



CREATIVE GROUND WORK ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

What We'll Cover

- The broader social and cultural context that makes the case for holistic approaches and points to resources for creative groundwork.
- Programming which actively works with the whole horse and the whole person: body, mind, spirit. Specific activities.
- Unique considerations in development & care of the horses for this approach. Program design elements.
- Volunteer and staff training implications of this approach.

Come Alive

What inspires you?



Don't ask what the world needs.
Ask what makes you come alive and go do it.
Because what the world needs is people
who have come alive.

Howard Thurman

Beginner's Mind

The richness of the present-moment experience is the richness of life itself. Too often, we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we “know” prevent us from seeing things as they really are. We tend to take the ordinary for granted and fail to grasp the extraordinariness of the ordinary. To see the richness of the present moment we need to cultivate what has been called “beginner’s mind,” a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time. ...An open, “beginner’s” mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise, which often thinks it knows more than it does. No moment is the same as any other. Each is unique and contains possibilities. Beginner’s mind reminds us of this simple truth.

Passage from: Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D.

Foundations:

The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness

In 2012, a prominent international group of cognitive neuroscientists, neuropharmacologists, neurophysiologists, neuroanatomists and computational neuroscientists gathered to reassess the neurobiological substrates of conscious experience and related behaviors in human and non-human animals.

Their conclusion:

“Nonhuman animals
possess consciousness”



Foundations:

We share emotional states

Temple Grandin draws on Jaak Pansepp's work in describing how an appreciation of the primal emotions that we share with our horses can improve our relationships and care for them:

- Play
- Panic/Grief
- Fear
- Rage
- Seeking
- Lust
- Care

Our Context:

Sentient Beings



Equines are **sentient beings** who can be **active facilitators**, and function as partners in sessions. Therefore, all sessions are **mutually beneficial** for horses and humans. We strive to **model respectful and dynamic relationships**: no teasing, scaring, manipulation or use as tools. We strive for care and management which honors their sentience and their willingness to be in community with us.

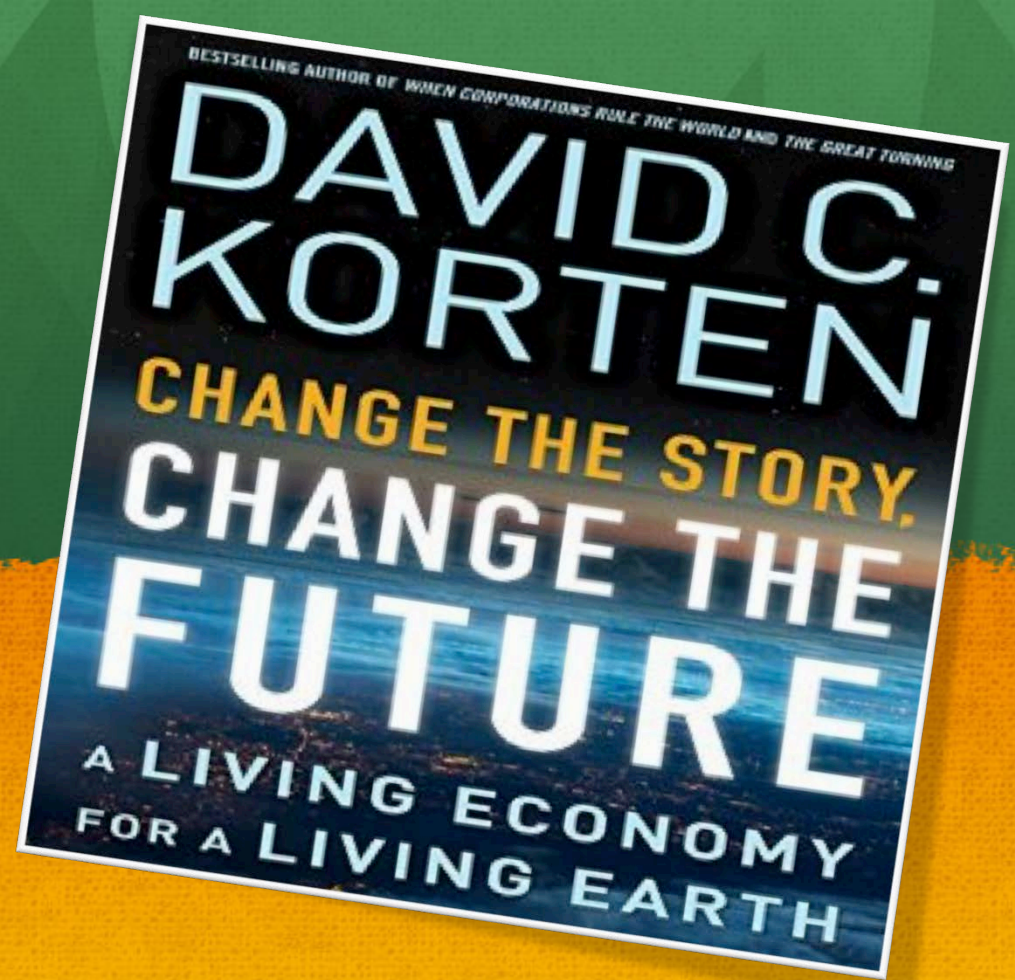
**If its not good for both the horses and the people,
then it's not good for either one.**

