

# THE ART OF LEADERSHIP EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



The Art of Leadership  
Equine AHA! Experience

On Theory & Praxis of Horse Assisted Education

Issue 1.1

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## PREFACE

*By Gerhard J. Krebs, EAHAE President*

*In the horse, reality and vision are connected. When someone learns together with the horse, concentration, presence, consciousness is one hundred per cent required. So the horse is an absolutely real being. On the other hand, mythological ideas have been associated with horses for thousands of years. The horse itself is a myth, a dream, a vision.*

*The individual horse embodies pride, strength, beauty, freedom, courage and energy as well as sensitivity, caution and the constant willingness to flee. The herd also conveys a feeling of protection and security, togetherness and cooperation, self-confidence and satisfaction.*

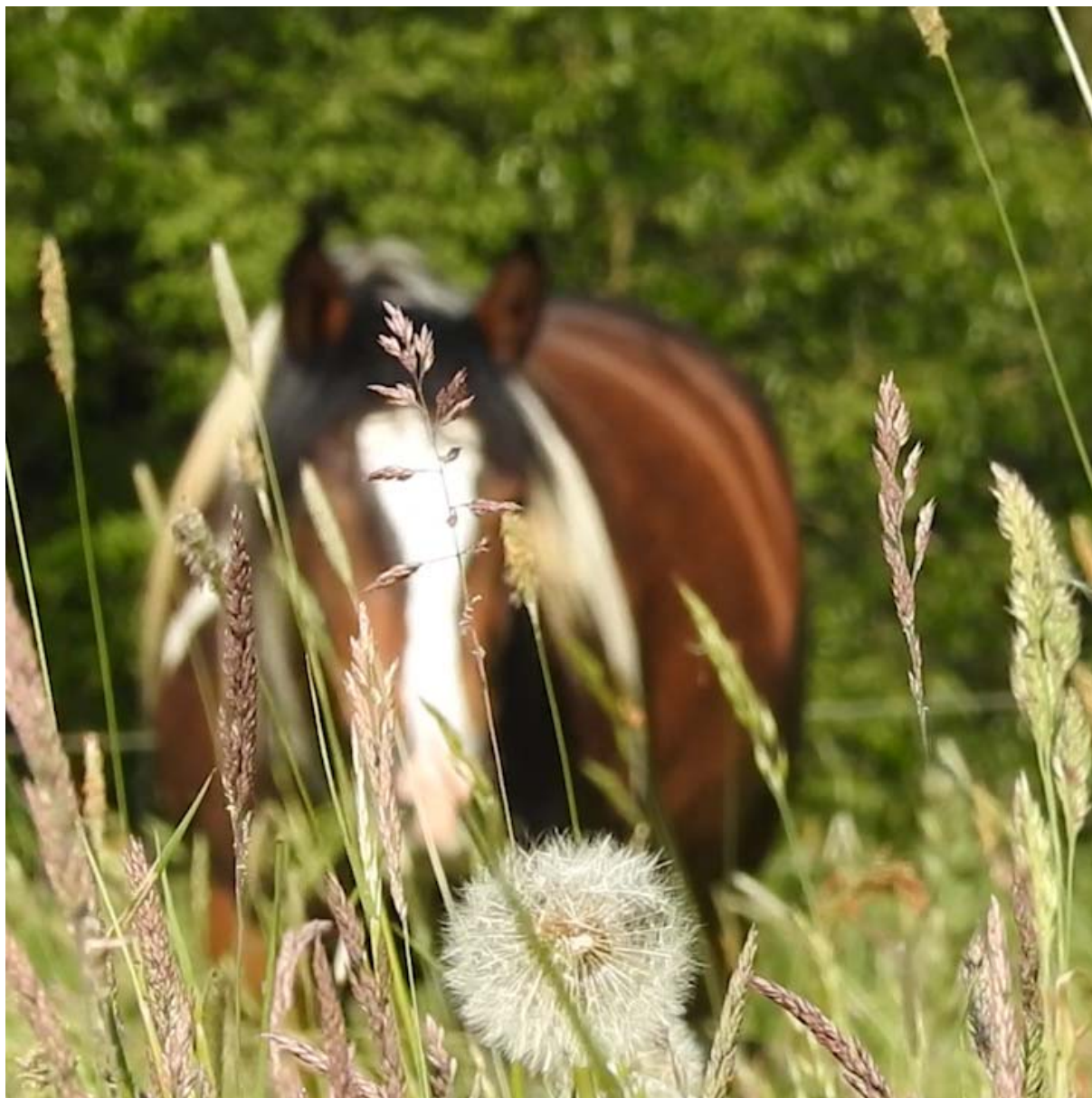
*In the past centuries, managers were trained primarily with the help of horses. Dealing with it encourages courage, strength, creativity and a willingness to take risks, but also a sense of responsibility, reliability, patience and determination - and teaches humility. Horses expect respect, esteem and recognition. They react positively to motivation, praise and trust.*

*Management training today usually takes place in the seminar room. Training with horses combines theoretical knowledge and practical experience with emotions. You are given the opportunity to internalise what you have learned in theory. You feel what leadership is. It is leading to a matter of course.*

*Horses possess qualities and instinctive behaviours that bring people to what is essential for them in the shortest possible time. The topic is reduction. In our complex present, learning with horses provides clear structures.*

*Projects are usually based on goal planning and calculation. However, project work is often influenced by emotions that are triggered by fear, envy, resentment, better knowledge, dogmatism or just carelessness. Communication fails because of misunderstandings: because a connection is not established sensibly, because information is exchanged before the right connection has been found.*

*Horse-supported seminars provide a learning environment in which teams can grow together in a short time. The horses act as emotional bridges between people, in intercultural workshops even as bridges between cultures and religions. An atmosphere of cooperation, creativity, flexibility, self-confidence and purposefulness is created; and this creates mutual understanding, goodwill and common visions even while working with the horses.*



## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



*Alyssa Aubrey is the HorseDream USA License holder and facilitates HorseDream® Licensed Partner Training Programs for qualified individuals interested in becoming licensed to offer horse assisted leadership programs. Medicine Horse Ranch is located on a historic 1000-acre seventh generation working cattle ranch located in beautiful coastal Tomales, California.*

### HORSE AROUND FOR THE LOVE OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP SKILLS

It is February, the month most associated with romantic love. However, I always apply a much broader meaning to love during the month, and I believe we humans are receptive to embracing the love of self and humankind during this fine month.

For leaders to be effective, be it in a family, community, small business or international corporation, love and authenticity go hand-in-hand. I'm suggesting that a bit of horsing around can lead to greater authenticity and greater leadership skills.

Here's why: Horses Have No Agenda, No Judgment.

The expression "horsing around" denotes silly fooling around. It's how kids pass the time in



play. It's not a game with an objective to win, but simply time spent fooling around having fun.

In a sense, horsing around is playing from the heart. It is an expression of pure joy. It is the absence of motive or judgment. It is playing for the pure love of being alive. Horses live in this state all the time. They have no agenda, no judgment.

### Rediscovering Our True Center

So, now, imagine three concentric circles – one in the middle and two outer circles. In the middle circle are written the words “I AM”. This “I AM” is our true self. It is who we really are. When we were born into this world that “I AM” was all we could possibly express.

Now, imagine the next circle out from the “I AM”. In that circle is written, “I fear I am.”

In the third circle out is written the words, “I pretend I AM”.

If the inner circle represents our truest nature, the second circle represents a layer that gets built around each individual as they grow. It represents fears, feelings of inferiority, hurt, guilt, etc. The third circle, the “I pretend I AM”, represents our pretend self. It is the face we want the world to see, the self we are acting out. It is a pretense of self-importance, arrogance, demonstrations of supposed power.

We go through our lives building outer layers around the true self. We create a mask with all those uncomfortable feelings as we pretend to be someone other than our true selves. There is a huge cost for doing this to ones' self and others. This behavior dilutes our authenticity. It breaks down trust and respect and ultimately contributes to the creation of toxic environments.

### Horses Respond To The Human's Authentic I AM

I use the HorseDream “I AM” model (based on the work of Paul Hunting) in workshops, to

help teams and groups reset group norms and rebuild a high level of trust and commitment with each other. Once we establish these identities, we then go out to be with the horses.

Horses provide a refreshing and new way of working with leaders and teams to develop both personal and professional pursuits. The experience of finding one's alignment of “I AM” mind/body/spirit in unison with an animal's mind/body/spirit gives us faith and a place to practice this virtue with our fellow humans.

This kind of communication is for our own good, for the good of others and for the good of the company, family or community. The horse gives us the practice if we are willing to respond in kind. The horse has no agenda, no judgment, and people feel this.

Most business communication takes place between the outer layers of each person. But the horse ignores this mask and communicates to us directly with our true nature, our hearts.

A participant in our most recent teambuilding workshop had this to say, “This process guided our team to a deeper connection with each other and more understanding of who we are as individual leaders. I learned it was OK to be vulnerable and speak from the personal truth, and that you don't need to be a horse person to enjoy and benefit from this experience. I highly recommend this program!”

So, for the love of whomever you lead, it may be time to horse around! If you would like to further explore how horses can help create more effective teams, custom equine-guided experiential programs can be designed for specific groups, businesses and organizations around any number of relevant issues and/or topic.





## THE VALUE OF RELIEVING STRESS

*By Alyssa Aubrey, USA*

Corporate America is finally coming to the realization that the human body is not designed to function efficiently under chronic stress. It has been a slow, but important lesson to learn. The newest medical mandate for health is a 4-step system that includes relaxation, adequate sleep, balanced eating and moving the body in nature. Not only that, the medical community is advising corporate America to encourage its employees to unplug from the constant use of digital devices and get out into nature, not just for the physical and emotional benefits, but also for the bottom line.

### Research Validates Value Of Corporate Wellness Programs

Validation of the importance of corporate health and wellness programs comes from a 2010 Harvard Business Review article stating that, “Wellness programs have often been viewed as a nice extra, not a strategic imperative. Newer evidence tells a different story. Since 1995, the percentage of Johnson & Johnson employees who smoke has dropped by more than two-thirds. The number who have high blood pressure or who are physically inactive also has declined—by more than half. J&J’s leaders estimate that wellness programs have cumulatively saved the company \$250 million on health care costs over the past decade; from 2002 to 2008, the return was \$2.71 for every dollar spent.”

### The Evolution Of Corporate Wellness Programs

With the importance of formal corporate wellness programs well-established, a newer trend is gaining in popularity which represents the evolution of the requirements for true health. The idea is to get employees out of the office and into nature. Nature is consistently proven to be one of the greatest stress relievers of all time.

A very popular and growing trend for getting employees out into nature is Horse Assisted Education (HAE) programs. These programs are designed around a herd of horses. As

intuitive animals, horses mirror the unspoken emotional attitudes of humans. When humans say one thing yet think and feel something incongruous with their words, tension is created in the environment.

Working with horses in a guided environment takes corporate employees out of the office and into a field of new possibilities. Working with the horses helps individuals realize the importance of being congruent in thoughts, words and action in order to have a healthy work environment. The benefits of HAE show up as greater trust among team members, greater confidence in asking for clarity and overall efficiency.

### Relax, Eat, Sleep, Move

Simply watching how horses spend their days can translate into greater balance for humans who work in a corporate environment. Horses spend their days relaxing, sleeping, eating and moving about in their natural environment. Humans need the same kind of balance. Too much work makes people less, not more, efficient. Sitting in front of a computer all day is not natural.

Nature is a great teacher. Take a daily walk in a nearby park or at least get out of the office for lunch. Feel the air, sense your surroundings, notice what's going on in the world around you. Get a good night's sleep, unplug from your digital devices for at least an hour a day and eat fresh, wholesome food.



*Dr. Barbara Gorsler, Switzerland, PhD in economics; post doctorate: International Communication and Management; Diploma: mental coach; languages: German, English, French. Ten years different functions in the banking sector and international project work. 15 years successful as independent management trainer and coach for soft skills: communication, conflict resolution, time management, self-management.*

## HORSE ASSISTED EDUCATION – A MOST VALUABLE COMPLETION OF INTEGRAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Managers and others can learn a lot during horse–assisted training. Approaching horses, watching their reactions to our behaviour, touching them, smelling them, leading them with or without a rope – this is an exceptional experience which brings people “down to earth”. Contrary to schooling in the classroom where participants are mostly rational decision makers in the context of horse – assisted education opens the emotional side of people. The authentic feedback of horses provokes reactions and insights for the participants who touch them deeply. That’s why horse assisted education is a very valuable completion of classroom seminars. In role plays in the classroom people often play a role – they are not authentic and are not open to face their problems and challenges.

The following case study will highlight what I mean by integral leadership training: I will tell you the story of Lukas, a participant of a two-day seminar: “Successful conflict resolution”, followed by a workshop with horse – assisted education.

My boss does not pay much attention to me, how can I attract more attention and recognition?

#### Confession in the classroom

Lukas was one of nine participants with banking and insurance background who attended the seminar: “Successful conflict resolution”. At first sight, he appeared to be a nice guy, polite, brilliant (a classical scholar with double PhD), very interested in communicating with the other participants, very engaged during the exercises and role plays. Overall, he left a somewhat shy impression, which also showed in his stooping posture.

At the end of the first day, Lukas had gained enough confidence to tell us about his actual problem at his workplace. He was assistant of the management board of a bank, and his task was delivering profound analyses and background information – he told us how he was fascinated by his work – he was sure he could provide competent details based on his long experience in the field. Unfortunately, he was seldom praised – even worse, his boss, an ambitious young woman, only used his work to create an image for herself. He admitted that he was now no more motivated.

#### First encounter with the horses – his favourite horse being Santana

It is always fascinating to watch the participants whom you know from two days classroom seminar in an entirely different environment during their first encounter with the horses. Most of them are looking forward to the new experience. Others are sort of nervous to meet the horses and ask themselves if they will be able to lead such a big animal. A few are in fear of horses and tell me in advance that the observer role will be alright for them (in most of the cases they change their mind and will ask me “What do you think if I try myself ?”).

Lukas was very eager from the very beginning – he told me that he didn't have any specific experience with horses but that he was always fascinated by these proud and elegant species.

During the first exercise, participants are watching a group of horses which play around in a riding arena. This exercise is useful to get a first impression of the horses. The task is to watch the behaviour of the horses very carefully – are there any differences in character? Which horse attracts me most? During this exercise, every participant can choose his favourite horse for the following practices. Lukas' choice was Santana, a very elegant mare with beautiful, expressive movements. I asked him why he chose Santana? "That is very clear, and I am fascinated by her elegance and assertiveness – did you see how Santana reacted when this little brown pony wanted to bite her? ... she just kicked out at him. I also chose Santana because of her gentle expression on her face."

Lukas and Santana – not a dream team yet

The exercise is to lead the horse on a rope, individually. The participant has to walk through different obstacles with the horse: turn around poles, pass through small obstacles, walk over tarpaulins on the floor. Lukas was very eager to do his job with Santana – his eyes sparkled like a little child when he took the leading rope of Santana. Only seconds later the expression of his face changed dramatically: Santana was not willing to follow him. He tried to motivate her by gently moving the leading rope, no chance – he did not know what to do. He tried some other timid movements, without success. He tried to talk to her – no luck – discouraged he watched the group.

