

Developing Coherent Leadership In Partnership With Horses – A New Approach to Leadership Training

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Abstract

This paper offers a new perspective in leadership development by demonstrating how engaging horses as partners in leadership training can lead to more coherent and sustainable leadership effectiveness. The training experience provides a unique approach for students and corporate participants to develop sustainable changes in their awareness and actions regarding their leadership abilities and authenticity. Horses prove themselves as dynamic co-facilitators by providing participants genuine opportunities to engage with others in the present moment and obtain honest feedback regarding the congruence between what they say and what they do as leaders. This innovative work suggests how the application of equine partnered experiences (EPE) can help transform and motivate people so they are able to make better decisions, gain more clarity, experience more commitment to their life and work and generally improve the coherence of themselves and those around them. Case examples are provided of actual training situations demonstrating the various outcomes related to increasing effective leadership and management.

Key Words

leadership training, equine facilitated learning, decision making, leadership effectiveness, nature-related experiential education, social systems dynamics, herd behavior, equine facilitated psychotherapy, psychophysiology, organizational leadership, leadership coaching, and cross cultural training

Introduction

A problem with most management education today is that it is primarily oriented towards analytical conditioning. Thinking is emphasized more than intuitive development is rewarded. Quantitative analysis is often more valued than qualitative observation. However, as the recognition of the importance of developing social and emotional intelligence grows, there is a greater need to emphasize and encourage the heart-brain-body connection. (Goleman, 2006) In education and training the balance is beginning to shift from being primarily cerebral towards incorporating more experiential approaches fostering the growth of more balanced and holistic leaders. It is not unusual to hear more discussion about the relationship of the heart and body, particularly the education of managers who provide leadership across cultures and nations (Senge, 2004). It is commonly accepted that continuous change and transformation is the norm in our global economy and that it is very difficult to manage these changes and transformations in ways that “stick.” The author’s developmental work, as presented in this paper, provides a general hypothesis that the application of energetic and equine

partnered experiences (EPE) can help transform the awareness and motivation of individuals and teams so they demonstrate improved decision making, more focused observation and clarity, experience more commitment to their life and work, and generally improve their relationships with themselves and those around them (Strozzi, 2004). Another outcome of the work is the reconnection to nature and animals and the growing awareness of the importance of interacting with animals, particularly horses. (Hesler-Key,2001)

Differences in leadership training with horses is discussed and areas such as equine coaching, team building, leadership awareness and cross cultural applications are presented. The reader will learn why horses are effective living biofeedback beings and how the metaphor of their social systems and herd dynamics is relevant to creating effective and coherent leaders. (Coates, 2008) (Kahonov 2003) Short cases are included to emphasize training applications and outcomes. There is a brief introduction of a quantitative research project which the author has underway to support the assertion of the benefits of human-animal-nature interaction. Using heart-rate variability as a market the researchers are measuring the existence and strength of the human animal bond.

The material presented took place over a two year period where the author included leadership development in her course curricula as well as in her training and consulting offerings. Various cases are used to demonstrate how equine partnered experiences generated substantial change in learners: something that happened deep within the person and not just in their minds. Most executives spend their lives "in their heads," concentrating, talking, thinking - and move at a rapid pace from one event and opportunity to another (Tolle, 2005). The work with horses in a natural setting is designed to encourage people to slow down, tune in, pay attention, stay in the present, make changes for the better now and not later, have an experience that incorporates both mind and body as a synchronized effort, and experience a way of learning that facilitates change which sticks and positively influences individuals and the organizations they work in.

The author has been teaching leadership and organizational development for more than 20 years. For the past 10 years, she has also been working with horses, particularly wild horses, gentling them and preparing them to work with and live in partnership with humans. The experiences gained in years of teaching and consulting and then years of training horses led the author to this emerging field of equine facilitated learning (see EFMHA website). This paper is only a beginning discussion of the work and research that is taking place in this area and it is hoped that it will be welcomed in the management arena as something that will become more mainstream and not considered as trendy or esoteric. The work has potential implications for changing people at their heart level (Rector, 2005) -- change that can make a difference in who leads our organizations now and in the future and how these people make decisions that are for the benefit of our organizations and society as a whole.

