



Leadership, Teamwork and Equine Assisted Coaching

By Joan Starkowsky

You may be wondering what the significance of the horses is on our company website and otherwise. Horses live in herds and survive based on leadership and teamwork. They are a prey animal and have a pecking order consisting of the leader and sub-leaders who are always aware of their surroundings and activity in them. This is critical in order for them to live and thrive safely. They work as a team continuously communicating with each other using emotions, energy and body language. They mirror each other, so that the messages get communicated to all members of the herd in a quiet way. This keeps them under the radar and ready for action when a predator is detected.

Because the very essence of horses is about authenticity, leadership and teamwork, we have chosen to utilize them as a metaphor of our own leadership journey. It doesn't matter whether we lead a company, group, family or ourselves. The lessons that horses have to teach us are very empowering and impactful. If we learn them experientially, they will inspire sustainable and transformational growth.

Most people are familiar with therapeutic riding and have seen the positive results it brings to clients. Another form of helping people using horses is called equine assisted coaching or equine experiential learning.

Equine assisted coaching is experiential learning through the use of horses as partners in the learning process. The focus is not on riding or horsemanship but on new approaches to develop

trust and respect that enhance relating with others. The methodology is being used successfully in executive, leadership and life coaching, teambuilding and strengths and talent to name a few. Participants do not have to have knowledge of horses and all the work is done on the ground in a horse arena. This enables participants to learn in a relaxed natural environment conducive to openness and fun outside the confines of corporate and hotel conference rooms.

How do horses help people learn? As we said previously, horses are highly sensitive to energy, emotions and the environment around them. Their survival depends on leadership, relationships and teamwork. Because of their high degree of sensitivity, they pick up on body changes such as breathing and muscle tension and will act as a mirror to the human-being. Horses will reflect behaviors and patterns and foster exploration of thoughts, feelings and sensations. They live in the present and give honest feedback to people without judgment, rendering self awareness and encouragement of growth and change. They provide an opportunity for the participant to experiment with new behaviors that engage them in a genuine and empowering way. The learning is embodied and therefore retained unlike most training functions where people leave with a three-ring binder and reenact old and familiar habit patterns soon after the event is over.

Equine assisted coaching can be done with individuals or groups. It can be utilized in coaching or training in workshops, meetings and/or retreats for teambuilding, leadership development, health education, emotional awareness, personal mission, vision, strengths and stress relief. The experience can be customized to fit specific needs of the participant(s).

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