I asked him: "Do you think the horse knows, what you want from her?" Lukas seemed to understand. "Ok, I will show her what I want.. I will take a leading position, walking in front of her." With timid movements he made some steps forward – seemingly not convincing enough. Meanwhile, Santana took a very uninterested stance and did not move. Poor Lukas was in a quite desperate state. I asked him: "Do you think the horse can

recognise your full presence and determination?” Lukas seemed to think about this and suddenly changed his posture, he appeared much more focused now and - no surprise. Santana started moving and followed Lukas up to the second obstacle where Santana stopped again. This time it was Lukas who explained himself: “I can tell you why she stopped. I was very uncertain if she would pass through the second obstacle. How can I take a leading position when I am uncertain and even in fear?” Now Lukas made his way with Santana very determined, and we could watch how he enjoyed realising how easily the mare followed him – finally Santana had accepted him as her leader.

Lukas` statements after his exercise

Deeply touched and still very excited, Lukas told us how he lived these 10 minutes: “In the beginning, I was quite in despair– I approached Santana so gently, but I could not gain her confidence – I had no authority. Only after I was despaired about the failed trials, I had the energy to get through and to be finally respected. I am sure Santana could feel that I was focused on reaching my target. I am very happy now that I succeeded to move her, finally – maybe that is also true for my life: I have to stand up and signal very clearly to others what I want!”

What we learn from this story

Already in the classroom, Lukas had told us from situations at his workplace where he was not much respected despite his broad experience and competence. The exercise with the horse showed him a way how he could increase his assertiveness.

Typically, Lukas chose the mare with a lot of expressions, who showed that she could defend herself, characteristics Lukas would like to have himself, as well. During the exercises Lukas could learn about the importance of determined body language and clear target-oriented action – there was a clear difference of his presence – before and after.



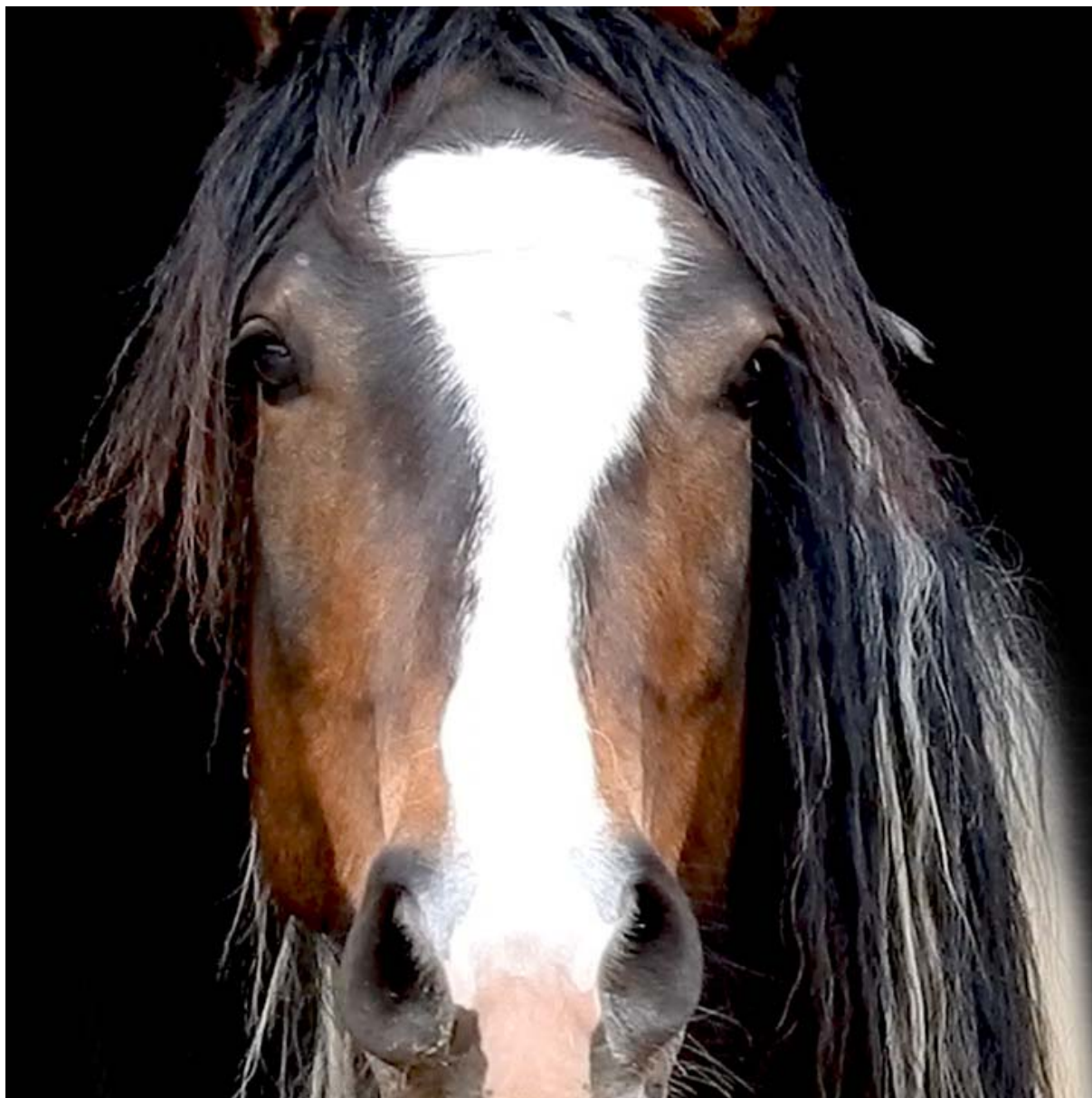
I am always impressed, how people so easily accept the lessons taught by horses – may be people think, “Well, it’s only a horse which reacts.”

That is a real advantage of horse- assisted education – horses can mirror people the unvarnished truth, and it is accepted quite easily. For me as a coach or another participant it often needs a lot of diplomacies and fine feeling to bring the message to the point. Working with horses we are not only focused on rational thinking, but we are also touching the emotional side of our participants. As the newest research about limbic learning shows us the emotional involvement is a prerequisite for personal acceptance and finally for a change of habits or behaviour.

## Conclusion

Horse assisted training is a most valuable completion of classroom seminars. To be efficient and sustainable the process of coaching and training is most important – horse assisted training must be embedded in a clear context: starting with a clear statement about the status quo and the personal targets of the participant. Previous classroom seminars often bring up important issues and goals for the horse – assisted education. Another possibility is a well-coached brainstorming with the group before the horse seminar. Most important is the reflection during the horse – assisted training session: by the participant himself, by the group and the coach. Videos are a useful tool to reinforce the thinking – nobody would be able to explain your nonverbal communication and appearance better than when you watch yourself on the video! Insight is one thing: change of habits another! So it is essential that the insight process is followed by a clear transfer plan – a plan which must be developed by the participant himself – because only he can know how far he is ready to initialise change– the coach is just the motivator of this process.

In the transfer process, we have another valuable effect of horse–assisted education: the situations lived with horses leave a deep impression on the participants. The success stories with the horses serve as a clear anchor – the interior pictures of successfully leading Santana, Prince or whatever the name of the horse is, will encourage the participants to be more self-assured and determined.





*Barbara Rector, USA, learning what horses can teach us about basic life skills in an interesting and often fun approach to awakening our capacity for authentic empowerment. Self-empowered individuals make healthy behavior choices and practice mindful awareness of thoughts, feelings and emotions as determinants of personal reality.*

## BROWN MAKES HIS NEEDS KNOWN

A few days ago, a very generous-spirited colleague and friend, Linda Kohanov, invited me to participate in her four-day teaching seminar focused on the Wisdom of Pioneering Spirit. Linda knew I was recovering from yet more dental surgery and that my horse Brown was living nearby. Brown had been moved two weeks earlier to El Milagros for the purpose of learning how to be a horse amongst horses. He was turned out with nine other geldings in a ten-acre grass pasture paddock. Jean Burke, the supervisor of the Milagros herds, has a good track record with me; she kept Rama for three years while I was in graduate school.

Brown is an August '92' foal, and near as I can determine, I'm his third owner. He is a Minnesota-bred American Quarter Horse who trained at a Duluth show barn showing so successfully as a Western Pleasure and Trail horse that when he was about seven years old,

he was hauled to Arizona for our Sun Circuit where he achieved Regional Championship status in both divisions. Brown came into my life as he was turning twelve years.

On the sixth day of Brown's socialization adventure, my friend and colleague Lisa Walters agreed to visit him with me after we finished up with our third annual face to face meeting of the Epona Quest Foundation Board held at Linda Kohanov's new home in Amado. Jean's Milagros pastures are just two freeway exits south past the Arizona–Mexico Border checkpoint. We call Jean to let her know we are on Bridge Road approaching the railroad tracks; she agrees to meet us at the locked gate where Brown's section of pasture is located.

Each nine to ten geldings or mares or babies and their Mom's have two ten acre irrigated grass paddocks that are rotated each week to week and a half depending on the grass length, growth, and water needs. Lisa and I follow Jean's truck out to the designated gate for Brown and his group.

My heart sings when in response to my whistle and yell out, "Hey, Mister", Brown pops his head up from eating and knickers a greeting. I'm thrilled as he begins to walk towards me.

Then, while he's still some distance away, I observe in alarm that he is walking as if in a perpetual half pass to the right with a strange wiggle twist to his right pastern or hock. In fright and panic, I think his leg is broken. Jean says, "No. His eye wouldn't be so bright, his interest so high in my offered carrot; if his leg were broken, and he would hardly be walking – if at all."

The three of us determine something isn't right and that he needs removal from the pasture for further checking. Jean goes in amongst the hovering crowding geldings, to halter a willing and compliant Brown. I slam the gate shut on the three youngsters attempting to follow him out of the pasture. He has developed friends. The big Percheron grey, Mac, bellows to him and Brown answers back even as he's busy minding Jean's request to back up.

I confirm his eye is indeed bright and run my hands down each of his legs. No sign of heat, no obvious swelling. Mystery. He is definitely walking with an odd twist, drag of right hind leg and as he does so is curved sideways. We decide to walk him up to the barn a distance of some mile and a half. I start off walking him on his lead with Lisa following driving Vanilla (my trusty 01 Subaru). Jean and her truck filled with three large shepherds bring up the rear.

Brown is dancing in place as the notion dawns he is leaving his friends. Soon they begin to gallop down the fence line next to the tree-lined lane where we are walking. Knickers and bellows and general racket, Lisa tells me later that Brown did several steps of pretty good piaffe. I have to remind him to stay with me and not go up taking me with him. Relief floods through me; his leg isn't broken with this agility display.

Three-quarters of a mile at the gate, Jean wants to switch places; she can see he is about to lift me off the ground. As I hand him over to her, she reminds me the dogs know me. No matter really as I open the door to drive her truck, they all bound out. Not a problem for Jean. She's a remarkable hand with a horse, even one strong as Brown now attempting to pull her stocky bulk up. Yes, I can now see, he's actually doing quite a decent piaffe.

I lock the gate per Jean's instructions, and Lisa follows me around to the barn. Jean has walked the shorter route down the house lane through the private courtyard of the owner's home. We arrive in time to see Jean and Brown round the mesquite shaded bend. He's walking still with that odd curve, twist and drag. Jean puts him in a large barn paddock about the size of a small dressage court – two twenty meter circles stacked on top of each other. She wants him to keep moving; so puts hay at one end and water at the other.

A small adjacent paddock holds an aged Shetland pony and a long-haired donkey. Further down the fence line is a lovely bay Arabian gelding. Brown immediately investigates the pony and donkey – two animals with which in the past, he has exhibited strong reactions of fear. Not so now. He is definitely displaying a more socialized 'horse amongst horses' demeanor.

The vet will be out Thursday or Friday for his regular weekly ranch visit day. It's Joe Robinson out of Nogales, our old friend from the days of Trakehner mare, Tasha and Kelly's Welsh pony type, Dolly when we hunted to hounds in Sonoita. In the meantime, Jean will keep him in this spacious paddock and give him a gram of Bute (horse aspirin) per day until Joe has an opportunity to go over him. Jean is of the opinion he has overdone it playing and romping in the herd life; she has observed some full-out gallops; Brown has made best buddies with Mac the big grey Percheron.

The coming week I have dental surgery and won't be able to drive for a few days. I agree to stay in touch with Jean by phone and check on his progress. I do want him to vet checked and if he takes a turn for the worse sooner rather than later. On Friday when Joe looks him over, he finds no obvious sign of injury. Brown actually passes the basic flexion soundness exam and still walks slightly curved with the odd twist and drag. Joe didn't have his x-ray machine with him; he agrees to bring it next week. He speculates there could be arthritic changes in that hock. Once he sees the picture, he may decide he could be helped by injection into the joint of Legend (product name for a hydraulic acid joint fluid).

As I hear this from Jean, the picture of the first day of turn out six days earlier pops into my mind; head groom Jesus walking Brown on the lead as he first entered the paddock. Amongst all those geldings down and across the entire ten-acre pasture, being familiarized with the perimeter offence line, the location of salt blocks and the water tanks. Brown had been passaging. "Making himself BIG", in Anna's words. That was probably more passage than in his entire nineteen years living up to that point. He's tweaked something in his hock, I'm thinking.

The following week post dental surgery, I'm cleared to drive and visit him daily late afternoons after the Wisdom seminar at Linda's. Rather nice to discover I'm approximately 45 minutes away driveway to driveway on the back roads past the Fairgrounds and down the 'Suharita autobahn' to old Nogales Highway through the township of Continental.

First day's visit, I brush his shaggy winterized coat and clean his feet. I notice his poops are healthy and there is even a roll spot in the sand, so I know he is getting down and up with no problems. After finishing off his six carrots, Brown does an odd thing. He walks over to a cattle loading chute and puts his head underneath it. He stays motionless for a few minutes and then retracts his head from the dark interior and looks at me intently.

Several minutes looking at me and then he puts his head between his front legs and rubs his eyes. Again Brown looks at me and then swings his head around to place it in the hole of the underneath side of the loading chute. "OK, what the heck?" I'm thinking.

As he finished off his carrots, I had asked him what more he needed from me as we waited out the week for next vet's visit scheduled for the following Friday. Now Brown is again standing motionless with his head inside the dark hole of the chute. I go over and actually poke my head in alongside his. We are eye to eye, neck along with neck, shoulder to shoulder looking ahead into the dark interior. I notice the shade on our eyes is pleasant.

After a few moments, it occurs to me this probably isn't the safest position, and I'm clueless as to what he is looking at if anything. After I retract my head and step back, Brown brings his head out and turns again to look at me intently. Then he puts his head between his legs and rubs his eyes.

"You want your fly mask!" I exclaim.