The Difference Between Dominating or Facilitating Leadership

“Leadership isn’t about making people do things”

Toby (name changed), a computer software engineer and manager of several project teams at a high tech company, showed up for the Saturday session on *Leadership with Horses* thinking he already understood and had a sense of his leadership style. However, that day shifted his perspective. When it came his turn to lead a horse through the obstacle course he had to slow down, and check in with the horse instead of “dragging” it along. He learned what it meant to pay attention to the goal (the obstacle course) and to pay attention to his team member (the horse). His first time through the obstacle course activity did not go as he had hoped. He got angry when the horse dropped its head and started to eat so he began to tug hard on the line to move forward. Then the horse refused to move across a bridge and that brought more frustration. Finally, he stopped, took several deep breaths and began to pay attention to the energy between himself and Rocket, the horse. It was an obvious and clear shift from his wanting to accomplish an agenda that the horse had no part in to a focus on how to engage in a partnership to achieve a goal. At that moment, Rocket looked up, took a step alongside Toby, began moving in step with him, almost as if they were dancing. He responded to Toby’s clear focused leadership with energy and enthusiasm.

Toby commented in a journal entry,
“It’s one thing to have a horse like you, however it is another thing to have a horse want to follow you around with no lead lines attached. You can’t be a leader just by telling someone you are a leader. You have to prove it...you have to be it. Before, if I was the leader and you didn’t do what I wanted, I would get angry. I may give up on you or just do it myself. Now I have a new perspective on leading others which is more effective and energizing as well. I learned how my energy and presence impacted how others (the horses) perceived me and that became a significant learning experience which has shifted how I manage and lead my team.”

Toby reported in a conversation the following week that he had immediately been able to apply his newly discovered realization to his project team and found that the work week went smoother. He added that the work was also more fun and less frustrating. He also indicated that the team became more productive when he was less angry and more present to assist his employees.

The lead horse in a herd is not a dominant member of the system. The lead horse is responsible for the safety and survival of the herd. (Grandin, 2005) Imagine working in an organization where each day the leaders show up and work entirely for the safety and survival of the people and the organization. Every day they earn their positions of leadership. And, that leadership is only maintained through continuous attention to the environment, knowledge of how to find and lead others successfully through complex environments, ability to make quick decisions that could mean life or death to the organization, and operating from an energetic connection that is able to mobilize organizational actions immediately, often requiring little if any on the spot explanation or manipulation. Horses operate in this manner and much can be applied to human learning systems from their behavior. If the leaders are not able to maintain this flow of safety, awareness, or social integration capability – then members of the herd, or

organization, lose trust, feel unsafe, and experience an imbalance. When this happens then it is possible that another mindful and aware leader will quickly move into the leadership position, taking over the territory which is common in herds and it is critical for the survival of the herd. This is applicable to leadership training for the individual to recognize their own presence and command within their organizations so they can sustain a positive leadership role.

Keeping People Safe As A Leadership Metaphor

The concept of leading for the safety of the herd is important to horses. Horse herds tend to demonstrate three leadership styles-- leadership styles which mirror what many of us experience everyday in organizations. First, there are true leaders who lead for the sake of the herd, taking care of their employees and paying attention to the workings of the internal and external environment. Second, there are those who are dominant bullies, pushing others around and looking like they are in control. Others avoid them and this may be perceived as leadership by an onlooker. Finally, there are those who go along with things in a submissive manner- also considered passive leadership behavior. The true lead horse serves as the responsible leader - leading for the protection and survival of the herd. If the lead horse is not constantly aware of the environment and providing constant communication exchange then predators may kill it or members of the herd. All members of the herd who want to be safe and cared for make sure they know where their lead horse is - at all times. The dominant horse tries to be a leader, pushing and moving others around successfully, but is never given leadership status because it is considered a bully and not looking out for the safety of all. Others may comply temporarily but they do not look to a dominant horse as their true leader. The passive horse goes along with the leader and willingly takes orders and participates within the herd hierarchy which is also important when the lead horse gives the signal to leave quickly or danger is nearby. Most participants in the leadership training programs identify with wanting to lead for the survival of their employees and the organization. Observing and engaging in the training programs helps build that ability.

