

Communicating with Horses continues...

We can learn a great deal about ourselves and what constitute effective leadership skills by watching herds of horses in the wild. The herd has much in common with a human tribe or other community.

A horse is a herd animal. The herd consists of an alpha male, an alpha female, a "harem" of mares and a number of colts (1-4 year olds?). The herd is a living system whereby each horse has an important role within the whole. It is to the advantage of the herd that each horse play its role for the survival of the rest. For this reason, there are fewer challenges for the leadership of the herd than is commonly thought.

The role of the alpha male is for the safety of the whole. His attention is on the outside world looking for predators, etc. When danger lurks, his body language places the rest of the herd on alert. His body language indicates his intention for their safety: in which direction to flee. He will remain to ward off the enemy until the rest of the herd is in safety. The attention of the alpha male is not on the herd, but on the outside world. He does not look at the herd to see whether his authority is being challenged, it is generally not to the advantage for the herd to challenge him. (since he is there to protect them). The attention of the whole herd is always on the alpha male for their own safety depends on it.

The alpha mare is responsible for feeding grounds and to see that all members are taken care of. She will lead the herd when danger lurks following the intention indicated by the alpha male's body language.

The alpha male and female are each directed at their own domain. That of the male on the outside world. That of the female on the herd as a whole. They do not look for fights with other members of the herd. That indicates weakness. When challenges from within by growing males, their actions are quick and decisive if danger lurks from within or outside of the herd.

A foal walks next to the mother around where her shoulder is. If we as humans do this, we are indicating that we are less in status than the horse. The mother leads the foal by showing a clear intention of the direction to run in. There is no force used, just intention and the knowledge that strength and survival lies in co-operation.

At all levels of the herd, fighting is self-defeating. It awakens aggression, resistance, anger and resistance. If a member of the herd is cowed into obedience, then the whole herd loses the strength that comes when the full strength of its members are directed at their role in the whole. A herd of cowed horses places all the onus of survival with the alpha male and female. In a herd where each horse voluntarily (for the sake of survival) is allowed to fully play its own role in the whole and is respected in that role, the herd consists of tremendous strength that can survive against huge odds.

As in a herd of horses, many of the same rules count. Someone, who is always looking to those s/he supervises for trouble, gives the signal that s/he is afraid and weak. While the leader will look to the whole of a problem, draw on the strengths of each member of the group and create a team spirit in which each member will come into her or his own. Leadership will avoid using force, it will be by clarifying and strengthening the intention of the group to move toward the common goal.

Action is by invitation, so that members of a team move of their own free will, each investing her or his full capacity in the venture. The leader looks at the whole and where

they are going instead of fixating on the personalities of the individual members and possible challenges of her/his authority.

This approach was designed by Pieter Baalbergen. It is an all-win approach.

The horses benefit, because they are approached with appreciation for their full ability and given an opportunity to act out of their own free will and in the way will most promote co-operation with their rider. People benefit, because they benefit from the full wisdom, co-operation, affection and strengths of their horses. And both humanity and the horse and animal species benefit because co-operation, understanding, appreciation and love is fostered for both species.

The work of Equi Libre, Terra Natura, v. Dedemarke 14, 8016 BR Zwolle. Info@terra-natura.nl

The Netherlands: Yvonne Bijleveld +31(0)6 2057 2220. Belgium: Jesse Stubbe +32 (0)486 459 385

Equilibre@tiscalimail.nl, Web site www.terra-natura.nl