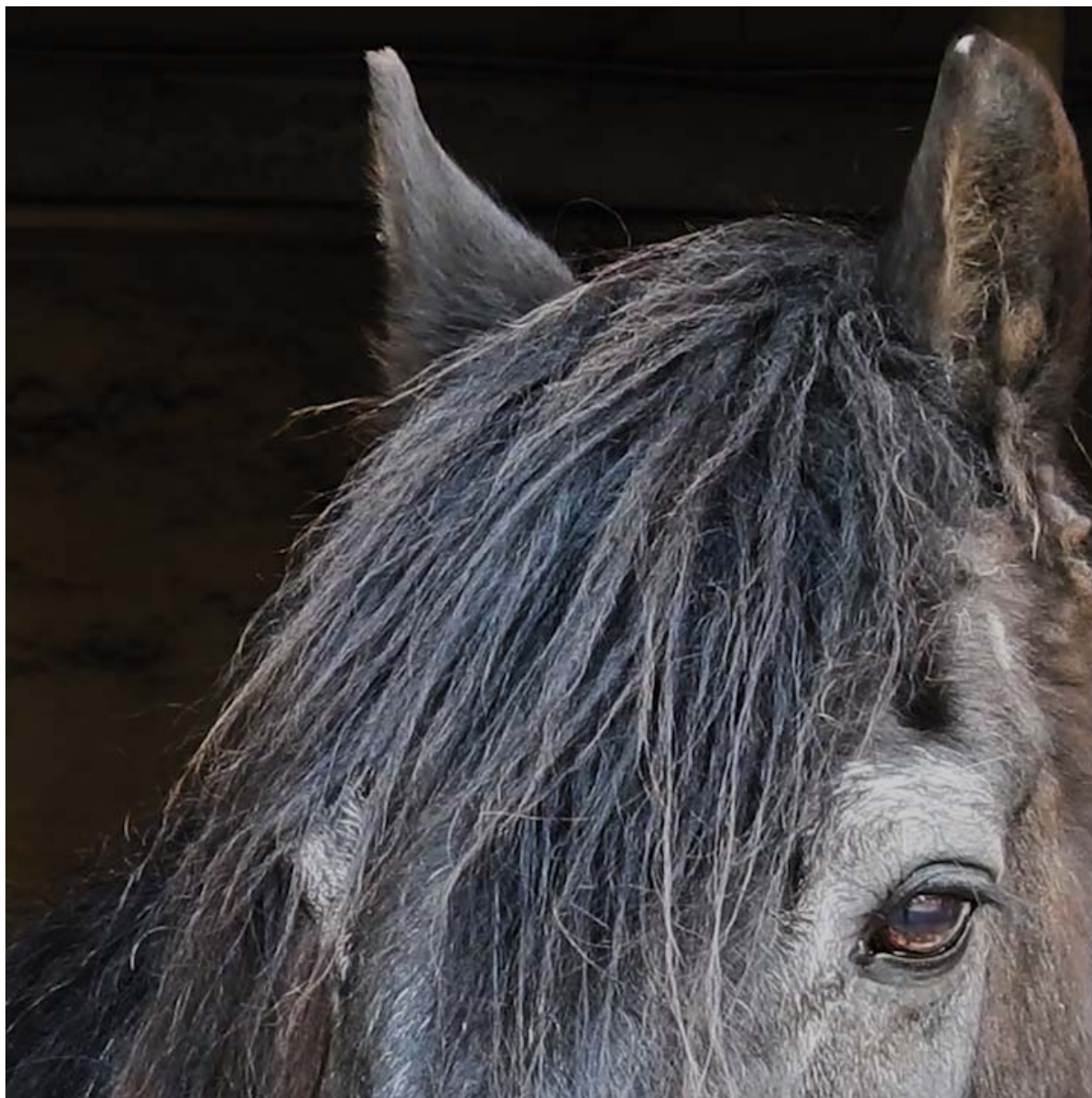
Brown nods his head up and down several times affirmatively. He puts his head on my heart. "Message delivered", he seems to say.

"Well, OK, I'll be here tomorrow afternoon with your freshly washed fly mask." I give him a big heart hug and go get the remaining apple to cut up for his departure treat.

Home from my Minneapolis teaching trip, I visited Brown yesterday (November 5, 2011) and he is even better. Almost back to normal with only the faintest of wiggle twist drag to



his leg. He's been five days with no bute. Joe did his x-ray on Friday, and we're currently waiting for the reading and news of whether he is cleared for pasture turn out. I've already told him that I don't care if he's ever ride worthy. I just want him to be free of pain and willing to engage with me and others in the Adventures In Awareness process of expanding our Awareness and developing Consciousness.



## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



*Christine Schöneberg, Germany, studied business administration and worked in international companies (IT, mechanical engineering) in specialist and management functions. It also included internal and external consulting services in various sectors and organisational units. In 2004, she worked on topics related to the corporate development and coaching of executive staff. For more than twenty years she has been accompanying her own horses. It was a long-term goal to combine the elements "organisation" and "horse". Since 2009 she is a licensed HorseDream partner.*

## A BIG HORSEDREAM

It was only in July when a large German car manufacturer approached Gerhard with an idea: could it be possible to integrate something with horses into an already scheduled management workshop? The audience was described as managers and team leaders from one functional area, facing the challenge of implementing a huge IT project and the corresponding process changes.

The target of the two-day workshop was to discuss the necessary management structure and effective ways of collaboration within the organisation – some very clear down-to-earth operational issues. The lady in charge of organising the meeting was thinking about something special, eye-opening and intense; something the people would be talking about

way beyond the workshop and reminding them about basic leadership and communication principles. There were only three minor details to consider: First, there would just be five hours time for the “horse part”. Second, the group was something around 95 people. Third, none of the participants was supposed to have the faintest idea what would happen. It was to be organised as a “surprise”.

During August, a dedicated telephone line between Gerhard, the customer and Verena, who was appointed to be in charge of heading the event, would have been appropriate. Many changes to the agenda had to be taken care of, terms and conditions had to be negotiated, numerous concerns had to be clear – the most important one for the customer: “How big is the risk? What, if it doesn’t work?”

The location was booked, a beautiful farmstead with two riding arenas and some Icelandic horses that were available as trainers. Additionally, Anja brought her two horses along. There was a professional caterer on-site, but it was the first time such an event took place here. On the HorseDream side, ten trainers with very different backgrounds and experiences were taking part. They met the evening before, some for the first time, and discussed the details of the logistics, which had to be planned by the minute and needed to be carefully coordinated: in total, there were 10 groups, five which had to work in parallel in the arena while the other five groups were doing the debriefing of the first exercises. Thanks to the common HorseDream background, the focus was on the flow of the event. The content never needed to be discussed.

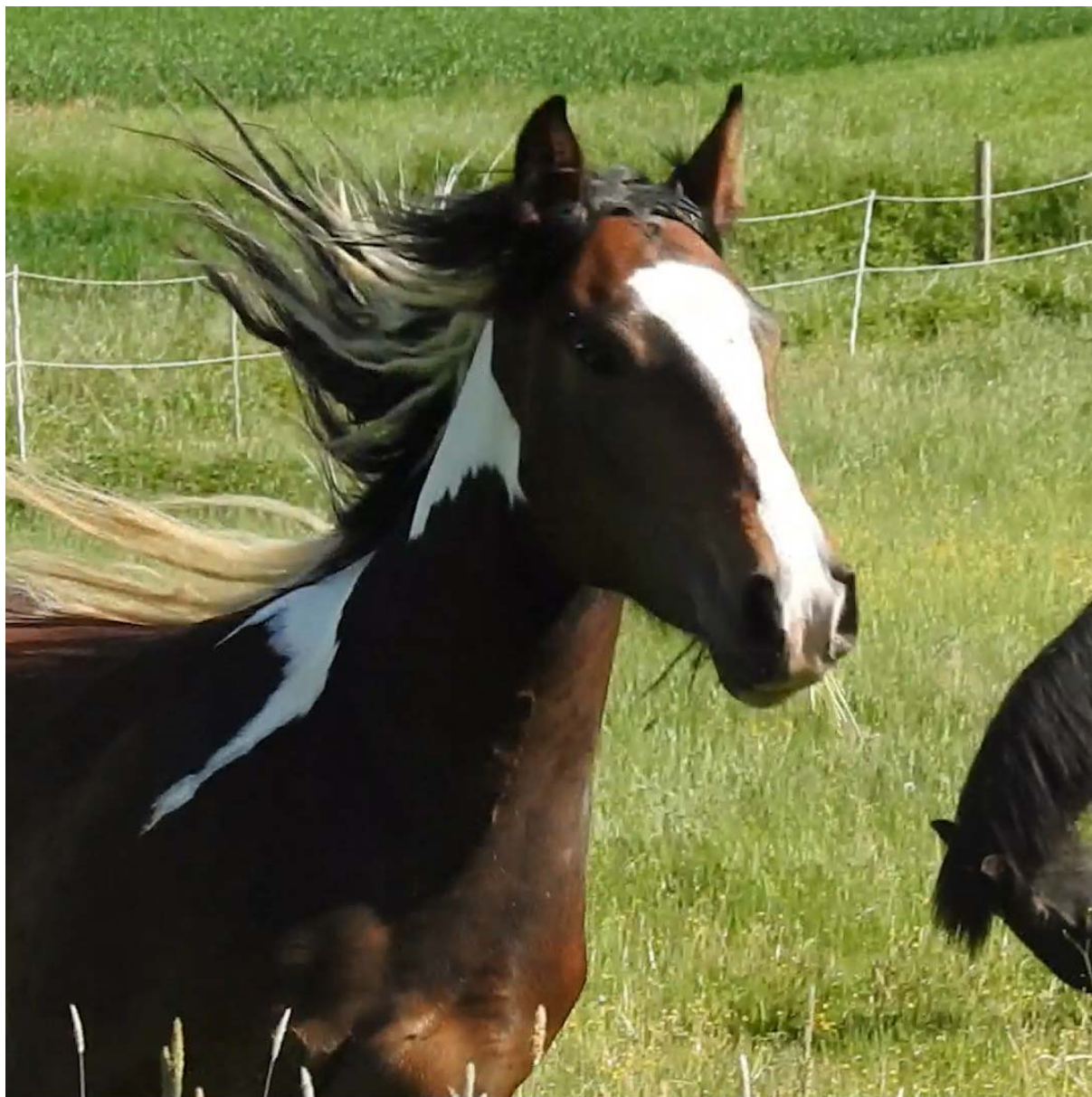
Then the big day came. A few minutes before nine o’clock, the participants approached the premises, some in disbelief, most of them having a big question mark in their faces. They did not have any clue about what they could expect. Yes, there was some preparation material distributed upfront, but without any hint towards the equine nature of the event.

After a brief speech from the upper management and Verena as the HorseDream representative-in-charge, the participants were divided into ten groups, and each trainer gave them an introduction before they were led to the first encounter with their future trainers: the

“Watching and Assessing”-exercise. Next followed the “Face-to-Face”, and while five groups went to debrief the first two exercises, the second half continued with leading the horses around poles, which required quite some coordination, as there was one group at each of the poles. The participants were anxious, sceptical, concentrated and very alert about what happened around them; a whole world of emotions showed up in this group of rational, grounded people that surprisingly allowed themselves to get involved into a “great unknown” and also reflected upon themselves.

In the end, participants were asked to take a few minutes time to note down their insights. It was very quiet during these 15 minutes, when people gathered in the shade (yes, it was a warm and sunny summer day), and took their time individually. No doubt, there had been an impact.

PS: Two weeks later: the internal facilitator, who led the participants through the rest of their 2-day-program, confirmed that a lot of thinking and discussing had been initiated within every single person – and within the whole group. Yes, there definitely was an impact!







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## CHARLIE

When we first started our workshops often, we did not have a structure. We would invite friends family and acquaintances to come and “play” with the horses. If the play resulted in learning, we would refine the process and utilise it in our programmes. This is the way many of our current exercises evolved.

On one memorable occasion, we realised you do not need a structure or even an exercise for profound learning to occur. This is my memory of that wonderful occasion. I have changed the name of the participant to ensure this intimate learning stays that way. She gave me her permission to tell you the story.

It was a sunny spring day, warm but cool enough to require a coat. We had a group of four people playing with us. We had completed a safety briefing, and the atmosphere was still with an air of excitement.



I intended to take the group through a lunging type exercise I was trying to refine. I asked who would like to try the exercise first. I was standing waiting with Johnjo, a chestnut gelding standing at 16.2 hands. He waited patiently while one of the participants stepped forward. Her name was Charlie (name changed by request).

I handed her Johnjo's lead rope, gave him a gentle stroke on the shoulder in preparation for the exercise.

"Well Charlie, what would you like to work with today?" I asked.

She took a deep breath and then started to talk at a speed and rigour, which took me by surprise.

"Well I wanted to work with something that has been bothering me for ages" she took in a short, sharp breath and continued even faster.

"I am single and would love to find a partner, I have many men friends who would make great partners, but we only ever have one date, never a second. And I do not know why." Another even shorter breath and continued to speak still faster.

"I am attractive, intelligent, I earn good money, I have a great job, and I think I am very interesting, why would it be that no one ever wants to go out with me more than once, I just do not understand". She continued to talk faster and faster, snatching shallow breaths between sentences.

All the time she was talking Johnjo was yawning gently but regularly. Initially, Charlie did not notice, but towards the end of her first stream, she did. She stopped talking looked at Johnjo, then looked at me and said.

"My god, I am boring the horse". For the first time she spoke slowly, and it seemed from the heart and not the head.

As the words left her lips, Johnjo stepped forward and put his head flat against her chest. Charlie looked slightly confused and then put her arm around his big, soft head. They stood together in a heartfelt embrace; it seemed like time stood still. After a moment Charlie looked up at me and started talking again building up speed with each word.

“Isn’t this interesting. When I got emotional, the horse stepped forward to me. I do not understand, what does this mean? Do you think he is trying to tell me something? Wow, this is amazing”.

Johnjo stepped back and started yawning again. Charlie stooped talking and looked into his big brown eyes. She sighed and said nothing; she looked moved by the interaction and visibly softened.

Johnjo stepped forward and again placed his head flat on her chest. Charlie put her arms around Johnjo, and they stood, melting into each other. With each breath Johnjo’s head got lower and lower; a sure sign he was very relaxed and connected. After a few moments he stepped back, there was a sense he was done.

Charlie looked at me, looked at the group then looked, and Johnjo gave his forehead a gentle rub and silently returned to the group.

Some weeks later Charlie called and said she had told all her friends what had happened with Johnjo. Her friends had said, “Yes Charlie, that’s exactly what you do, you pretend to be what you think they want”.

Charlie asked me “Why did they not tell me?” I asked her “Would you have listed if they had?”

## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE

This was profound learning for Charlie by the simple act of being herself. She experienced the attractive quality of just being herself and had a whole body learning experience. Horses have an amazing ability to help us be who we really are. No pretence, no mask; the real self.

## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



*Gerhard J. Krebs, Germany, EAHAIE President and HorseDream Managing Director, born 1949 in Hamburg/Germany. University of Hamburg, 1978 Magister Artium in political sciences and contemporary German literature. 1978-1983 employed with Daimler, Bogner, Munzinger. Managing director at an agency for new communication and IT trainer 1983-1996. Founded HorseDream in 1996. Developed the first horse assisted management training in Europe. Entered the seminar market in 1998. Educating trainers for horse assisted leadership seminars, team building, coaching and change management processes since 2004. Founded EAHAIE International in August 2004. Workshops and training with own horses, naturally living in a herd, schooled to work with people without any horse experience.*

## WELCOME TO A NEW WORLD OF LEARNING

"Better a boss who's always nagging, grumbling, exploding and mistreating us than a boss who has mutated into a horse whisperer." That could not be true! It was 11th March 1998, and we were reading the summary of our carefully formulated press release in the local newspaper, having just completed our first open "Motivation Seminar for Managers" with horses as medium, and we were excited by the prospect of interest from not only hundreds but thousands of new participants in the future.

What was it that upset “pat”, the columnist? Why should his boss not “learn from horses”? Why by no means from “Friesians, possibly East Friesians”? He did not want to be compared to nags. He did not want to “always take higher, and higher hurdles of work motivation and job performance, like these highly-bred willing four-legged animals” and “at the end gratefully eat from the palm of somebody’s hand! No never!” Was he not right?

He could not know that even more renowned press and TV journalists would approach this topic in much more detail in the following years. For example the seminar reviewer Baerbel Schwertfeger who published six pages in the German HR magazine “wirtschaft + weiterbildung” (“The seminar is an impressive experience”), or the journalist Dagmar Deckstein who wrote a three-quarter-page in the business section of the “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” with the sub-heading “The Rediscovery of Intuition”.