The Difference between Equine Partnered Experiences and Other Outdoor Adventure Training

Comparing the social systems of horse herds with social systems inside organizations is a new way to assist in leadership growth, change and transformation. Engaging individuals and teams in equine partnered experiences is different than many of the popular outdoor adventure or experiential learning courses. Some people compare the leadership with horses programs to outdoor survival programs, ropes courses, river rafting trips or other outdoor adventures.(Graham, 2007) However, unlike these other experiential programs, the equine partnered experiences go beyond overcoming fears in a period of stress to a deeper level of connection, engagement and heart felt learning. The activities require true communication and engagement with another being - at a level that does not often present itself in traditional training environments(Rosak, 1995). It is not about overcoming fear or building self confidence to jump off a cliff with others.

It is about recognizing the moment of an energetic connection with another being and what that communication moment really means for lasting and effective relationships. The experience of connecting strongly to a horse has been profound for participants. They often inquire about certain horses a year or two after their interaction. They also retell a particular lesson they learned about themselves in the presence of a horse and how the experience has “stuck” with them. The changes and realizations are “persistent” and offer participants reflective insights which resonate for days, weeks, months and even a few years. (Compiled from journal entries and observations from more than 200 participants)

A Lesson On How Others Reflect Your Energy Presence

During one of the sessions at the ranch, Melissa stated that she felt difficulty in others truly understanding her. She mentioned some situations with her parents as well as her co-workers and her fiancé. Melissa managed a busy retail store and was participating in an organizational behavior class. As part of the leadership segment the author inserted the leadership with horses workshop in the curriculum. One of the first activities was for participants to mutually choose a horse to work with through awareness of the exchange of energetic connection and understanding between themselves and the horse. Often, one horse may end up with two to three people out of a group of 10 -15. On this day, Melissa found herself the only person sensing a connection with Rusty. Rusty is a very personal horse and usually ends up with several people who are drawn to work with him during workshops. It was unusual this time that it was just Melissa.

She later stated in her journal,

“I never felt so “mirrored” in terms of another animal and myself in my life. I felt like he was trying to reach out to me but for some reason I didn’t let him all the way in because it was overwhelming to me and I didn’t quite know what to do. I think that he definitely sensed that with me. He sensed my power and confidence a few times and I really did feel the energy between him and me when I had him moving- then there were times when I felt lost in the process and weak and that was when I knew I lost Rusty and his reliance on me as his leader. It's crazy to me how we can overlook so many minor details within our lives that plague and excite us on an ongoing basis, but then in a moment or through mere seconds with a horse, you can have all the clarity in the world as to what plagues or excites you, as they look within your soul and you to theirs. All I have to say is “wow!” I am truly speechless as to the immense freedom this study has brought to my life. It is a feeling like no other than I have ever known.”

Melissa later told the author that the connection with Rusty and the realizations she experienced led her to arrange for a meeting with her parents to talk about some things that had pulled them apart. She also said that she was trying out a different management approach at work and was getting along better with her employees. She also found that she was reducing her alcohol consumption because she wanted to feel more present. She came out for several private sessions with Rusty after the class was over to engage in equine partnered coaching. (taken from notes and conversations with Melissa)

How Does This Type of Educational Development Work?