Enlivening
everyone:



Participants
Volunteers
Horses
Staff

Our Context:
The Big
Picture



We humans live by stories, and the stories that now govern our society set us on a path to certain self-destruction: the Sacred Money & Markets Story.



Current story:

The Sacred Money & Markets Story

Money is the measure of all worth and the source of all happiness.

Earth is simply a source of raw materials. Inequality and environmental destruction are unfortunate but unavoidable.



New story:

The Sacred Life and Living Earth Story

We are living beings born of a living Earth, itself born of a living universe. A connection to nature and community is essential to our physical and mental health and well-being.



The critical elements of this Sacred Life
and Living Earth story live in the human heart.

It must become our shared public story.

Horse have assisted mankind for ages. As a result, they claim a powerful place in the human imagination which can be tapped for transformational change vital to our times.



Professionalism

- Stay within your own realm of expertise / scope of practice.
- Mounted activities require that a certified TRI be present.
- Work in partnership:
 - Horse
 - Therapist
 - Coach
 - Educator
 - TRI
 - Equine Specialist
- Therapists/coaches/other credentialed professionals add other dimensions.
- Certified Equine Specialist required for sessions with psychotherapists.

Be familiar with larger issues: relevant sections of
PATH Intl Standards for Certification and Accreditation Manual

Professional Implications

- **FIRST**, develop and maintain collaborative relationships between your horses and all the people working with them.
- **SECOND**, develop effective, creative, ethical activities that teach qualities like leadership, partnership, responsibility, trust, empathy and compassion. Horsemanship skills serve these goals rather than being the goal themselves.
- **THIRD**, constantly assess what you've done before and the work of others in this field and tweak for ethics and creativity.
- **FOURTH**, commit to a path with your horses for personal development.

PS: We are on the verge of a tremendous evolutionary frontier in our world of equine assisted activities and therapies.

Keys to Creative Approaches

- Hold with wholistic values for everyone: body, mind, spirit.
- Study other disciplines that interest you and weave them in.
- Collaborate with you and horses as sentient beings.
- Gather/experience the work of others and tweak it for professionalism, ethics, values.

#1 Developing and maintaining horse/human relationships

Develop collaborative ways of working with your horses that are heart and relationship-centered, with performance and obedience as secondary goals.

Shift from human-centric perspectives to horse-centric perspectives and the dynamics between the two perspectives.

Liberty work for willingness, trust, interaction, understanding, respect



7 Waterhole Rituals

-Carolyn Resnick

- **Sharing territory:** bonding, acceptance
- **Mutual greeting:** trust
- **Taking territory:** leadership, respect
- **Eye contact:** focus, responsibility
- **Leading from behind:** willingness, work ethic
- **Companion walking:** magnetic connection
- **Go trot / come back:** playfulness, leadership, consistency

21 Step Checklist

-The Horse Leads the Way, Honoring the Horse's True Role in Equine Facilitated Practice , Angela Dunning

- The horse has clearly indicated that he/she is happy to undertake equine facilitated practice.
- The horse is regarded as a **sentient being** in his/ her own right.
- You seek to provide a service in **equal partnership with your horse**, offering an inter-species modality for the benefit of your clients and enjoyment of your horses.
- **The horse has a choice about working or not** on any particular day, and also which client/ s or not to work with as far as possible.
- The **horse has a voice**, and it is listened to.
- The horse is kept well, **healthy and fit** enough to do this work, otherwise he/ she has time off.
- The horse lives out **in a herd** with sufficient access to company, shelter, food and water.