And we could not know that neither the mocking contribution of “pat” nor the well-founded articles in the national press and the professional journals would be helpful to bring managers to our horse seminars at this early stage. Then, when even the famous news magazine “Der Spiegel” and the second channel of German broadcasting “ZDF” came we simply had to guess: Now we have got it! But no – it took four more long years for the prediction of a marketing magazine chief editor at one of our seminar evenings to come true: “It takes exactly seven years to get such a new concept into the market.”

In fact, we never claimed that we had developed anything really new. One can already read that the horse is a mirror in the writings of the old masters on the art of riding. Observations that horses are skilled in extrasensory perception were already published by Henry Blake (“Talking with Horses”) in the 1970s. The fact that human beings were not able to imagine a life without horses for thousands of years is reason enough to think about the increasing distance between humankind and horses over the last sixty years.

“There is nothing good unless you do it,” Erich Kaestner says. So let’s do it. Let’s take the horse back to the development of human beings, back to their raising of consciousness, their character building, their way of behaviour, and their leadership concepts.

Why the horse? Because it combines reality and vision. Because it is a mirror. Because it requires one hundred per cent presence in every moment. Because it shows up boundaries. Because it opens horizons. Because it can be a medium to the universe.

We were not the only ones thinking these thoughts. From the year 2000 on, we found similar approaches on web pages in several countries. The number of seminar providers working with horses in management seminars in Germany increased. Sometimes we detected sentences just copied and pasted from our HorseDream homepage on new websites. As a consequence in 2003, we decided to teach other trainers our seminar approach and to give them permission to use our concept and anything we had written on our website. One year later, in August 2004, we founded the European Association for Horse Assisted Education (EAHAE) together with seven other European trainers and coaches. When we started with our G&K HorseDream GmbH in 1996 we did not imagine that there would be more than 200 trainers, coaches and seminar providers with us, sharing the “vision to establish and develop Horse Assisted Education as a general form of personal and professional development in (not only European) enterprises, organizations, institutions, societies, and for personal purposes”.

But it becomes even more exciting. Nearly at the same time that the first horse assisted seminar providers in Germany, England, Austria and Switzerland dared to go to market; similar concepts were developed in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In January 2005 Ariana Strozzi held her first annual conference of the newly founded Equine Guided Education Association with participants from three continents. Shortly before this, she had published her book “Horse Sense for the Leader Within. Are You Leading Your Life or is it Leading You?” Horse sense means common sense. In the meantime, this term has been used as a book title or company name many times. The

Austrian management trainer and leadership lecturer Fritz Hendrich gave his book “Horse Sense” the subtitle “How Alexander the Great first conquered a horse and then an empire. Three steps to the charisma of leadership.”

Well, we don’t have anything in mind about empires and their conquest. And actually, we don’t think about charisma. In HorseDream seminars, normality plays the lead. Our subject is reduction. Reduction to the essentials of leadership. And for us this means authenticity. Our horses accept the participants just as they are as long as they express themselves as they are. Our horses don’t engage in play-acting. There are extreme examples.

Peter stood together with Benetton in the picadero. Peter is a key account manager at a large telecommunication company. Benetton is an athlete; high and upright, muscular, glossy black, big – actually too big for a Friesian horse.

Picadero, a square pen of about ten by ten meters, comes from the Spanish language and means “small riding arena”. The exercise is called “Distance and Nearness”. Leading with distance, leading with human nearness. What is it like to push somebody to a distance? Am I able to do it? Without overacting? Am I a hurrier? Peter waves the flag, the “leadership instrument”, or better the “tool of power”. Benetton is moving around him in a circle. First walking, then he trots a little bit. The whole thing lasts for one or two minutes. Peter follows the instruction for the exercise and drops the flag behind him. The pressure is gone. Benetton stops. He looks towards Peter. He turns his head forward. Peter steps up to the horse. He holds a long lead rope, the “leadership structure”, in his hand. He hooks the rope to the halter and waits.

Maybe the horse follows you, at the loose rope, without pressure, without pull, without a word. Only based on the trust you gained in the first phase of the exercise – the phase of distance, respect. Because you did not play the boss, you did not need to prove your power. You just asked for distance, quietly and easily. And then you got intuitively that respect is present; that out of distance may come nearness. Without distance, there is no nearness.



Whoever wants nearness must be able to demand distance. Whoever wants distance must be able to allow nearness.

Peter is still waiting. Benetton stands in front of him like a statue. No muscle is moving. Peter's hand moves to his pocket. Carrots are not required. We want the horses to follow us out of free will, not because they get something to eat, but because they like us; they trust us; because they love to be with us; because they know that we know where we want to go.

Peter pulls a tissue out of his pocket. He puts out his open hand toward Benetton. No reaction. Peter takes one step back. Then one step sideways. No response. The rope hangs loose. Once it is taut, the exercise is finished – that's the agreement.

Peter steps up to Benetton. He takes off the rope from the halter, moves to the middle of the picadero and takes the flag again, his leadership instrument of power. He points the flag at Benetton, and the horse begins to move. Round and round he trots. From time to time he throws his mane with a short head movement towards Peter who holds the pressure constant, walking with a firm tread in a small circle in the centre of the quadrangle. Then he drops the flag abruptly. Benetton stands still.

Peter walks up to the horse, fastens the lead rope to the halter, makes an inviting gesture and takes a first step. Benetton stands still. Immovable. No reaction. A key account manager who sits facing his customer? Distance works but nearness does not? Ability is present, but willingness is not? I hear the message well but lack Faith's constant trust?

What is it that the horse wants to tell Peter? We don't know. We cannot look inside the heads of our horses. We don't interpret. We leave the situation as it is. But we know one thing very well: The experience with Benetton in the picadero will trigger something in Peter. Maybe it will come up in discussion during the seminar; perhaps he will take it home, to the next customer conversation, or to the next sales meeting.

What is it that is so extreme in this example? “By the way, I was trained as an actor and was onstage for two years. A bad income. Too less to live, too much to die,” Peter tells us during the smoke break. Short silence. Then the question: “Well, could it be that you just played a role in the picadero? Did you wear a mask?” “I think I did,” Peter says.

We are used to acting behind our masks. We are even recommended to do so. Just do not let anybody come too close. Business is really tough. Who reveals himself is already lost. Authentic leadership! For sure!

“In the army, I did not have any problems with acceptance from the very first moment,” Mayer tells the seminar group. The audience listens with interest. “It started with the clothing. With my name badge. My first name Christopher was too long. So it was just C dot Mayer. Know what? The newbies always thought this meant Captain Mayer.” Everybody is laughing. The moment Christopher is in the picadero together with Benetton nobody is laughing any longer. He holds the flag diagonally upright to the croup of the horse and runs. Accentuated paces. Benetton trots with high knee action, like a Friesian who is being presented by the so-called Monsterknecht at the stallion licensing. He loudly puffs the breath from his open nostrils so that everybody can hear it. The seminar participants back off involuntarily, expecting the horse could be driven across the borderline. The giant Benetton gallops through the ten-meter quadrangle. And Captain Mayer keeps up the pressure. Shortly before we give the signal to end the exercise when the flag is dropped. Benetton stops from full speed and turns his powerful body towards Christopher in the middle of the picadero, tossing his head, snorting wildly at him. You’d almost think Benetton is a dragon who spits fire.

Christopher does not even try to fasten the rope to the halter. What nobody considered possible at this moment happens: Christopher starts walking – and Benetton follows him. The horse now holds his mouth at head height of the man at maybe a foot distance. Christopher walks – and Benetton follows. No uncertainty on the horse’s part, no doubt, no resistance. Just nearness. “Typically capricorn,” Karin says, “hard on himself and hard on others.”

This is authentic leadership. The horse accepts the human being if he acts like he really is. We have experienced a lot of such examples in more than 20 years of horse assisted training. We saw men full of self-doubts and those pretending to be omnipotent. We experienced arrogance and humility. “Be yourself,” Karin shouts into the picadero as man and horse are facing each other stock still for two minutes. “Then I would have to hug him now.” And precisely at this moment, the horse moves towards the human. We don’t know any better way to let leaders experience the difference between distance and nearness. The picadero exercise is the emotional highlight in all of our training.

Emotional learning is deep learning. It is effective learning. And it is learning in a very short space of time. Emotional learning is also motivation and self-motivation. Very often, the motive of leaders to attend a horse assisted leadership seminar is curiosity. The outcome of such a workshop, very often, is the insight that you cannot learn leadership because leadership is learning.

“When I was back at my company on the Monday morning after the seminar, the people in my team were totally different,” Maria tells us on the phone two weeks after the seminar. She is a manager in a large automobile company. “Actually I just wanted to be around horses once again for a day. And now all of a sudden everything has changed!”

In our seminars, it is not the point to realise how many parallels there are between horse and human socialisation – that the lead mare is in charge and that she forms a dual leadership with the lead stallion. It is not about all the metaphors. Not about the symbolism from thousands of years of history of horse and humankind. There is nothing wrong with all this.

“The map is not the territory.” The horse is a reality and an explanatory model. We take the horse as an “As If” and we place it in the centre of an emotional recognition process. Whether there results any change potential for the participants – and if so, in what way – stays consciously outside our influence. We try to enable instead of generating. The basic work with the people is done by the horse. Welcome to a new world of learning!



## HORSE ASSISTED APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY HORSES AS TRAINERS

*By Gerhard J. Krebs. Published in Germany April 2011 (weiterbildung 2/2011)  
Translated in March 2017 by Verena Risse, Singapore, and Jesvir Mahil, England*

Since the 1990s, horse assisted management seminars for professional development have been offered in the German marketplace. It took several years for them to be taken seriously. Today, hardly anyone denies that these seminars are meaningful. The spectrum of workshops offered is expanding: employees' motivation, leadership training, team building, coaching, organisational development.

Whereas workshops for motivation, leadership and teambuilding are offered by many horse assisted trainers, organisational development is new to most trainers and clients. HorseDream first introduced the concept at the 2007 Annual Conference of the American Equine Guided Education Association in California. It is based on the Integral Approach by Ken Wilber and is called 'Integral HorseMapping'.

A practical application of horse assisted organisational development is the Change Management process with horses as catalysts.

Now, dear readers, kindly remember the quote from Mark Twain: 'A person with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds.'

We know that it will be some time before horse assisted organisational development is no longer a novelty.

In the meantime, we are grateful for every scientific support for the process, e.g. for the master's thesis of Magdalena Broich and Julia Eppler, 'Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a tool for organisational and personal development', published as a book in October 2010. The subtitle reads 'Analysis of the AI concept applied by G&K HorseDream GmbH in its horse

assisted Change Management and applied by Cama Institute for Communication Development.'

But instead of going into further details of the AI concept, I'd like to emphasise the suitability of horses being part of change management seminars by highlighting some aspects of horse' evolution.

### Horses Changed The World

For more than 55 million years horses have been living on this planet – in different surroundings and respective evolutionary shapes. Originally, horses were the size of a dog. Today, horses can be as tall as 2 meters. Horses lived in forests, later in grassy steppes and today predominantly in 3x4 meter stables. Horses served man as food, workhorses, riding- and cart-horses and thus enlarged man's geographical range, carried him and his armour and even pulled his canons and supplies vehicles during World War II.

There were 2.7 million German "Wehrmacht" horses. Every day, 865 died. In the 1950s, only 30,000 horses survived in Germany. Today, there are again over 1 million horses in Germany.

In one sentence: Horses were changed by the world, and they changed the world.

Their ability to adapt could be a reason why horses became subjects of metaphors and idioms like 'sitting on one's high horse' etc.

One can also define horses' skills like speed or awareness as desirable characteristics for employees and leaders. We think, however, that this would be much too superficial. For us, horses are much more:

They are a medium to the universe. They are the actual trainers of the workshops. With their help, workshop participants move in an open, self-determined, experimental and emotional learning space.

The HorseDream workshop team is only responsible for safety, theoretical input and for supporting the learning by helping participants to transfer their learning to their professional and personal every-day life and finally, for interpreting and plotting results of company workshops.

‘Horses are the actual trainers.’ We take this statement seriously in two ways:

The first aspect: In their years-long workshop experience our horses have indeed developed differently from normal horses. They act and intervene pro-actively. Hence, there is a difference between working with riding-school horses and horses that work solely in communication-based seminars. Also, horses being used for hippotherapy are not per se predestined for working in communication-based seminars.

### Creative Process Between Horse And Human

The second aspect is a priority statement: The horse is the most important element in our seminars. The horse is the decisive factor for the learning process. The human trainer is always subordinated. Usually, in our workshops, we do not even define the goals of the learning process but leave them to the creative process between horse and human or horse and team. With this approach, we put ourselves and our workshop concept in opposition to the popular and commonly practised role of the human trainer.

The Cologne ‘Institut Fuer Persoenlichkeit’ (Institute for Personality) analysed approx. 100 trainers, who also work as coaches, regarding their life motivation using the motivation analysis by Steven Reiss.



The result: high parameter value of the parameters power, social status, curiosity, social contact and acceptance. A possible interpretation is that average trainers find it more important to receive positive feedback from their clients than their client's actual learning.

The authors of the study remark that people with a high priority for power would want to be influential directly. Therefore, we are not surprised if some typical trainers, coaches, HR and consultants do not yet want to embrace the HorseDream concept.

Their default concern goes like this: 'Why would I have put so much effort into my education if I am not supposed to share it?'

Or they reverse the learning process by trying to prove the established communication- and management theories. We don't say this is wrong. However, after more than 14 years of workshop experience, we claim that this approach does not at all tap the full potential of horse assisted education. In the worst case scenario, it may even eliminate creativity in an organisation's development process.

Matthias zur Bensen's contribution to the book 'Raus aus der Fuehrungskrise' (Get out of the leadership crisis), published by Hans Wielens and Paul J. Kohtes, was in 2006 our entry point to the Appreciative Inquiry method applied in the change management process.

Zur Bensen calls AI the 'positive' path to change. When reading his article, we immediately identified the 4 'Ds' of Appreciative Inquiry -Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny- as a meaningful application for our 'Integral HorseMapping'. Integral HorseMapping is a horse assisted learning process, based on elements of systemic organisational constellations, mind mapping and the integral approach.

Whereas Integral HorseMapping is open for all kinds of questions, Appreciative Inquiry focusses on change processes of companies and their teams.

Building Emotional Bridges

In the learning process, the horses act as emotional bridges between the participants/team members. Therefore, they reveal commonalities and build an understanding of the differences between the participants. Change management processes that have been rationally planned and organised become emotionally experienced.

Participants need to be open to new methods and courageous to experiment. However, not all of them are. There are sceptics and even anxious participants. Interestingly, they are the very ones who often become the most convinced supporters of the respective change process in the company.

Within each of the 4 D-phases, one change process will be simulated, driven by the participants and the horses. We, as moderators, only intervene if physical or emotional safety threats occur for either humans or horses.

In other words, in a completely open learning space, participants design and shape the process and moderators act according to the principle of 'Trust the horse and trust the process.'

As a preparation for the Integral HorseMapping, in two exercises we introduce participants to general learning with horses as well as working with symbols and metaphors. After this, the four phases of the process are designed with the help of objects:

**Discovery:** In the picadero, a fenced 10x10 meter square, participants 'portray' what is 'really good' in the company's current situation with pylons, balls, plastic covers, poles etc.

With a mobile fence, the riding arena is separated in two parts.

**Dream:** In part A, participants portray their vision using soft objects like rubber rings, balls, bean bags, plastic covers etc. Everything is allowed, even the boldest thoughts.

**Design:** In part B of the arena, participants build the scenario that should be realised by using hard objects like wooden poles, plastic parts, pylons, etc. It is essential to also include the ‘really good’ elements from the discovery phase.

The built-up area symbolises the effort necessary to convert the dream vision into practical reality.

**Destiny:** Now, the fence between both parts of the arena is removed. Dream/Vision and Design/Reality merge into one entity.