Equine Partnered Experiences (EPE), Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL), Equine Guided Education (EGE), Equine Assisted Activities (EAA) and Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) are gaining increasing recognition in the field of personal growth and leadership development (Halberg, 2008). Horses are included as partners, considered as emotional sentient beings, in the venture and awareness for facilitating leadership change and learning. Because they do not have a frontal cortex (Grandin, 2005), they are not capable of separating their feelings from their behavior. In fact, they are primarily emotional beings and respond to the stimuli produced by emotional energy which begins in the heart.(McCraty, 2006) Horses do not approach relationships with any agendas, judgments, or preconceived thoughts of how the relationship “should” be. In addition, they are not familiar with concepts such as sacred cows in organizations, they don’t care what gender, race, sexual orientation, economic status, positions you hold or any other social indicators of status or equity. This makes them ideal in providing honest and clear feedback to those who engage in communication with them. It also has been effective at restoring a sense of relationship with nature and natural life cycles- a state that has been considered an important element to the development of the emotional self(Goleman, 2006).

Incorporating participants in a partnered approach with a trained facilitator and willing horses is proving to be a useful and dynamic approach for creating lasting and meaningful leadership changes. It is important to the integrity and outcome that a competent horse person, a competent human relations facilitator, and a horse who has been trained for this work are considered when participating in these types of programs. The potential for transference and counter-transference can occur within the training environment and it is critical that the horse and the human are not harmed and always kept safe mentally, emotionally, spiritually, as well as physically.(Rector, 2005)

Why Do Horses Make the Difference?

There has been a great deal of research and training in the area of leadership development...so you may ask, why horses and why is this different and does it work and will the learnings “stick” or be sustainable? First, it is different because when a human comes face-to-face with a horse, the horse can only work within the boundaries of the present moment and offer a communication environment that is grounded in honesty and truth. Horses are not capable of lying as humans are and thus make excellent partners in the leadership transformation process. (Dorrance,1999) Horses, because of the nature of being prey animals, are masters at reading body language and non-verbal communication. They respond instantly to the true energetic field of the human. The training programs work because the activities with the horses are designed to allow participants to experience the alignment or mis-alignment of the energetic moment in the present and make changes immediately. It is not presented in a way that requires participants to do homework or engage in a thinking activity in some future moment in order to understand what happened. When work is done with the horses, it

is delightfully, or, painfully obvious how effective a person or team is at leading for the safety of each other and the performance of the organization.

Cross Cultural Training with Horse Partnerships

The author taught a course in cross cultural management for ten years. Her evaluations and continuous contact with students would be enough for some to consider her efforts to be successful. However, it was not until she brought her cross cultural management class out for a day of leadership training that she realized how significant the horses were in virtually eliminating boundaries of difference and allowing for a state of complete appreciation, care and support of others, no matter who they were or where they were from (Trompenaars, 1994). One particular class consisted of approximately 20 students who originated from diverse countries such as Kenya, Brazil, Turkey, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Peru, Germany, Sweden, Russia, Tunisia, Mexico, Italy, Egypt, and the USA. The students were asked to participate in several leadership exercises with the horses as a part of a day at the ranch on leadership and culture. It was immediately apparent to the students that the horses didn't care what nationality they originated from or what languages they spoke. They only cared how the students presented themselves to the horses energetically. Did the students stand before them in heart felt appreciation and ready to be effective leaders? The horses just wanted to know if the students had good hearts and if they were good leaders. Many students commented that they had never experienced anything like this in the United States, that it was always them adapting to the American situations or the scenarios presented in classroom discussions. Some of the participants experienced a few tears of joy at the connection they realized with another being and how good it made them feel. They also stated that they felt an intense desire to care for the horse and to be a good leader and aware person.

One Kenyan student, who was destined to return to his home country and become chief of his local tribe- changed his whole demeanor to the class and could not stay away from Shiloh, a big black mustang adopted from the Bureau of Land Management and gentled by the author. The two of them made a powerful connection. He proclaimed a great deal of appreciation for Shiloh's "blackness" and his strength and power as a wild horse (he was gentle now).

