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FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HORSE ASSISTED  
LEARNING PROGRAMMES....



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## LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE



# Horses for courses: training with a difference

Effective leadership often comes from within, but sometimes it takes a horse to tell you that. Confused? Don't be – horse-assisted learning is a great way to tap into your inner management style, as **Maxine Perella** finds out

**W**hen primitive man first drew horses in caves, it marked the start of a spiritual connection between human and equine which has thrived for thousands of years since. Throughout history we have forged a formidable partnership with these beasts, through war and labour, and because of this the horse represents something quite magical to us on a very primeval level.

The deep bond we share with these animals makes them a natural choice when it comes to self-development and exploring our leadership style on a more intuitive level. Horse-assisted learning (HAL), or equine-guided facilitation as it is otherwise known, is a relatively new management training technique founded by Gerhard Krebs in Germany. It has since extended across Europe and the US, and is now offered here in the UK.

Whereas conventional management training techniques are often based on textbook theory, HAL takes you out of that classroom comfort zone and puts you up close and personal with a horse. Whether or not you feel you have a natural affinity with horses doesn't matter – the horse is there to teach you about yourself through how you communicate with it.

To learn more about this intriguing approach, I attended a HAL taster day last month at a small farm near Hitchin, Hertfordshire. The workshops are run by three women – two qualified HAL trainers Madeleine Moore and

Jackie Davis, and Annie Larner who owns the farm and has a keen interest in natural horsemanship.

The structure of the day was quite intimate. Guided by the trainers, myself and three others worked with two horses on a series of practical exercises in an outside barn. There is no riding involved, it is about instructing the horse to perform various tasks centred on leadership, trust and team building. Interaction with the animals is based predominantly on non-verbal behaviour. It is not so much what you say, but how you tune into a horse's space – they are highly intelligent and intuitive and can sense if you feel comfortable and confident around them.

### Honest judgement

"Horses are honest creatures, they will pick up on what we are feeling and feed that back to us," says Jackie Davis. "If we project our own fears and anxieties onto a horse, they will mirror that – you can't hide your inner emotions from a horse. They will judge you as you are, in that moment."



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Horseplay: Maxine Perella and other delegates learn how to interact with the animals (opposite) and the group discuss their findings – and feelings (below)

Of course this can be quite disconcerting, especially if you hold out your hand to greet a horse and it turns its head away from you. You might feel upset or rejected – you might feel the horse has a problem with you. But it's often the other way round; you have to learn to challenge your own preconceptions and deal with any negative emotions. Put simply – you have to find a way to change your behaviour and learn how to get along with the horse.

The ingredients needed – trust, mutual respect, listening, observing, clear body language – are the same skills required for managers and teams to work effectively together in the workplace. In an office environment however, people can often put on a front to mask their true feelings. In a barn with a horse, you can't. You soon know whether a horse wants to work with you or not and because of this, results are instant.

Most of the exercises we did with the two horses – Lady, a 22-year-old mare and Jigsaw, a 23-year-old gelding – involved getting them to walk round a series of obstacles, either one-on-one, in pairs or as a team. This isn't as simple as it sounds. We were allowed to lead the horses at liberty or by a soft

rope bridle, but with no force or aggression. If they didn't wish to follow, or wanted to walk off in a different direction, we had to figure out how to handle that on the spot and change our management style accordingly.

### Keep it flexible

As horses are herd animals there is a natural hierarchy. Of the two we worked with, Jigsaw initially appeared more compliant. We later found out that Lady is a lead mare, the queen of the herd. Being a natural leader herself, she doesn't suffer fools gladly and if you are at all hesitant or indecisive with your instruction, she won't play ball. Be clear and confident and she falls into line. Like people, horses have very different personalities and you need to be flexible and adapt according to their character.

Observation is also a key part of the day. As well as being hands-on with the horses, we were also encouraged to watch each other interacting with them to see what leadership styles worked and what didn't. This proved invaluable as effectively the group ends up teaching each other in a very tangible way. The final exercise we did as a team, drawing on our individual

**“You can't hide your inner emotions from a horse. They will judge you as you are, in that moment”**

strengths and skills which came to the surface during our time spent together.

Ultimately horse-assisted training is a journey of self discovery. To improve your relationships with others you must first look inside and improve yourself. It doesn't over-complicate, over-analyse or bombard you with management-style jargon. In a highly practical environment, the horse strips all that away, leaving you to tap into your own instincts to find the best way forward – one that suits you both.

There is a saying that goes 'horses lend us the wings we lack'. At the end of the day I left with a real sense of pride yet deeply reflective, humbled even. I felt that I had really accomplished something, not just how to handle a horse when presented with a particular task or challenge, but how to handle myself.

*Maxine Perella is editor of LAWR*

## Let horses lend a helping hand

### Madeleine Moore, managing director of Workscales

Now more than ever the public sector is in need of strong leadership to meet the challenges of restructuring and cut-backs. Unfortunately, in my experience as a training professional, high levels of stress, low levels of self esteem and lack of staff motivation are all too common. To compound matters, this is often not being acknowledged and dealt with by senior management. So how can a workforce that isn't performing well be expected to rise to this challenge? Horse-assisted learning (HAL) bespoke workshops are designed to address these issues. Instead of traditional management training and feedback, Workscales offers a fresh approach. We formulate tailored exercises and workshops with horses that challenge the leadership skills of managers and their teams and help them recognise the strengths in any organisation. As this training only takes two to three days, instead of several weeks, it is very cost-effective.



When working with horses, we become part of their herd and need to gain their respect. Those who get the best results must show continuous clear leadership. The same kind of understandings are equally important among humans in the workplace. This method of learning is ideal for managers in a public sector environment as it encourages greater transparency. Working with local authority clients, where senior managers engage with their teams, there can be improvements in efficiency, team morale and reduced levels of absenteeism.

HAL helps staff at all levels by improving leadership skills, promoting team building and lowering stress levels.

Workscales will be running a series of HAL taster days and bespoke programmes throughout 2011 at our training facility in Hertfordshire.

*Madeleine Moore is a qualified member of the European Association of Horse Assisted Education [www.workscales.co.uk](http://www.workscales.co.uk)*

“ I found the course to be entertaining, professional, relaxed, interesting and very thought provoking. I would recommend this course to a number of managers who are looking to improve their leadership methods and understand how to get staff and colleagues to ‘buy in’ to your methods and goals...

The experience was powerful. I felt fully involved with the day and enjoyed the initial unknown and then the unfolding of the learning experience”

**Tom Hedges – General Manager, Sentry GroundCare**

“ I really enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere; the immediate feedback from the horses was very worthwhile. Sometimes it is good to let someone else lead and I benefited from the importance of non-verbal communication. It was a really enjoyable and useful workshop”

**Alison Penfold – Financial Controller, McMullen & Sons Brewery**

“ I really enjoyed connecting with the horses and learning about myself in the process. I learnt that animals make us all equal, regardless of our individual sense of worth or societal status. That is a very liberating and humbling feeling. The experience was invigorating!”

**Maxine Perella – Chief Editor, LAWR Magazine**

“ I enjoyed being able to feel confident and just go for it when doing something different. I saw how to look at things differently. The day was very enjoyable.”

**Rosie Norbury – Child Development Worker, Hertfordshire**

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### Find out how HAL can help your organisation...

Contact Madeleine Moore at Workscapes Limited now on **0845 638 1330** for more information and booking details

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Workscapes Limited is a member of European Association of Horse Assisted Education.