The participants -through a horse assisted exercise- experience each of the four phases. It starts with free horses roaming the discovery phase, followed by the dream phase where participants lead horses on a leading rope through part A. The Design phase in part B is explored while one participant sits on a horse which is directed by another participant walking behind the horse using long reins. Finally, the Destiny phase is explored by two horses and two riders walking in a row, whereas the horse-rider team in the back leads the front squad with long reins through the whole arena. Please have a look at [www.horsedream.tv](http://www.horsedream.tv) for videos of the procedure.

The HorseDream Appreciative Inquiry concept postulates the following hypothesis: The rationally planned and designed changes in the organisation will be emotionally experienced evoking understanding and acceptance of the intended changes.

### Experiencing Change

With its AI concept, HorseDream addresses all kinds of change processes in a company- e.g. the introduction of a new IT system, the merger of divisions up to the merger of two corporations. Participants could be teams or the C-level of the company, depending on the respective change process.

Even we, as moderators, become part of the respective change process in every workshop. Change occurs in the participants, the horses and the overall settings. We are very aware that decisions made during the process can very often not be categorised in ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. However, our experience of 14 years together with the feedback we receive from participants confirm our hypothesis: Emotional learning evokes acceptance and understanding of the required changes.

The master's thesis mentioned at the beginning of this article represents the scientific evaluation of Integral HorseMapping. Its validation must now follow.

So far, we only worked in small groups of 8-12 participants. However, it would be possible to structure an ‘Appreciative Inquiry Summit’ for a large group. If compared with moderation of other concepts for large groups, e.g. Open Space, RTSC-Conference (Real Time Strategic Change) or World-Café, the decisive aspects of AI remain a) the explicit focus on the positive aspects already there (‘really good’) and b) the possibility to create – with the help of the horses- an emotional learning environment opposed to just a verbal-rational one.

In Germany, new development and change management concepts still lacking scientific validation hardly make it into the HR departments yet. Nonetheless, we hope to find HR decision makers and organisation developers who are willing to integrate the HorseDream concept into their education and development spectrum.

It needs to be said though, that up to now there are only very few providers of horse assisted workshops that have the required experience, competence and the quality horses to provide the desired experience. If demand became huge, today’s German providers probably wouldn’t be able to satisfy it.

## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



## HOW TO GAIN CLIENTS: THE HORSEDREAM WAY OF DOING BUSINESS.

*By Gerhard J. Krebs, Germany*

Whenever somebody is on the phone asking questions about the HorseDream train the trainer seminars, for example, “what is required to do the training and to be successful in the horse assisted education business afterwards?”, we answer: “The most important thing is to get clients.”

If you have management skills and horse knowledge, that’s perfect. In the 2-day seminar, you get all the information to combine both. But that is only the essential requirement to do a good job. It is not sufficient to make a living out of our concept.

There is one page in the seminar manual covering public relations, marketing and advertising. This page contains our experiences from more than 20 years of management training with horses. We summarised in a few sentences, what worked and what did not.

Our core statement is that ‘Traditional marketing and advertisement does not work at all with horse assisted education’.

Unfortunately, most of the seminar participants do not believe this. Therefore they try out everything on their own. We guess some of them think: “Okay, if you just do it the right way, it will work,” or “I have the competencies; I know how to do it.” And when they start their marketing, they realise after a few months; there is no real success regarding paid clients. They attract a lot of attention, appointments, taster seminars with much interest but no bookings.

How come?

Perhaps you know this famous AIDA model:

A – Attention or awareness: attract the attention of the prospective customer.

I – Interest: raise the interest of the prospective customer by focusing on or demonstrating advantages and benefits.

D – Desire: convince prospective customers that they really want to do the seminar and that it will satisfy their needs.

A – Action: lead customers towards taking action and booking the training.

There is a whole industry fighting for attention, interest, desire and action. Advertising agencies employ thousands of very creative specialists to continually think about new ways to sell products and services. Be honest: what is your reaction to direct mail, advertisements in newspapers or magazines? What is your response to TV adverts? And what is your response to internet banners and pop-ups?

If you are not really interested in the product, in the service or the company brand, you don't even notice this kind of information. That's why marketing psychologists come up with new strategies. They try to get the sales information into your subconsciousness. This is a method that works with a lot of people. They order the product, not because there is a need for it, but because they feel there is a need.

Of course, the more conscious people are, the less this method works. You know the advertising is manipulating you. Moreover, you think every marketing activity is trying to pull the wool over your eyes. With time you learn to ignore it. It is no longer your cerebral cortex which reacts to the message but your amygdala. And your amygdala immediately says NO to whatever shows up as sales manipulation.

You think your horse assisted education advertising is information? Your prospective customer thinks it is manipulation. Your target group is the conscious customer and, believe me, he does not react to traditional marketing as you hope he would. He acts as you do. His amygdala works just as well as yours!



Okay then, how do we get clients? We wait for them. It sounds strange, but it is true. We want horses to follow us out of free will. We want employees working together with us out of free will. And we want customers to come to us out of free will. The positive impact of such an approach is: you only work with clients who are genuinely interested in what you are doing. That's much better than working with participants who have been convinced to come to your training by written or spoken promises.

There are many companies out there, unaware of how vital horse assisted education is for the benefit of their businesses. And there are a few companies out there which are aware. Don't focus on the former. You will not gain any paid participants by doing so. Wait for five more years, and some of them will probably be in the latter group. Focus on the companies which are already open for our new world of learning. They are only a few in relation to all the others, but only a few in this dimension means tens of thousands worldwide and at least fifty to a hundred just around you within a radius of two hours drive.

What is required to get into a position where you can just wait for those clients? First of all, you have to be present. In the very beginning of all our seminars, people get the information to be present one hundred per cent. Because when you are working with horses, you have to be present. The horse is a very present sentient being, and it wants you to be present, too. So working with horses teaches you to be present all the time. And as a seminar provider, you have to be present in the market.

The market is the place where you turn desire into money. It is full of offered products and services which are not really needed. And yet they are bought. Those companies which are aware of the outcomes of horse assisted leadership seminars, horse assisted change management, horse assisted team building, horse assisted personal development must have the opportunity to find you. You go to the market with open arms just to be there, only to be present.

The internet is our primary communication medium. More than 75 per cent of our seminar bookings come via the HorseDream homepage. There is a German and an international

version. Further, special websites are covering specialised topics, like HorseDream Concept, which was launched to attract large companies and seminar organisations. We also deal with the statistical part of our homepages watching which path visitors take inside our programmes. And of course, we search for new horse assisted education offers.

Do you know how many natural or unnatural horsemen and women have invented this revolutionary thing called horse coaching? Hundreds. And they all consider themselves to be very unique. Hopefully, for them, corporate clients will visit their websites, because otherwise, they won't survive. Whenever you find someone who offers horse assisted education on the same website besides riding lessons, mum-and-kids-projects and similar clinics you can be sure that s/he's not an HAE professional in the sense of providing corporate training.

From our point of view, competition belongs to what we call "the old business". Our vision is not to compete any longer but to collaborate and cooperate whenever and wherever it is possible. Look at the market. There are hundreds and thousands of companies with millions of employees. What if only one big company finally comes up with the idea to train all staff with horses? Who would be able to do that? We would have to say "Sorry, we can only manage three courses a month – and two of them are already booked." You see, we need many of us. We need to be prepared for these first huge orders. And we are sure they will come. Horse assisted education is not hype; it is not something that burns like a big straw fire and afterwards calms down again. Horse assisted education is like building a future. It is like being alive again. It is like being human again. When people experience that horses are bridges between people, when companies experience that horses are even bridges between countries and cultures, there will be no stop for our concept.

So how do we spend the time until this happens? Being present, being aware, being of help to others, offering seminars and training in our own region, talking about what we are doing. What I mean is, burning like a fire of passion – not just presenting a method. Horse assisted education is more than a business. Whoever asks us what is required to become a horse assisted educator gets the answer "You need a long deep breath." And s/he receives the

recommendation not to leave their present job. If you can make a living doing your current job and start with HAE seminars once a month or so you will not run into any problem. And you will be able to put your seminar price on the table. And this price is high.

There is one big delusion. If you think you have to start with a low price offer, you are terribly wrong. Your horse assisted leadership seminar is worth the highest price ever. There is no way to learn faster and more profoundly. So you deliver very high quality – actually not you, but your horses. We heard people saying after our training “These two days have been worth each cent we paid,” and “It would have taken us ten months coaching, to get to these fundamental results.”

So you and your horses are absolutely excellent value for money.

There is one more point. If a company books a training for executives, the HR people know well that quality requires compensation. So what? Horses are much more expensive than computer slides. And horses working as trainers are priceless!

Let me tell you a short story. When we started with top management seminars for chief executives, we set a price of 1,995.00 euros per person per day. Nobody signed up. Our thoughts were: if nobody signs up at 1,995.00 euros, it will make no difference at all if nobody signs up at 3,995.00 euros. We had just changed the price on the website when the first vice president registered on a two-day course. In the meantime, we take 4,500.00 euros if someone wants an individual one-day training. Why? Because it is worth this price. Do people still sign up at this price: yes, they do. Not very often, but once or twice a year.

That leads me to the next crucial point of our market approach. We won't do more than three or four seminars a month. The horses need time between the dates. They have to recover from their work with the clients, which is not of physical but and emotional stress. As the horses are most important in our seminars, we have to look after their psychical, emotional and physical well being all the time.

This does not mean that we are on holiday between the seminar dates. Just the opposite. We need the time to work on our websites, to network with business friends and those who might be interested in attending our open seminars or corporate training. We need the time to run the International HorseDream Partners Community and the EAHAE network. I spend about four hours a day, just answering emails, giving support regarding particular seminar issues, talking with EAHAE members and HorseDream Partners. The rest of the day is developing new ideas, working on seminar videos, preparing the next workshop or train the trainer seminar.

Considering all our train the trainer seminars it is like lighting candles everywhere. In the first three or four years, people had to travel from the north to the south to attend a HorseDream seminar. Now they find the nearest HAE seminar provider in Germany with two clicks on the internet just around the corner. In the next few years, they'll find you worldwide, everywhere.

The base of qualified HAE seminar providers is becoming larger and larger. And this means the base of HAE seminar participants is growing larger and larger, too. Word of mouth information about the incredible success that can be the result of continuous horse assisted training will spread. That's the way we attract companies. It is not about pushing; it is about pulling. Traditional marketing is a numbers game. The more you put in, the more you get out. But Horse Assisted Education marketing is not a game. It is a vision. And we will all keep this vision alive until the very last person can see it.



BACK TO THE ROOTS UP TO THE FUTURE  
A VISION BECOMES REALITY

*By Gerhard J. Krebs, Germany*

Today, more than 300 trainers – 170 of them licensed HorseDream Partners – from all five continents are working with the business concept of horse assisted training and advanced development programs developed from 1996 onwards, by HorseDream -and since 2006 by Licensed HorseDream Partners. An idea has become a worldwide trend. The EAHAIE International is the driving force behind this development.

Am I a good manager or leader when I can lead a horse around four posts in the riding hall? What do managers have to do with horses anyway? The history of humans and horses, which is thousands of years old, has left some informative traces behind in connection with language:

- one keeps his/her members of staff on a tight rein,
- slackens the reins now and then,
- gets the team up to speed,
- holds the stirrups for another,
- helps someone into the saddle,
- kicks over the traces,
- knows it's going to be red tape all the way,
- puts the cart before the horse, etc.

“To be led” means to follow voluntarily. In its most pronounced form, it should ensure the independence and willingness to take risks in moving forward in the direction the leader desires. And the horse? Who does the horse follow? The horse follows a person precisely then when they demonstrate self-confidence, trustworthiness, clarity, credibility and are goal oriented.

Can I deceive a horse? Horses are honest people say. They don't have any ulterior motives, no hidden agenda. They act according to their nature. If I try to trick the horse, I don't deceive it, I fool myself.

## Horses and Leadership

How do I lead a horse in a management seminar? "Take the lead rope rolled up in one hand and let it loosely run through your other hand, is perhaps the best way. Don't wrap it around your fingers!" They are the only instructions you get. "Why is the rope so long, wouldn't it also work with a shorter one?" The question comes almost every time.

We work with symbols and metaphors. Everything has a meaning. But the participant has to work out the meaning him/herself. So what does the long lead rope represent? Perhaps the management structure of the company? Maybe the long leash I usually lead my staff on? Or information presented like a tangled ball of thread? And what does the horse represent in this exercise? My co-workers/staff? My project? My customers? Me?

The horses are used to each of the leading exercises. They have known them for years. Bosse and Benny, our oldest horses, who are over 20, have been with us from the beginning. But even Goody, aged 10, has already spent half his life in seminars.

The horses adjust to each new participant within seconds. The same exercise but another person and with a different personality, a different character and different background experience are for the horse, a different situation.

"The horse is your own mirror." We often hear this at the end of our training. For us, the horse is more than that. It is the real trainer. In hundreds of seminar situations, we have experienced the horse not only reacting to the person, or to the whole situation but also acting independently. And in fact it wasn't done accidentally or intuitively, but quite consciously. So the horse becomes not only the initiator or medium of the learning process, but it even controls it.



In the company in-house seminars there is an exercise at the beginning and at the end, where the horses run free in the riding hall.

In the beginning, it's about experiencing and recognising – a known phenomenon of every participant: “You can only see what you can see” (Fred Kofman, in *Conscious Business*). We see, hear and think in our own patterns. One horse is big and proud, so it has to be the boss in this group of four. Another one is agile and wiry, makes contact with everyone and interferes everywhere, that one must be the boss. The third one is calm and reserved, keeps track of everything and doesn't allow anything to disturb it, so it must be the boss. And the fourth one? “You can only see what you can see.”

### Horses & Organisational Development

At the end of the seminar, the horses run free in the hall again. This time, however, they move in the middle of a set-up representing a situation in an organisation. The set-up is the result of a previous team discussion held in the seminar room. This concerns, for example, goals and obstacles which are then represented by such symbols as plastic pieces, skittles/cones, a tarp or balls, in the arena. This is a four-phase learning process: First the rational phase in the seminar room during the discussion, then setting up the symbols representing the real situation, in a playful way, after that the emotional stage where participants watch what the horses do in the arena and finally the integrated phase where participants debrief and evaluate the session.

It may happen that the horses only stay in one half of the riding hall. It could be that they just concentrate on one theme. Sometimes two horses pair up and take care of something in particular. It is also possible that everything that was set-up falls over – or, it is all still standing when the horses are finished.

Back to leading. As one of our participants put it, “To date, I have read a lot about leadership, but today I felt what leadership is.” You can't learn to lead – leading is learning.

Horse assisted management seminars are concerned with respect, trust and authenticity. The horse directly mirrors a person's outward manner of leading and their internal attitude. It helps us to recognise our strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes it only takes a small self-correction for us to become more like our "real selves".

### Years of Pioneering Work

For us, this all began in August 1989 during a riding holiday in Tyrol. This was followed by six years of intensive work with horses. In 1996, alongside of the EDP courses we were holding at our small business, an entirely new seminar idea developed. The idea became a plan, a new company and in the following year, a seminar program. At the beginning of 1998, after a one-year internal pilot project, we ran our first open management training seminar with horses. It was titled "Motivation – Reaching a Goal Together".

In August 2004 we founded the European Association for Horse Assisted Education (EAHAE) as a platform for horse assisted seminar providers. In 2005 the first of now seven annual conferences took place. After the conference in Warsaw in 2008, a qualification process was started. Since then a qualified membership requires each member to take part in a Train-the-Trainer seminar. This seminar is offered today in different countries. Of the current 320 EAHAE members, almost all have completed this seminar.