The walls between all the cultures came tumbling down that day. The debriefing after the exercise was as raw and exposed as any activity the professor had ever conducted. Many tears were shared between the students as their hearts opened to the horses and to each other. Journals were submitted proclaiming that the "horse experience" was the most profound in all their education in any of their countries. It was the first time they experienced themselves and others with no cultural boundaries only how they interacted with one another from "the heart" and that the heart knows no cultural boundaries. The professor had two sets of parents send her messages from China asking what she had done with their children that had given them so much courage and confidence to continue their studies in the US in such a determined manner. All she

could respond was that it was gift from the interaction with the horses. She had just set up the experience for the students and they took from it what was important to them.

Energetic Awareness in MBA Students

The author included a horses and coherent leadership segment in her leadership and management of change class in the MBA curriculum. During a preliminary activity to prepare the students for coming out to the ranch she worked on their awareness of their energetic fields and how they influenced one another with their presence. (Lipton, 2005) One student from Turkey, Hakan (name changed), had been particularly aggressive during the practice activities and the professor suggested that the student not attend the horse session if he was going to have such aggressive behavior around her horses. He did attend the session, but as a much calmer person. He had had such a strong reaction to the feedback about his energy that he made a tremendous shift to a gentler, more approachable person. This did not go un-noticed with the horses, who willingly engaged in activities with him, and it was apparent from their behavior that mutual appreciation of horse and human occurred between them. In his journal and subsequent discussions with the professor, he later changed from a stressful and unfulfilling job to a challenging and engaging organization and job environment. He also broke up a relationship that had proven dysfunctional for several months. He became more serious about his studies and changed the aggressive angry presence he initially exhibited into someone who was quite pleasant to be around. It almost seemed too fast of a change. The student attributed his renewal to his experience in the class with the horses and realized he could do things a different way. The author relayed the results to colleagues from the clinical psychology department who stated that those kinds of changes would normally take months or years not just a few weeks and were very supportive of the results, confirming that the training with horses was very successful for initiating change.

How Does EPE Help Us Understand Organizational Systems?

As previously stated, horses live in herds and are prey animals. Thus, they depend on their ability to “read” the intention of other animals for their survival. They depend on their ability to relay, or what we often hear as the term “mirror”, this information non-verbally to others in the herd in order to maximize herd survivability. They have a keen ability to sense emotional energy of those around them and respond in a synchronous manner. These instincts allow the horse to be an ideal partner in working with humans to help rediscover the ability to sense the environment and communicate whether there is a “threat” to ourselves and others. It is this ability to discover the energetic field of human interaction that makes this type of work so relevant to good communication and organizational effectiveness. (Kaye-Gehrke, 2006) Horses expect humans to be congruent and coherent while interacting with them. They are quick and instinctual in sensing the emotional field and this helps encourage people to learn how to develop trust, to operate with integrity and fairness, to be clear in communication and intention and to accept how things go without criticism and judgment. These lessons, which horses so generously and patiently teach us, can be solidified at the neuro-cellular level

in our physical selves and be helpful in improving our relationship with ourselves and others.(Church, 2007)

Working From the Heart – Not Just The Head

Lisa (name changed), is a single mother who experienced a difficult divorce. She was a doctoral student in organizational psychology and participated in an experimental doctoral class which the author led, called Chaos to Coherence. Part of the class included group and individual coaching sessions (Goldsmith, 2006) with the horses. When Lisa arrived at the ranch she claimed that she felt tired and sad. One activity involved grooming horses. Oftentimes participants claim that, when grooming the horses, they shift into a higher level of energetic connection with the horses and themselves. The next activity, called gestalt with horses, involved Lisa being in an arena with the horse. There was no specific agenda except to listen and be with the horse. The facilitator is always nearby to insure a safe working environment for both the horse and the human. Lisa had a powerful response to the gestalt activity. These were her words about the experience.

