

Peopleship – How Horsemanship can Enlighten our
Relationships with Employees and Employers
© Seth B. Burgess

As a prey animal and herbivore, a horse's primary concern is not finding the next meal, it is to avoid **being** the next meal. In the wild environment where horses evolved, food was generally abundant, or a horse could easily relocate to where food could be found. However, avoiding being eaten in the meantime was a serious concern. To avoid being eaten, a horse in the wild had to be instantly aware when a predator was in the area and be able to read the predator's intentions from a distance. The ability to quickly and accurately read the intentions of a lion might mean the difference between life and death for a horse. If a horse decided that they were quite likely to become the lion's next meal, they could also go into immediate action to avoid, frustrate, and confuse the predator. Horses are "hard wired" with this ability. In a modern horse farm environment, the likelihood of becoming the next meal has largely been eliminated, but horses still think and react in accordance with their nature.

Predators like lions, on the other hand, have no such need to read the intentions and emotions of their prey. But, their food is not as readily available and as easily subdued as grass and plants. Predators are hard wired for hunting down and eating their prey, regardless of how their prey feels about the agenda. This highly focused and single minded agenda makes it relatively easy for horses to confuse and frustrate predators. Anyone who has trained horses is likely to admit that horses have a highly developed ability to read, avoid, confuse, and outwit their trainer.

Horses recognize that there is safety in numbers. It is very rare to find horses who don't get along with other horses. When a new horse enters the herd, there is an adjustment period while the dominance order is established. Once horses determine their position in the herd, their apparent strife ends, and they band together for a common purpose; to avoid being eaten.

People are basically predators. Finding and securing food is a high priority human concern. To meet our survival needs, we have a hard wired tendency to develop a plan for success. Once we have a plan, we focus intensely on bringing it about. This kind of linear thinking applies to most everything we do, not just to supplying our basic needs. Sometimes our plans are hidden, even from ourselves. Old emotional wounds can influence our behavior for years without us being aware. We also have trouble banding together for a common purpose. Our plans frequently conflict with the plans of others. We commonly hide our emotions and real intentions, even sometimes from ourselves. Is it any wonder that training horses is so relatively difficult for us? We try to impose our hard wired plan on the horse and the horse is hard wired to avoid, confuse, and frustrate us.

Modern horsemanship is evolving to recognize these dynamics more and more. While it is possible to impose a training agenda on a horse through fear and intimidation, many

trainers have decided that better results can be obtained by learning to band together with a horse for a common purpose.

When employers hire help or career professionals search for a job, they are most successful when they also band together with other people for a common purpose. The common purpose is the success of a business while providing for the survival needs of the humans the business supports.

After 20 years of serving employers and job seekers in the horse industry five days a week, I have seen the best made plans in the employment relationship turn ugly over and over again. Usually, when the employer/employee relationship fails, it does so because people are trying to merge incompatible predatory agendas. Sometimes it seems to me like the employer and employee are almost trying to consume or “eat” each other. The employer tries to get the employee to bend or give in to their agenda for performing tasks, and the employee tries to get the employer to bend or give in to their agenda for building a career. When you add the fact that many people, employers and employees alike are not fully in touch with the emotions and intentions that are driving their agendas, is it any wonder that so many employer/employee relationships run into bumps in the road?

Horses can teach us two things. (1) How to read and be in touch with our feelings and intentions, and (2) how to band together for a common purpose. To build a successful employer/employee relationship, we must understand what motivates us. It is not enough to be aware of the tasks that need to be done. We must be in touch with the most basic emotions that drive us and how they are helping or hindering our goals. Like the horse, we must learn to read emotions and intentions quickly and clearly, both ours and those of the people we encounter. As we develop this ability, we will see the need to relax the death grip we have on our agendas. If we are to genuinely band together for a common purpose, we will need to seek common ground with the members of our herd, regardless of our position in the herd. Will there be a dominance order; yes of course. However, the dominance order should never be so strong that it threatens the integrity of the herd. And, once the dominance order is established, we must recognize that we are free to band together and achieve our common goals.

If you found this article helpful and would like to read more about how horses can enlighten employer/employee relationships, click the link below and send us a message to tell us.

http://www.equimax.com/eq_howcont.htm