Qualified EAHAE members are permitted to hold the EAHAE one-day seminar "The Art of Leadership". The underlying principle of this seminar is the HorseDream concept. It is based on a finely tuned balance between practical, experiential learning and theory transfer. Within a short time, horses can get people to focus on what is essential for them. The topic here is the reduction. It is said that many areas of our society and many companies are "over-managed, but under led". To lead companies and people, we probably don't need less management, but certainly, need more leadership and more vision.

In a horse, reality and vision are uniquely connected. Learning with a horse requires one hundred per cent concentration, presence and awareness. A horse is absolutely a real being.

On the other hand, there has been a mythological connection with the horse for thousands of years – the horse itself is a legend, a dream, a vision. The HorseDream concept unites reality and vision.

In past centuries all leaders were trained with the help of horses. Working with horses fosters courage, strength, creativity and willingness to take risks, but at the same time also promotes a sense of responsibility, reliability, patience and determination.

The individual horse embodies pride, strength, beauty, freedom, courage and energy just the same as it does sensitivity, caution, and the ever-present readiness to flee. It is willing to serve humans, and it does this both from the position of being dominated and through entirely voluntary participation. Apart from that, the horse herd conveys the feeling of protection and security, inclusiveness and cooperation as well as self-confidence and contentedness.

### Team Development

Where people work together, there are always issues that cost time and energy. External or internal factors can cause these. When teams are newly formed, it takes some time to get rid of reservations and build trust.

In the horse assisted training's learning environment, teams grow together in a short period. In the two 4-hour sessions, they pass through so to speak, the four phases of the team development process (according to Tuckman): Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing – or, according to Christoph V. Haug: Test phase, Infighting phase, Organisational phase and Working phase.

In the Test Phase team members are polite, impersonal, curious and cautious. During the Infighting Phase, there are underlying conflicts, personal confrontations, clique building and progress is a struggle. The Organisational Phase sees the team developing new ways of personal conduct and behaviour, enabling constructive feedback and confronting the

differing points of view instead of making it personal. The Working Phase shows the team is finally full of ideas, flexible, demonstrates solidarity, is efficient and participants are ready to help. All four phases are portrayed through practical exercises with the horses. That can be likened to a vaccination where the symptoms of the team development process are experienced in a weaker form. According to our experience, the horses act as emotional bridges between the people and in our intercultural training, even as bridges between cultures and religions.

### Project Work

In the first instance, projects are based on objective planning and calculations. However, the project work is then influenced by emotions triggered by envy, resentment, a know-it-all attitude and cantankerousness, or just merely carelessness.

Through a horse assisted project workshop an atmosphere of cooperation, creativity, flexibility, self-assuredness and goal-orientation, can be created in two days. During the work with the horses new ideas, mutual understanding and goodwill arise.

### Communication

Sometimes communication fails just because of misunderstandings, or because the connection doesn't reasonably take place, or perhaps because information has been exchanged before people have found the right approach to each other.

In this respect, it makes sense to integrate horse assisted training as the emotional door opener in every medium- or long-term program for further education, personal development and communication. All our experience with these combinations has shown that despite how sceptical some were at the beginning, the seminar leaders, coaches and participants, were all enthusiastic – and the enthusiasm was then carried over into the following “normal” course of the event.

## Change Management

Change processes, however proper and well planned they are, always run the risk of emotionally losing the people involved. The horse assisted Change Management concept addresses precisely the emotional component of the change process. The participants work through the four phases that are the underlying principles of the Appreciative Inquiry approach, by David L. Cooperrider, namely: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. The team tackles the issues regarding the present and the future they have planned.

## EAHAE's Vision

The EAHAE's vision is to establish horse assisted training and further education as a general form of personal and professional development, in corporations, organisations and institutions. Three challenges have to be met.

## Optimal Group Size

The first challenge is an implementation problem. The optimal group size for management seminars is 6 to 8 people. If we take a company with 1000 employees and 100 Managers, we would need 13 one-day workshops for all of the managers to enjoy horse assisted training just once. Team training can easily be held with up to 20 participants. Assuming that only half of the workforce is to attend the training, we would need 25 seminar days.

To ensure that the horses retain their sensitivity, we usually plan one seminar per week. There should be at least four days between workshops. The management seminars would, therefore, be able to take place within two months, and the team training would take four months.

So taking the above into account, one seminar provider would be busy for six months. So if we calculate this for major population centres such as Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt and

Munich, or the Ruhr area, one gets an idea of the number of qualified seminar providers that would be necessary.

### Seminar Price

The second challenge is the price of seminars. If we look at horse assisted management seminars in the context of operational training and further education, and not as an event, the EAHAE's seminar providers net price ranges between €400 and €1,100 per person and day – depending on the number of participants and the additional services, e.g. a specially cut seminar video. An event with horses for 30 or more participants does make sense but doesn't have much to do with the seminars described above.

In the example mentioned in the first challenge, the price per management seminar would be approx €7,250 and for the team training approx. €8000. A company's total investment would then be at least €290,000.

Taking into account the regular costs of the horses, riding hall, seminar room as well as the cost of equipment, material and assistants as a basis, it's clear that the prices mentioned above are realistic. Seminar providers who offer considerably lower rates, are either making their primary income in another area or leave the horse assisted training field after holding only a few seminars.

From the cost perspective, the company has to take into account that horse assisted seminar measures can't be compared with any conventional training. Current scientific research has shown that the sustainability of the seminar work and the time factor are of vital importance. This type of seminar assures long-lasting learning success in an extremely short period.

### Marketing

The third challenge is Marketing. According to our experience, it isn't possible to explain to someone understandably, how horse assisted training works, what it sets free in people,

what mental blocks it releases and how it helps individuals and teams to progress. Even seminar videos that show content and atmosphere don't really help. And participant's stories only give a partial picture of what happened on an inter- and intra-personal level, in the team, for example.

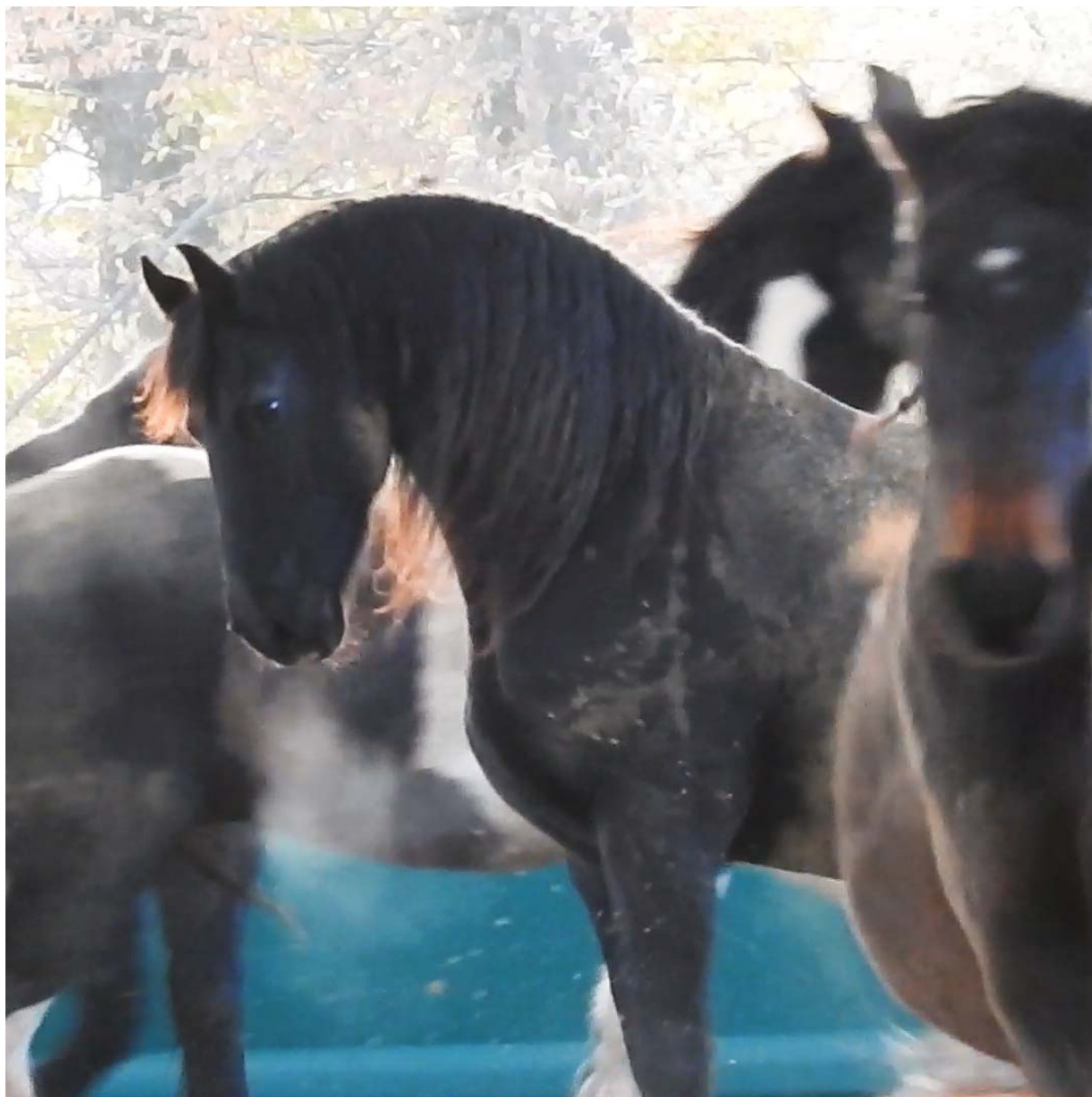
How can the vision of horse assisted training and further education become a matter of course in human resources development under these conditions? How do you simultaneously prevent an attitude where this concept is misused or misunderstood as a joke or just hype?

The motto of the 2012 EAHAE conference "Back to the Roots – Up to the Future" stood for reflecting on the moral and ethical concept of our horse assisted educational work.

We worded it thus:

"For the EAHAE community it is essential we hold and adhere to certain values. Above all is trust. Further, we encourage caring, collaborative business and not a competitive business. It is at the core of the EAHAE values that we collaborate on an equal level. Regarding our horses, we consider them as trainers, not as tools."





## THE HORSEDREAM APPROACH ABOUT FEEDBACK

*By Gerhard J. Krebs, Germany*

There is a saying: “The feedback tells us a lot about the feedback provider.”

In HorseDream seminars we consider the horses to be the real trainers. We as humans step back behind the work of the horses. This also means that the horses give feedback. The feedback of the horse is instant and honest. There is no hidden agenda behind it.

The HorseDream concept is based on a specific set of hands-on exercises. In between, there are questions on observations, one-word-feedback from participants for participants, transfer models as theory inputs, and discussions on personal experiences from the exercises.

Based on what we have learned in more than 20 years of horse assisted education, we believe that all the HorseDream participants go through a profound process of self-development or as a group through a team development process at our seminars. In our experience, everyone learns a lesson. Sometimes the learning happens already in the first exercise, sometimes in the second, third or fourth.

Learning with horses is an emotional learning process. Emotional learning is much faster and more sustainable than rational learning. Thus, we want to provide as much emotional level of learning as possible. Whenever you start to discuss or give feedback, you interrupt the emotional learning process. That’s one of the reasons we recommend not to explain or interpret during or after a practical exercise.

The second reason is that if you state your point of view, you might be right, but you could be terribly wrong. Nevertheless, your opinion as the “horse knower”, as the “horse work experienced facilitator” or even worse as “the horse guru” could be perceived to be “the ultimate truth”.

We believe that if a participant thinks s/he did not learn anything from an exercise, s/he is not ready for the lesson at this moment. S/he will probably learn something from the next exercise, the one after that, or maybe in a fortnight, in six months or a year from now.

How can we help people to understand the feedback of the horses? According to the thoughts expressed above, we don't need to! But what if someone insists on getting our feedback or interpretation?

First, we give the question to the group. Secondly, we talk about what we observed. Then, if our interpretation is still requested, we tell a story about a similar situation, which happened at a previous seminar.

Understandably, at a one-day seminar with eight participants, there is not enough time to go through these steps with everyone. But what if there is only one participant or if there is time enough like in a more extended seminar?

In this case, we watch the video of the exercise together with the client, and we interpret using the integral model, starting with the four quadrants I, We, It and Its. For example, just some possible questions which could be answered:

- What do I feel about the situation?
- How does it influence both of us or the whole group?
- Anything to say about the horse's nature or instincts?
- How would society change if not only the participant but all humankind would learn from this?

HorseDream feedback or interpretation is never about right or wrong. We cannot look inside the heads of our horses. We are not able to tell people what the horse wants to tell them. However, we can encourage them to think about what it may mean for them. And if they want to get a confirmation, we can assure them or talk to them about what we see differently.

## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



*Jackie Lowe Stevenson, USA, is the founder of Spirit of Leadership LLC providing coaching, training, seminars and retreat opportunities for corporations and not-for-profit organisations. Jackie says “Work is important. We all struggle with day to day challenges trying to earn a living and do productive work while living our dreams and destinies. We seek meaning and identity in our work and strive for purpose in our endeavours. Being physically, emotionally and mindfully present provides the wellspring for meaningful relationships in work and the courage and creative energy to inspire greatness in individuals and their organisations.”*

## NAKED NETWORKING A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS

Networking was the last thing on my mind when I entered the sauna naked except for a small towel to sit upon.

I understand that networking is an essential business skill. It connects us with people to build mutually successful business relationships, gain knowledge, share resources and expand our collective ability to make a positive difference.

Many of us, however, are resistant to networking, ambivalent about networking, hate it or see it as a necessary evil as it is often associated with being inauthentic, pretentious and disingenuous.

I happened upon the concept of naked networking in Knüllwald, Germany at the gathering of the EAHAIE International Association for Horse Assisted Education, a professional conference that focused on learning about leadership by engaging with horses.

Following long hours of travel from the US, relaxing in the hotel sauna seemed like a great way to end the day. I learned that the tradition was to be naked in the sauna with only a towel to sit up. Soon after entering the sauna and I was joined by a woman who was at the hotel with her company for a leadership training seminar.

We began sharing interests about our work and discovered we were like spirited and had much in common in how we approached leadership and teamwork. She was intrigued by the ideas of learning about leadership and teamwork by engaging with horses and thought this might be of interest to her organisation. Having no clothes on, or pockets for my business cards, I told her I would leave my card and some information for her at the hotel desk about a colleague of mine that offered this training program with horses, just a few miles away.

What I discovered that evening in the sauna was a concept I call naked networking, a strategy for success based on a mindset to networking that is authentic, relational, genuine and even fun I shared my experience of “naked networking” in the sauna, with my colleagues at the conference, and suggested that it might be a metaphor for a more transparent and authentic approach to networking and strategy for successful business connections.

That night in the Hotel Sonnet dining room I thought I saw the woman I had met naked in the sauna at a corner table, I couldn't be sure it was her with her clothes on but as I approached it was indeed her.

I greeted her and asked if she would like to meet my colleague Gerhard, the man I had told her about, that offered horses and leadership programs just a few miles down the road. She was interested in meeting him, and so I made the introductions, and he joined her at her table.

The next morning Gerhard told me that the naked networking approach worked. The woman was meeting with her boss that morning and was going to highly recommend that they incorporate the leadership with horses work into their ongoing leadership training. She also decided, as she loved horses, she would take the EAHAIE training as a possible new career direction for her.