“This experience has truly changed my life. I am a very skeptical person by nature and I am not easily swayed from my personal beliefs. However, the horse coaching experience has changed my personal beliefs about energy and connections between people and animals. It also allowed me to break away at a wall I have built around myself for some time. I really found myself trying to “think” Rusty over to me, which, of course, yielded no results. When Rusty did come over to me I really felt this warmth between us. I really noticed a difference when I was “in my head” and when I wasn’t. The horses responded so much to me when I was experiencing emotion in my heart. I spend a lot of time in my head and it took a lot of focus to remain in my heart. This experience taught me that I can be “big” and energized and powerful and still be liked and effective. It also taught me that the wall I built was truly pushing people (and animals) away from me and almost unsure of how to approach me. (At one point, Rusty, came half way down the arena and stopped as if to say, “Do you want me around or not?) I couldn’t imagine trying to be a leader with people afraid of how to approach me. I also learned that I am so much more effective when I am “in my heart” as far as connections go. The day at the ranch was the most time I have spent in my heart in years. I left feeling so much better and more myself. “

Often, you will hear that horses tend to be mirrors for human emotions and are able to allow us to understand ourselves and make changes in the present. In reality, horses actually assist in demonstrating the consequences of emotion driven behavior - without the support of verbal communication. If a horse does not trust your intentions then it will not be as responsive to your leadership. Their survival depends on the emotional clarity of the herd leader to keep them safe (Strozzi, 2004). For example, if we work with a horse when we feel angry, frustrated or depressed, the horse does not necessarily become angry, frustrated or depressed. However, they respond to the energy of frustration, anger, depression- they respond to the emotions we generate, Humans may experience the same emotional response but they have been socialized to censor a visible response. When humans “fake” happiness, confidence, support then this only serves to deny or misread the congruence of how others may actually feel or want to react to the emotional energy presence. Lisa learned this when she had her coaching experience with Rusty. He did not know what to do when she sent confusing messages

about her leadership. This makes a horse feel unsafe and it does not want to be with the being who is making it unsafe- in natural environments they could get killed in such circumstances- so their instincts prevail when a human behaves or sends confusing messages to them.

The social pressures of our society have taught humans this learned “fake” behavior. And, as the top predators in the food chain there has not been any incentive to rewire this “dishonest” behavior. The horse senses, very quickly, a human’s frustration, anger, confusion and they may do three things.

- 1) try to leave the situation by running away
- 2) freeze and not be responsive to any requests or interactions from the human source of the confusion, or
- 3) they may become aggressive towards the source or others nearby.

This is not unlike situations which we find in most organizational environments today. The energy of the emotion is something horses sense very quickly and respond to. If they do not sense you as a congruent leader, they will not look to you for leadership or safety. By observing ourselves in relationship with horses and becoming aware of their reaction to our emotional energy, this then becomes a learning opportunity for making changes in how we authentically manage our emotions and our ability to lead in relation to self and others. (McCormick, 1997)

Energetically Leading an Effective Team

During one of the author’s corporate programs the organization had requested team building activities with the horses. To help the group understand energetic connection- the group was asked to form a large circle and stand at least 5 - 10 feet away from one another. One of the team leaders came into the center of the circle to direct the exercise which was to ask a horse to move from person to person around the circle in one direction then to turn and go back the other way. The team was not allowed to touch the horse or move it out of a walk or get it upset. They were sure this would be a simple activity. After all, they had already worked with this horse and they thought he liked them. They started out very confident- appointed the organization’s president as the team leader. The horse, Storm, started in the circle with the team and appeared engaged with the group. Then, as the group became more competitive and interrupted the team leaders directions by yelling at each other Storm started acting worried. One person thought that the horse liked them so much that he could lead the horse from person to person himself. He proclaimed himself the savior of the activity. When this happened, the leader quit her role as the leader of the activity. Storm stopped and wouldn’t move with the newly self-appointed individual. - To get Storm moving many of the team members started waving hands. This caused the energy level to escalate so much that the horse ran off to the other side of the arena. It became apparent to the team that the energetic connection was being sacrificed for the sake of trying to get the task done. They initially blamed the horse and thought Storm was not cooperating with their directions. However, the horse WAS doing what they wanted it to do since it was responded to their energetic communication of frantic, take over, blame, and frustration (Mills, 2005). The debrief was powerful when they discussed that this is exactly how

