

The Horse | Whisperer



The Horse Whisperer

“There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man. Winston Churchill”

Forget the boring old conference room and whiteboard lecture, managers are learning how to get more out of workers by heading to the paddock. So where is the connection then between horse whispering and corporate leadership and management? We asked Lisa Brice, owner of Horses For Courses, to tell us more...

“I could ride before I could walk. I was lucky enough to have a mother who was passionate about horses and a father who didn't mind never having any spare cash so that we could have ponies. I trained as a riding instructor and have adored this noble animal all my life. I have spent the last 5 years observing horses in the wild, rethinking some of my old ways of handling horses, taking lessons, testing new techniques and exploring different theories about how best to communicate effectively with horses.

“Many horse trainers focus on training the horse to behave in a certain way in response to “human” signals. I keep my techniques close to how I believe horses relate to each other. The difference is that I try to talk in the horse's language rather than expecting the horse to talk my language. I want to be able to communicate effectively with the horse so that we have a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. One of the keys to this is to be able to put myself into his shoes, view the

world from his perspective, and understand what is going on for him. As the horse doesn't speak “human” and can't verbalise his feelings, emotions, wants and desires, the onus is on me to read his body language to interpret how he is.

“In short my approach towards the horse is one of awareness and curiosity; The intention is build up a rapport with the horse so that he trusts me enough and feels safe, and consequently has more fun. So it is not about showmanship, and not about dominance and invitation; it is about establishing ground rules and boundaries (through consistently noticing the little things) and communicating constantly.

How does this translate into the business environment and working with people?

“Having worked in the corporate world as a trainer and consultant for the last 12 years, I have been intrigued with the parallels that can be drawn between working with horses in this way and human interactions, such as business dilemmas, management challenges, leadership issues, instances of underperformance, cultural diversity, equality, performance appraisals, presentation skills, change management, strategic planning. The list goes on.

“Horses have no preconceived ideas; they are not influenced by who you are, your job title, the house you live in, the car you drive, the clothes you wear, the holiday you went on, or the size of your bank account. They live in the moment and will give you immediate feedback about how you are relating to them. They don't separate their emotions from their behaviour and they will read straight through any smoke screens that you may be putting up. The way we approach horses is often how we approach other relationships.

“If leadership can be defined as one's ability to get others to willingly follow, then it would stand that a successful leader needs to have a clear, vivid picture of where to go, a firm grasp on how to achieve success and, importantly, that they can build trust in their followers.

“Every programme I run is different and the insights gained by the delegates (and myself) are an ongoing and ever increasing list of gems!”

Some of the training programmes used by Lisa:

Using non verbal communication to get your message understood.

93% of our communication is non verbal compared to 100% of a horse's communication. When we take away the words it allows us to focus on what is actually being said. One of the keys to effective communication with humans is the ability to be aware of the other person's representational system and to read the subtleties of body language. You get to really experience the power and impact of your body language and non verbal communication and get immediate feedback about the impact it is having.

Using positive reinforcement to achieve your desired outcomes

If we have created the right environment for the horse, normally they will make the right choice; sound familiar?

Horses will choose the best option they have available to them at the time. People tend to do the same. Reward for the horse is not food; it is the absence of pressure / “the push”. Rewarding the behaviour you want repeated tends to work with humans too. In the wild, the matriarch mare will reprimand the young horses by isolating them from the herd - Remember the naughty chair you maybe sat on as a child!

Learning to talk in another person's language

Horses play “push or be pushed”; they push each other into boundaries to establish the hierarchy in the herd; they need to know who will lead them from danger should the need arise. Horses “shepherd” each other; they tell each other where not to go. Humans are more directive and tend to tell people where to go. By mirroring the horse's behaviour we can communicate with them effectively. Mirroring people also builds rapport; people tend to feel more comfortable with people who are like them!

These powerful programmes offer the opportunity to work with horses at liberty from the ground. Through experiential learning techniques, delegates can assertively explore and raise their personal awareness

of previously untapped internal resources. Whilst interacting with the horses, delegates will be encouraged to seek opportunities to transfer their learning into their communication, leadership, coaching, influencing and negotiating activities.



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