Naked networking as a metaphor and strategy offers the best of networking without the common aversion or resistance to networking. The focus is on developing meaningful relationships based on authentic interaction and transparency. With nothing to hide, nothing to exploit, naked and vulnerable we can better engage in a more selfless, unpretentious way and build productive relationships with people. Naked networking is about connection; connecting to and sharing what is most important to you and learning what is most important to others.

I had another important though quite different experience later that morning with the concept of naked networking. Engaging with the horses as part of the conference experience, the horses offered me an essential perspective about naked networking for a successful relationship and making connections.

The horses were interested in connecting with me, but they had no interest in my business card, how much profit my business generated or how many customers we serve. They were not impressed by name brand clothes or type of car we humans arrived in.

They simply were interested in how I was going to be with them. Was I being honest, did I try to understand the world from their point of view, would I be courageous enough to be myself with them and accept them as they were. The horse's outer behaviour was in absolute alignment with who they were on the inside. What I learned from the horses was that authenticity begins with who I am on the inside, my values within and extends outward to my behaviour and actions in the world.

What I learned was that the practice of naked networking, whether in a sauna or horse pasture or at a conference, is not about who we are it is about how we are when we are authentic and approachable, honest and humble, genuine and generous. The basis of naked networking is a respectful and trustworthy relationship, meaningful connections and in persistently being our natural and lovable self.







## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



*Jesvir Mahil, United Kingdom, is an Education Consultant for post-compulsory education in the UK. In addition to teaching for over thirty years, she worked as an official inspector, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in colleges. She facilitates Equine Assisted Creativity Masterminds where people learn to expand their consciousness in the company of horses simply being horses.*

*Empowerment, authenticity and balance are key principles to Annemiek Van Reepingen, Belgium. As a business coach and life coach, she supports and coaches people and teams to find and expand on their true potential. Inspiring people to live life fully, to work with what they are passionate about, to become true leaders in their own lives and that of others is her passion.*

## PRESENCE AND CREATIVITY

You may have already noticed, when you think of some of your most revered heroes and heroines, that a combination of presence and creativity in action is an incredibly powerful way to make an impact and add value to the world we live in.

On our journey home after the 10th EAHAIE conference in Poland, Dr Annemiek Van Reepingen and I, wandered through Warsaw, discussing the relationship between presence and creativity. She had delivered an experiential workshop at the conference in which participants learnt the difference between being fully present in the body, and not.

As you'd expect from old friends who haven't seen each for years, each bursting to share the ideas we have discovered and passionately curious about how they all fit in with the perspective of the other, our discussion got so interesting we promised to write an article about the relationship between presence and creativity on our return home.

Well, here is what we wrote.

Jesvir Mahil:

When we are fully present in our own bodies, aware of the rhythm of our own breathing and alert to all the sensations we feel, it is very difficult for another person to topple us over. We are able to maintain our balance with strength and resist external pressure when we are fully present. If you practice martial arts or any other sport where balance is important, you will know the importance of breathing rhythmically and like the Chinese, Japanese and Indian philosophies teach, the importance of the solar plexus, wherein our personal power supposedly lies. This is often described as a yellow ball of light, like the sun, located in the region of our bellies. When I was learning Tai Chi, my teacher described it as a cauldron full of boiling water and advised us to move gracefully to avoid spilling any of the scalding water. This was a good metaphor that always reminded me to remain alert to the fire in my belly; my personal power.

It seems to me that this personal power taught throughout the ages in yogic and martial arts philosophies is closely linked with the concept of presence. Indeed they may be exactly the same thing. What is important is the impact of our presence or personal power in our daily lives. Dr Van Reepingen clearly demonstrated this through an exercise where we imagined being three meters ahead of our physical body and found ourselves being easily toppled over by our partners in the exercise. In comparison, when we were fully present in our own bodies, we were able to resist external pressure and maintain our balance.

There is a growing trend in the personal development industry for literature advocating the importance of presence, for example a Google (2014) search for books on 'Mindfulness',

the modern companion to the ancient tradition of meditation, brings up no less than 1,500,000 entries. A search on Amazon.com (2014) for Mindfulness shows 14,852 products being sold, presumably to people who want to harness this power of presence which is commonly associated with a reduction of stress.

The book that I am personally working with to gain a better awareness of presence, is by Williams and Penman (2012) and the title promises “Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world”. I was drawn to this book because there is a chapter entitled “When did you stop dancing?” I know the power of dancing and that it is impossible to dance well unless we are fully present in our bodies. In fact, there is a popular quote going around on social media, accredited to Gabriel Roth (Life, 2014) that says:

“In many shamanic societies, if you came to a shaman or medicine person complaining of being disheartened, dispirited, or depressed, they would ask one of four questions. When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop finding comfort in the sweet territory of silence? “

This quote leads nicely to the link between presence and creativity. I can understand the importance of being fully present in our own bodies when we are dancing or singing but not when we are listening to a great story for example. Doesn't our mind take us on a journey that is beyond our physical experience when we are listening to an engaging storyteller? Does that absence from our bodies, when our minds are elsewhere, take away our power?

This was the question over which I pondered with my friend Dr Annemicken Van Reepingen. I am a creative writer and one of the first books I wrote, (Mahil, 2006) was mostly written as an unconscious stream of consciousness, in short bursts of creativity, in the middle of the night when I was usually only half awake and not fully present in my body at all. I do not remember writing creatively and being fully present at the same time. Telling a good story often involves entering the realm of different worlds through our imagination, which is a bit like daydreaming. I am sure we can all remember times when we were daydreaming and jolted back into consciousness by the sharp pangs of reality which brought us back into our own bodies like a bolt of lightning. For me, this is usually looking at the

clock and realising that hours had passed when I meant only to sit down and write for half an hour! Although there may be a paradox between being conscious and fully present and at the same time accessing the inspiration for creativity from our unconscious, Annemieken and I realised in our discussion that in order to write authentically we have to be present to our own selves and values to ensure that we are not writing to please others. There is power in our words when they come from our own heart and soul and when these words ring true for others. So in this sense, we do need to be present and in alignment with our own souls in expressing our creativity.

Out of the many definitions of creativity, the one that I find most useful in my business work is suggested by Robinson (2011: 2):

“Creativity, ... is the process of developing original ideas that have value, ...”

Is it possible to use the principles of mindfulness as explained by authors such as Williams and Penman (2012) to create a powerful presence and to be creative as defined by Robinson above? Well, here we have to understand that creativity is not often achieved in isolation. When we generate original ideas, we cannot claim that they have value just because we say so. Most creative work in business is accomplished through collaboration and popular authors on creativity such as Csikszentmihalyi (2013) remind us of the importance of others in evaluating whether an idea is original and whether it has value:

“There is no way to know whether a thought is new except with reference to some standards, and there is no way to tell whether it is valuable until it passes the social evaluation. Therefore, creativity does not happen inside people’s heads, but in the interaction between a person’s thoughts and a sociocultural context.”

Whenever I have worked in teams, I have noticed that it is those members that are most fully present in themselves that manage to steer the group and even if they don’t generate the most original ideas, they are the ones that add most value by making use of the ideas in a manner that is appropriate to the sociocultural context.

So regardless of whether we are writing creatively in deep solitary slumber, or whether we are developing innovative products in collaboration with teams, it seems wise to be mindful that we put full presence into the expression of our creativity.

Annemieken Van Reepingen:

Before we can start talking about the relationship between presence and creativity, let's define presence. What is presence? Presence to me is:

being in the here and now,  
and in contact with the world around you.

It means being aware of yourself, of whatever is going on in your body. Your body has wisdom, your mind is only a small part of that whole great system you are. What are your sensations, emotions, thoughts?

Presence is at the same time staying in contact with the external world, using all your senses, including what we call your sixth sense, your intuition. Being present is not a closed state of consciousness, it is quite the opposite: it is being totally aware of your surroundings. Being present in that way does not leave room for thoughts that are not about the here and now, it does not leave room for worrying about the past or the future.

Being present requires also letting go of expectations, letting go of what you think should happen in the situation, thus making room for what is actually happening.

I work daily with horses and people. Horses are masters of being present, they are prey animals. For them being present is a prerequisite to survive. You never know whether a lion might come round the corner, and you have to keep all your senses open to find out whether he is hungry or not, all in a split second. Leading them requires the same presence from us:

staying in contact with our inner selves and in contact with the world around us. People on the other hand are masters in not being present. Horses can teach us a lot in this regard.

Presence evokes a state we call “the flow”. You are in the flow when everything happens smoothly, almost automatically, it does not cost you any energy. On the contrary, it gives you energy. Some say that is because you tap into the energy of something greater than yourself. In any case, it is a state of being that does not cost you any effort, there are no obstacles really. When I am in this fluent presence, I often say and do things I am amazed about later, when I look back. How on earth did I think of that or come up with that? Where did that come from? This is where creativity comes in: new and valuable things come up that you wouldn’t have been able to come up with without this state of presence. When you think about it afterwards, it almost seems like you have become some kind of channel for ideas. I have heard many artists and masters in their profession say that they feel they are a channel in their best moments; in the moments they create best whatever it is they create: a piece of art, a presentation, a coaching session, teaching, furniture, etc...

So, my hypothesis is that to be able to be creative, you need presence. And everything that prevents you from being present kills creativity. One of the biggest killers, and one of the sneakiest ones too, is perfectionism. Bréne Brown (2013) defines perfectionism as putting oneself out. It is trying to do the best we can, so people are pleased with what we do and like and love us. It is not really about looking for better quality. It is not trying to develop and get better; it is trying to look better. Perfectionism is a shield that people put up to protect themselves from rejection and criticism. “If I do things perfectly, no one can criticize me, and everyone will love me and treat me with respect”. Perfectionism is a monster that devours energy. It wears you out and leads to burn-out.

In other words, it is a shield against the vulnerability. This leads us to the conclusion that being present also means daring to be vulnerable. If you are present with everything you have in you and in contact with everything there is around you, you are in a state of vulnerability. This means that in order to be creative we have to be able to be vulnerable. And isn’t it true indeed that we feel extremely vulnerable when we are creative or expose

the products of our creativity: every author feels vulnerable when his book is published and read by the public; every painter feels naked when people look at his paintings.

Now, we are ready to close the circle: it is precisely presence that will keep you in this vulnerable and creative state. Presence will keep you away from perfectionism or any other defence mechanism or shield you use to hide yourself. Now, you might say: “why wouldn’t I hideout? Why would I want to be vulnerable? It’s a dangerous world out there”. Because I have never seen anyone happy hiding out, except maybe in the hide and seek game! It is exhausting and wears you out, alienates you from yourself and others and as we already pointed out, kills creativity. Being present and vulnerable on the other hand is the prerequisite to connecting with your inner core and with others really. And we human beings are all about connection. We are unhappy if there is a lack of connection; we need connection to strive and survive. We certainly need connection to be happy. Presence allows you to connect.

If you hide out, your view will be impaired. So instead of protecting yourself from danger (when I talk about danger, I am referring to physical and emotional risk), you increase the chance of getting hurt. In contrast, presence will keep you safe, as you will be aware of everything that happens and be able to react if and when necessary.









*Nikki & Leslie Kagan, Israel, USA. Based on more than 35 years of combined experience as management consultants and corporate facilitators, Nikki and Leslie Kagan offer corporate leaders a unique and highly effective approach to leadership and team development through their HorseSense programs. Their custom-designed programs help individuals and teams to effectively increase self-awareness with respect to leadership styles and the ways in which to influence or impact others, expand their repertoire of leadership approaches in order to be flexibly responsive as appropriate (i.e., being able to lead, partner, or follow effectively), develop an understanding of leadership presence that is embodied and experienced on an emotional level, not just known intellectually; and learn to self-manage relative to their leadership performance and self-evaluate relative to progress in cultivating desired leadership competencies.*

### LESSONS FROM THE PICADERO PAYING ATTENTION TO OUR INTENTION

The picadero – much like a round pen with corners – is a place where we can explore our own truths and look in the mirror of how we relate to others. With our equine partner, we have the opportunity to experience the impact of our presence – our emotions and energy – on others. This experience can be a very powerful metaphor, as was the case with “Susan,” a participant in one of the corporate HorseSense programs we facilitated recently.

Susan is the Office Manager for an executive search firm in the northeastern United States. She had never been around horses before our program, and seemed to be enjoying her interactions with them very much. Still, she entered the picadero with some trepidation, gripping the flag tightly in her left hand, unsure of how to proceed with Chip, a large Appaloosa gelding who was a veteran of a number of our programs. Susan approached Chip in an attempt to establish a connection with him. Dropping the flag to the ground between her own and Chip's front feet, she held out her hand in silent gesture of "hello". Chip expressed mild interest in the flag, nosing it lightly, and ignored Susan.

We watched as Susan tried more affirmatively to connect with Chip, moving closer to him, tentatively stroking his neck with her right hand, holding the flag aloft in her left hand near Chip's head, and occasionally shaking it. When these gestures produced no obvious connection, Susan began to wave the flag at Chip's left haunch, then his shoulder, then his haunch again – trying to get him to move. Chip stood perfectly still.

Susan's efforts became increasingly disjointed and remained without effect. It was painful to watch her frustration visibly mounting. After a very long few minutes of being ignored, Susan turned away from Chip looking dejected. She lowered the flag, lowered her head and said, "I just don't know what to do."

Nikki joined Susan in the picadero and asked her a few questions. "What would you like Chip to do?" "How would you describe what you've tried so far?" "What else might you try?" With a few words of encouragement about the importance of setting your intention and concentrating on being clear when asking for what you want, Nikki stepped out of the arena and left Susan to continue.

Susan seemed to draw inward and we all watched in silence. Then she took a step back from Chip and snapped the flag energetically behind him. Chip raised his head and shuffled forward a few steps. Encouraged, Susan repeated the vigorous snap of the flag. Once again, Chip responded by moving forward a few more steps. Then the dance began in earnest. With each step that Chip took, with each snap of the flag, we could see Susan's

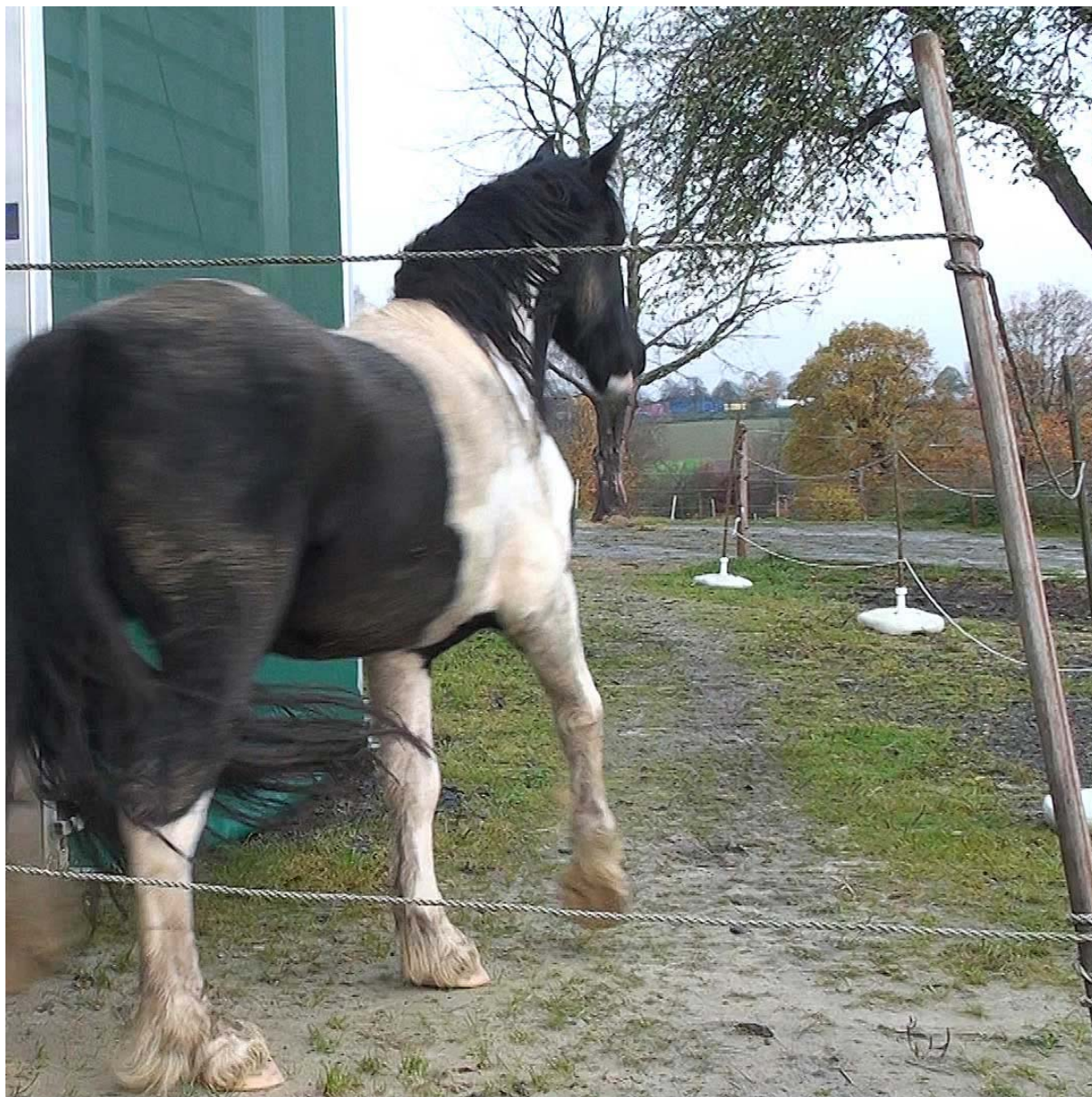
confidence grow until both horse and human were trotting easily around the picadero together. Susan was grinning from ear to ear, carrying herself lightly and openly, radiating excitement and energy.