they conduct their teamwork back at the office. It was a very sobering experience for them. A few weeks later they asked if they could come out to the ranch and do the activity again. This time they were calmer, they focused on the energy and how the horse was responding. They were more successful this time and had told the author how much they had been working on recognizing and being aware of the energetic connection of how they all worked together. The president of the company expressed to the author that, "energy" wasn't something they had paid attention to. After the horses and teamwork sessions it had become more "visible" and apparent to them. Back at the office they started a new behavior of recognizing and monitoring the level of energy among each other and indicating to one another whether it was contributing to more or less motivation to cooperate. They stated that this process had created a very significant culture change in their organization. As indicated, the next time they came for a session, the effort and outcome was more successful.

The company president commented:

"If a human approaches the horse with an agenda and goal and not from a position of openness and awareness then it is unlikely that results will be attained or fulfilling. However, when the human tunes in to the energetic field of others and responds appropriately then more often than not it leads to successful communication and leadership."

Quantitative Research Supporting the Benefits of Horse-Human Interaction

The author found very little quantitative evidence to support all the anecdotal writing claiming the benefits of horses and humans working together. She recently began a research project to quantitatively measure the emotional bond between horses and humans (Kaye Gehrke, 2007) Using heart rate variability as a marker, a team of researchers is setting out to measure the emotional connection between horses and humans (Mistral, 2007). The horse's heart is 4-5 times larger than the human heart and capable of sensing a magnetic field via its heart much stronger than we as humans (McCraty, 2006)(Becker,2004). The initial results are supporting the hypothesis that when humans are in emotional states of presence then the connection between them and the horse begins showing similar rhythms to the humans. The research is currently undergoing further rigor- yet, it does provide some initial support to the suggestion that it "feels good" to us when humans experience heartfelt energetic connections between ourselves and a horse. It is a beginning to demonstrate quantitatively -what this paper has qualitatively suggested -that this type of leadership development can be stress reducing, and contribute to more authentic and effective leadership.

Conclusion

There is very little published research regarding this emerging field of training and coaching in partnership with horses (Kaye Gehrke, 2008). Most of the literature is directed at psychotherapeutic interventions which are much different than the work described in this paper. (EFMHA summary of research, 2006) Horses are powerful archetypes and they evoke intense emotions among training participants. However, in leadership training the facilitators do not engage in psychological analysis. The

guidance is based on principles about working in the present moment, and becoming aware of the impact of one's energy on another being- in this case a horse - who provides honest feedback. The horses prove to be effective living biofeedback beings! Unlike other training programs where a participant may need to go away to work on things they learned about themselves, horses allow people to make immediate and lasting changes. This aligns with the emerging neuropathway research suggesting that present moment experiences can lead to permanent cognitive and emotional changes in the human.(Church, 2007) As natural horsemanship trainers have known for a long time, horses are not judgmental.(Rashid, 2005) If a person is angry, fearful or unaware of their impact on others then they can learn, with the help of horses, to master tools or resources to change their neurological and energetic state. When this happens horses immediately respond to the human change in a positive manner- without “judging that the human was different a few minutes ago or last week”. This ability to make a positive change and rewire or anchor a more positive emotional state as the event occurs is the primary reason why this work with horses is so powerful for helping to improve individual leadership ability, group and/or organizational effectiveness.(Hunt, 1987) Plus, it is fun and memorable. Horses enjoy the companionship of humans and respond with love and appreciation to honesty, sincerity and care. They will try to please a human who offers positive consistent heartfelt leadership. Offering leadership training with horses that involves carefully designed activities,well-trained horses, an open working environment and a team of skilled and educated facilitators then this type of leadership training supports the hypothesis that horses can serve as honest biofeedback beings for improving leadership and relationships in organizations.

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