21 Step Checklist, continued

-The Horse Leads the Way, Honoring the Horse's True Role in Equine Facilitated Practice , Angela Dunning

- The horse's lifestyle is balanced with **regular breaks**, time off and opportunities to engage in other activities that he/ she enjoys.
- You work towards removing all forms of **control and dominance** in your relationships with your horses, including techniques and equipment and in your relationship approach.
- The horse's physical, emotional and spiritual **boundaries are respected** at all times.
- **You trust your horse** to carry out his/her role and do not interfere with his/her suggestions, feedback or actions unless **safety** become the priority.
- You **pay attention** to your horse's feedback at all times and strive not to ignore or override it.
- You carefully manage the ratio of number of people to each horse, to **avoid overwhelming, pressuring or frightening the horse**.
- You manage **your own boundaries and avoid projecting your needs** onto the horse.

21 Step Checklist, continued

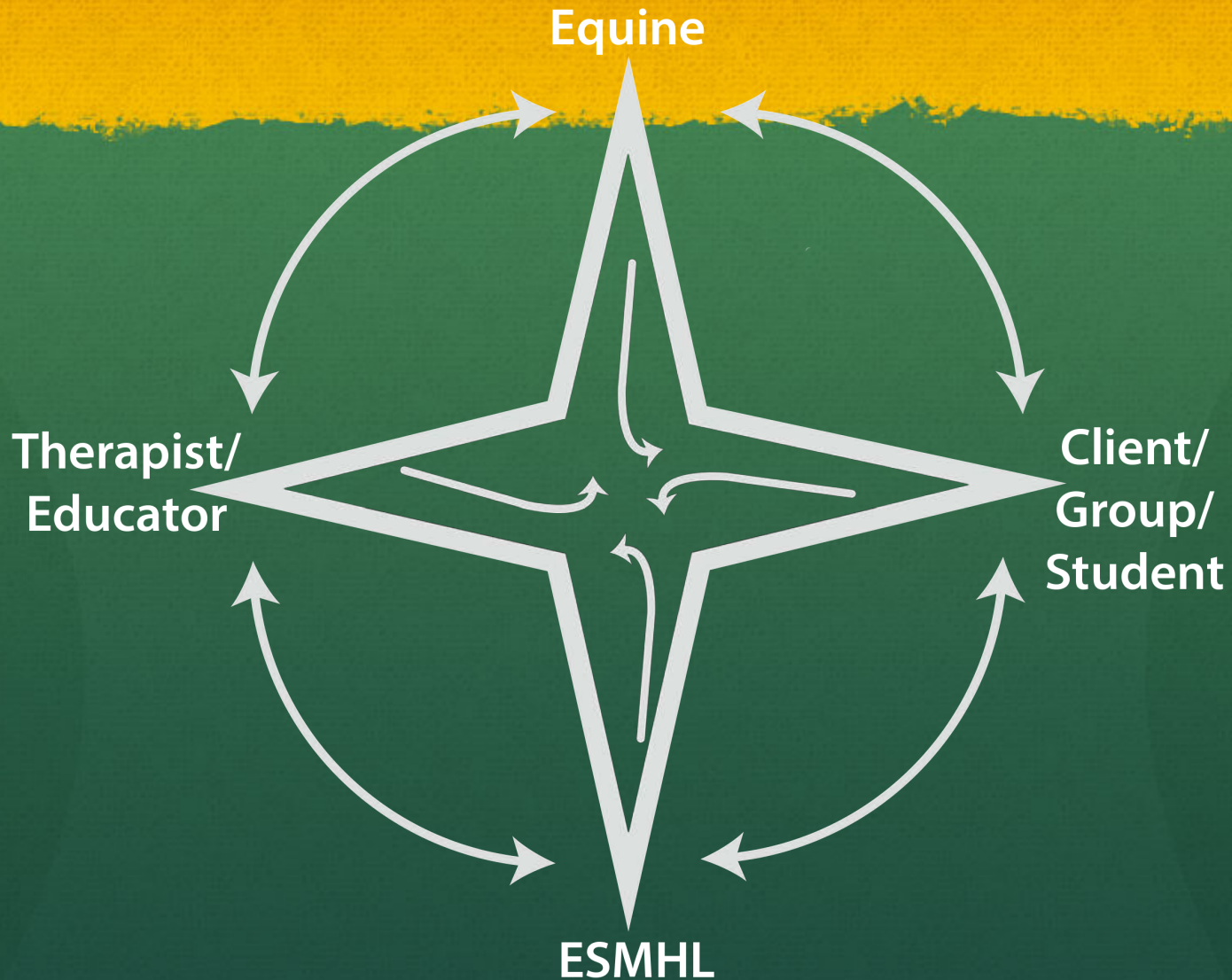
-The Horse Leads the Way, Honoring the Horse's True Role in Equine Facilitated Practice , Angela Dunning