After a minute or so, Susan stopped trotting, lowered the flag and, having accomplished her objective, moved to leave the picadero, not noticing Chip following behind her like her newest best friend. We motioned to her to turn and look, and then asked her to stand by Chip for a picture of the two of them together.

Once the picture was taken, Susan left the picadero and walked past the group, clearly moved by her experience. Without speaking, Leslie placed a hand on Susan's shoulder, and Susan started to sob. Leslie asked, "Do you want to talk about what's coming up for you?" Susan nodded and explained that her experience with Chip mirrored her experience in the office with staff. "I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings at work, just as I didn't want to push Chip with the flag. But they don't pay attention to what I'm asking for, and I end up feeling frustrated. I see now that I'm so concerned about being nice and getting along with everyone that I don't really ask for what I want. I don't want to hurt their feelings, but I end up feeling hurt because I've been unclear and they don't respond."

Leslie asked, "How did Chip respond to your clarity?" Susan answered, "It was great. Everything flowed so easily after that. We had a great time! This was a huge lesson for me in asking clearly for what I want."

Not every picadero experience is so profoundly insightful, but the opportunity is there for those who are willing to engage with what they see when they look in the mirror of their equine partner's eyes.





*Renáta Foldynová, Czech Republic. Her journey to horse assisted training for managers' groups, and individuals were through a long experience of managerial positions in five-star hotel catering and prestigious retail companies, and of course my love for horses.*

## HORSES ARE MYSTERIOUS CREATURES!

“Horses are mysterious creatures,” a friend of mine told me when we talked about her project of horse assisted management training, and I felt this phrase in my mind suddenly opened the door to another world. Until then, the horses were for me like other domestic animals. I was not particularly interested in them; my interest was strictly neutral. But I was intrigued, attracted and inspired by the mysticism. Now, horses entered into my world of mysticism by the main gate in all their grandeur and splendour. From that moment I knew that I would take the first opportunity for contact with these leadership trainers shrouded in mysticism.

Finally, the day came when I parked the car on the farm Heroutice that offered ideal conditions for the natural leadership course with the assistance of horses – accommodation,



restaurant with lounge and garden, indoor and outdoor riding school, horses in pens, beautiful countryside 70 km from Prague. I got out of the car full of curiosity, what to expect. Just somewhere on the edge of curiosity, I felt the vibration of fear, how am I going to hold out as a leader face to face with these large animals.

The very first lesson – the observation of three horses from the gallery of the covered riding hall – was unforgettable. Our task was to observe the behaviour of this small group of horses and determine which of them is the leader. It was interesting to observe how the behaviour of the group reflected the different character traits of these three animals, Master, Merlin and Louise. Even more interesting was to share views and insights with other students in watching the video after returning to the classroom. To my surprise, we didn't agree with the leader of the herd. Each of the three horses was the leader in somebody's eyes, and each participant had strong and convincing arguments for their choice. The best example of the diversity of views on the same situation I had never experienced.

Another activity was leading the horse by the bridle near its head. At first glance, nothing complicated. We were outside. My colleagues fulfilled their tasks excellently, and I took Merlin's rein with confidence. Problems, however, arose after a few steps, when Merlin saw a group of horses who just then had driven through a nearby meadow to the farm. These horses caught his attention so that to fulfil a simple task for me was virtually impossible. I tried all possible ways to attract his attention back to me and our task but in vain. Sure, it was the outside influences that made a real challenge from a simple task. But when analysing the video with the teacher and other participants I clearly realised that my behaviour was lacking conviction. Merlin did not mark my words; he might have been more convinced by my body language, if only it were more expressive.

A more complex task was to get the horses to run around. It was an example of leadership at a distance with a tool – a riding whip with a flag. I had never tried anything like this before, so I had no idea how to use the riding whip. I tried different strategies, but with only partial success. Later the colleague, who had dealt with horses for years, demonstrated how to do it. Wow! Why are we looking for some complexity when the solution is simple and vivid, I

thought to myself. What a lesson of humility this was! And what a lesson I learned to put into practice effectively! As a manager, I have a set of different management tools, and often complexly use them with little effectiveness.

After leading the horse from the front and from the side came leading from the back using the reins. After the previous experience, I was really worried. How should I handle this? I do not suffer from a lack of confidence and courage, but I was prepared for the worst. And again the surprise came – Master and I completed the task as easily as if it were the simplest thing. Sensational! Another surprise came in the analysis – this kind of leadership is an analogy of coaching. Even though I had already some coaching experience, this experience of coaching effectiveness was much more expressive. Instead of drawing a sail-boat and discussing wisdom and control as in standard training, here I was standing on the swinging deck with the wheel (or reins) in hand.

I know that management is in part science and in part craft. You can read hundreds of books and not be a good manager, because a substantial part of the art of management is not transferable. This craft part we gain by practical experience through feedback from others. At the seminar with the assistance of horses, I found that feedback from these animals is much more vivid and goes deeper into my heart than feedback from other people. The horses did not understand words and logical arguments. They responded to the language of my body and to what my inner being wanted. With Master, Luis and Merlin I could go through some shells of sophisticated ideas to the foundations of my managerial skills and within two days realise my strengths and weaknesses, which had accompanied me for several years undetected. Horses are really mystical beings!

## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE



In her 12-year international career in corporate human resources, Riddhima Kowley has worked with diverse leadership teams and organisations in India, France, Middle East and Africa, America and England. Having completed her training per the International Coach Federation standards, she implemented what she learned to get teams and leaders to collaborate. However, she always felt the lack of a strong glue needed to bond collective leadership. She discovered this glue when she heard about EAHAIE and HorseDream in June 2017.

Taking the opportunity of experiencing a personal transformation, she started training towards being a HorseDream Partner, quit her 9-5 job with Vodafone in August 2017 and started working full time on Horse Assisted Leadership and Team Development. She is excited about having found her life-long career.

## HORSES CREATE UBUNTU TEAMS

Ubuntu is an ancient African word in Xhosa that literally means "I am what I am because of who we all are". It was one of Nelson Mandela's favourite words - and now mine. Today it is a philosophy that lies at the heart of how many humanist tribes thrive in joy and happiness when they have so little materialistically. It gives them what they need to be happy teams - joint purpose, the knowledge they are safe with and because of one another, love and belonging, and a sense of higher self. When a leader can create a similar sense of Ubuntu in the organisation, people will take care of each other, bring out the best in each other and find their own best selves through the larger purpose of the organisation. It is too late at



night to search for empirical evidence, but my gut tells me that an Ubuntu culture will always help a business outperform itself sustainably.

I had an inspiring conversation today with somebody who leads the coaching practice at a renowned consultancy. He asked me a variation of the most common question I get these days. He asked me “How can a horse be a coach?!”

Our conversation left me thinking about Horses, Teams and Ubuntu on the train journey back.

The short answer to that question is that horses seem to be born with 'natural coaching-behaviours'. They give immediate feedback, in a non-aggressive, non-judgemental way yet touching us deeply and helping us see the truth. They then give us the space to reflect; and when we have owned an insight we just became aware of with the earlier feedback, they give us immediate acknowledgement and praise. They can coach us within minutes! It is one of the biggest reasons why horses provide leading edge “team building experiences” that most interventions I have experienced and used either don’t do 'impactfully' enough, or take long to do, or by the time they do it the business has changed and opportunity is gone past.

In October 2017, I was facilitating a team workshop for the sales team of a leading software company.

The goal was for a team of 8 people to take a horse from Point A to Point B through a course laid out in the arena by learning how to use as many non-verbal communication cues as possible. They were given planning time before they began the course with the horse. I also explained a model of the leadership positions that collectively exist in a herd to lead themselves to a destination, all taking the same direction and collectively maintaining the necessary pace in the given moment whilst on their journey. For tens of millions of years they have had to move hundreds of miles together to find food and not become food themselves on the way. Time and the need to survive on predator-filled earth has made them

masters of teaming through nonverbal communication and a lot of other amazing things we can learn.

That day, the team had to use the non-verbal communication skills and collective leadership model of the herd to take a horse on a short journey from one point to another,

We were working with two horses in that workshop - Oliver “Olly” and “H”. And the team was free to choose who they wanted to work with. After taking a few moments to agree to work with Olly, and deciding on who takes which leadership position in the herd model, they connected with Olly and started moving him forward. They had only made a few paces before he stopped. The leader in the front, whose role was to lead the direction and pace, somehow ended up a good few metres in front of the horse and the rest of his herd. So he came back and they started again. This time, they could not get Olly to move. They tried all antics (well, whatever they could apart from physical force, as we maintain high standards of safety both for participants and the horses) that raised the energy levels. Finally Olly moved, but not with them. He gracefully turned his back around and headed towards the grass which he coolly began to graze on.

The team was stumped. Nothing about the leadership positions and model I has shared with them told them how to get a horse away from fresh green grass. Now what?!

What a gorgeous team coaching opportunity. Reminded me of those large sized complex projects and defining moments on those projects where teams would get stuck because they have lost the sense of the joint direction or pace. In such times, we find that individuals try to salvage whatever they can and do their best to move their piece forward at least. Unfortunately in the case of a horse, you cannot move it forward in pieces.

I decided to use this learning opportunity by asking them to shift their attention away from the horse, and instead huddle together to debrief what had just happened and restart the planning. This time, they had the experience of trial and learning. I asked them to think

about what their trial had taught them and to tell each other what they perceived might have been required from each other.

So they began telling each other what they thought each one could do differently.

As they started this sharing and feedback, one lady asked her colleague at the opposite end of the circle to speak louder as she could not hear him. I asked them if there was any reason they were standing so far apart. They smiled as they came closer. It was beautiful to watch. As they inched forward to tighten the circle, the lady mentioned and another couple of guys asked the rest to move even closer. It just needed somebody to say it, and everyone loosened up and took bigger more confident steps to form a circle that they were all happy with. Finally you could see them conversing animatedly – shoulder to shoulder. Physically, mentally and emotionally connected - in a light yet genuine and honest way.

In those few minutes, each one had received ideas on what he or she could do differently to play out their role successfully. More importantly each one was open and curious to receiving this help from the others. They smiled and jested together as they described some of those behaviour patterns as “it is exactly what happens at work”. Everyone listened with humility and sense of safety in the circle. It was beautiful to watch. Out there in the field there were no titles, no hierarchies, no fear and no “serious or tough feedback”. That last piece was the horse’s job. And he had done it perfectly – as they always do!

And then the magic happened. My co-facilitator that day, Nancy Winton, owner at Dance with Equus, and I noticed the two horses – Olly and H – had both walk up from different corners of the arena to the human circle that had been formed. They stood just on the outer rim, facing the inside - as if they wanted to be a part of it. Have you ever experienced a moment where you had goosebumps because you have just witnessed something so powerful that you cannot explain scientifically but know deep down inside there is a big truth there? That was what happened to Nancy and me watching that moment. The chance to witness precisely those learning moments is why I chose to do the work I do with horses and people.

Coming back to that moment – the team stopped the discussion there and started to notice what had just happened. The next few moments of silence saw the circle expand, as the two horses took a few shy but curious steps forward to join it. It was the perfect moment for the team to accept the invitation of the horses to go play. The horses felt safe with what I think they had by now identified as a herd. The body language of the circle was congruent, clear, calm, non-aggressive, created safe energy and probably looked and felt like a herd. Horses being the social animals they are, given a choice, they always prefer to join the herd. When they ‘sense’ the energy and ‘see’ the behaviours of a herd, this choice becomes possible. What they don't know is that Human's Tribe, just like Horses Herd and Birds Flock. So if we look at it from their perspective, then those words just become a matter of semantics.

It was fun to watch what happened next. Their original plan had been to take Olly on the journey. But as life is what happens when we are too busy planning, and they had started living in the moment, they ended up taking both H and Olly on the journey! That's what the moment had presented to them. And they had received it gracefully. From the outside, it looked like harmony in nature.

They were all fully present, tuned in to each other, listening to each other's non-verbal cues and looked fully connected to each other's needs from the group and themselves. Most importantly, they were having a lot of fun, fully engaged in play. We enjoyed watching them actively taking the guidance of each other through body language. It worked, because each one was looking out to the rest who could see much more of them in the herd dynamic, than what they were able to see themselves.

In those ten minutes or so, I had numerous flashes from various previous workshops on emotional intelligence, self-awareness, trust building in a team, healthy conflict, giving and receiving feedback and other team off-sites. So many conversations and whiteboard sessions had not achieved the magnitude of team learning that this team had received in less than an hour today.

My friend Lou Whiting, founder and director at Waves Training Solutions, sent me a white paper on emotional intelligence in which they have made a strong statement. I would like to share it with you and ask you to reflect:

“Organizations of the future will no longer question whether there is value in providing Emotional Intelligence training for their leaders, they will focus on which EI program will provide the highest return on investment for their company.”

I don't claim, although I do believe from my personal experience, that Horse Assisted Education is the most effective education approach today for complex learning and development requirements. But I do want the corporate world to know that it exists and is an accessible option they are not yet fully aware of, so they can make an informed choice. I feel frustrated that the dearth of awareness around such a powerful and accessible tool slows us down from creating that better humanity and corporate culture we envision for tomorrow. But that is a discussion for another time.

Going back to how it all ended that sunny day in October - as the team arrived at the end of their course with the two horses, there were beaming ear to ear smiles, watery eyes, massive “Thank You” hugs and scratches to the two coaches Olly and H. I guess they were existing in a space of marvel that is far too big to be put into words. They bounced out of there in a happy silence and shared a sense of wonder. I felt blessed to have been a part of it.

## EQUINE AHA! EXPERIENCE

