

Learning corporate training from horses

By CHRISTINE POHLKAMP, Special to the Compass

Corporate training, team building and horses, what is the link? If you have ever been at work or at home and wished you knew more about the business of managing people, but did not wish to learn about it in the traditional sense, then the link is established.

There is now a growing movement in which horses help smooth corporate and personal life.

The daily challenges of communicating with peers and management, with direct reports and with family members can cause many people to seek out help. The equ.a.l. (equine alternative learning) workshop run by Nova Training and Consulting of Rockwood, offers this help.

The business was established in 1989 and began the equine aspect of our services two years ago.

We had been presenting management training in the traditional way, and I realized that people like to be challenged and this stretches their ability to learn. By placing participants in an unfamiliar situation, the person actually opens up their thinking process and this allows for the challenge.

I am also a horse owner and find that the horses are always teaching me something about myself. So, I thought to incorporate these teachings into a programme.

The company is more than just a management training company. Participants are immersed in the theories of management interactions, the art of communication and the skills of team building in a totally different and innovative method.

An example of a goal setting exercise used in the program has two participants saddle a horse. Together the team writes the goal, then working together they carry out the steps to complete the goal obtaining feedback along the way. This exercise inevitably is more challenging than it first may seem.

The exercise and the discussions usually highlight inadequacies in the goal writing and execution process. The participants learn the horse is a behavioural animal. Humans are behavioural as well. We just need to open up our senses to read the behaviours of others. The horse helps teach that process.

I have been a horse owner for many years and in the summer months have worked as a wrangler and trail hand for local outfitters. I also teach basic western riding lessons and when working with my pupils I find that people really

bond with their horses.

Horses are so behavioural that they can be "read" if you know what to look for. As managers, or as team members, the interactions of others should also be "read" except we tend to label the behaviour with a word.

An example is a person who works very hard on a project and then is called highly motivated. If the person wanted to repeat the behaviour, they would not know what they had done well, all they would know is that someone thought they were highly motivated.

In the corporate world our behaviours cause others to act a certain way. Simply stated, behaviours breed behaviours. In the corporate and team programs, the horses are in tune with the groups. This has been observed many times over the centuries when a horse "mirrors" the behaviours of its rider. An anxious rider will create an anxious horse, and the horse can be calmed with a calm rider. The behaviours have been mirrored. At work, we do the same.

When the participant discovers that behaviours need to be communicated properly to be repeated, that delegation is not just telling someone to go and do something,

and that teams can come together and produce just about anything that is asked of them, given enough encouragement, it's like a lightbulb goes on and it's very rewarding.

The laughter and fun that people have when working with horses is also very rewarding, and who can resist being out doors on a beautiful day while learning a new skill?

There are two types of workshops; the first is dedicated to management, team leaders and supervisors, giving them the skills to excel in their jobs.

The second type of workshop is about team building. This is open to existing teams, or just individuals who want a day or two to learn about teams and communication. These workshops are held at Whinný Acres in Moffat and at Camp Encore in Belwood.

We also offer executive retreats in Alberta and Utah, providing an adventure built on team activities. To find out more about this wonderful way of learning please visit the site of www.trainwithnova.com or call Chris Pohlkamp at 519-856-2528.

Christine Pohlkamp is the founder of Nova Training and Consulting and focusses training professionals from across the country.

Sunday Afternoon Walks

The Arboretum at the University of Guelph is again offering a series of Sunday Afternoon Walks from 2 to 3 p.m. Enjoy time with family and friends experiencing the wonders of nature. Meet at the J.C. Taylor Nature Centre at 2 p.m., and bring binoculars if you have them. The walks are free, with a suggested donation of \$3 per person. For more information call 519-824-4120, ext.2113.

August 4: Summer Discovery

A journey along winding trails to discover the Arboretum's natural and cultural history.

August 11: Tree Folklore

A new perspective on trees - listen carefully as they tell the stories of their ancestors.

August 18: Field Notes and Sketching

Learn first hand how to take notes in the field and the value of a drawing.

August 25: Summer Wildflowers

Smell the late bloomers found in the Arboretum on a leisurely stroll.



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