- You **turn your horse out** as soon as the session with the horse is finished.
- You hold the “**sacred space of possibility**” and teach all your group participants how to do this in order to ensure a calm, mindful environment for the horse to work in.
- You adopt a **flexible approach**, non-reliant on agendas and you keep your False Self in check.
- You are willing to be humble and **defer to your equine partner's suggestions** and lead.
- You are **connected to your body, emotions and energy** at all times to ensure congruency when working with your horse and adopt a mindful approach.
- **Your work focuses on relationship** with the horse at all times and this takes priority over task completion or outcomes and is not outweighed by benefits to clients.
- You support your horse's well being through a blend of veterinary care and holistic management using **appropriate complementary therapies** to maintain his/her health and balance.

#2 Develop effective, creative, ethical activities

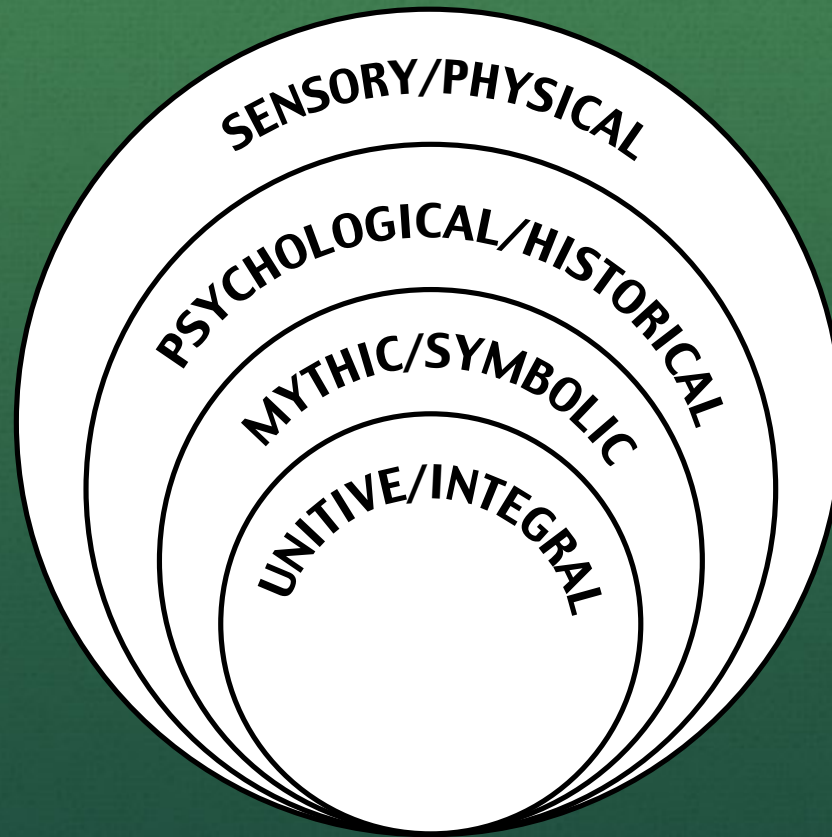
- Develop activities that teach qualities like leadership, partnership, responsibility, trust, empathy and compassion within the context of teaching horse/human relationship and horsemanship skills.
- Open the creative portals for designing activities that are safe and effective for meeting client goals, utilizing the diamond model and ethical relationships with horses.

Diamond Model



What comes from each impacts the other.

Work with the Whole Person/Whole Horse: Tend to Depth Issues



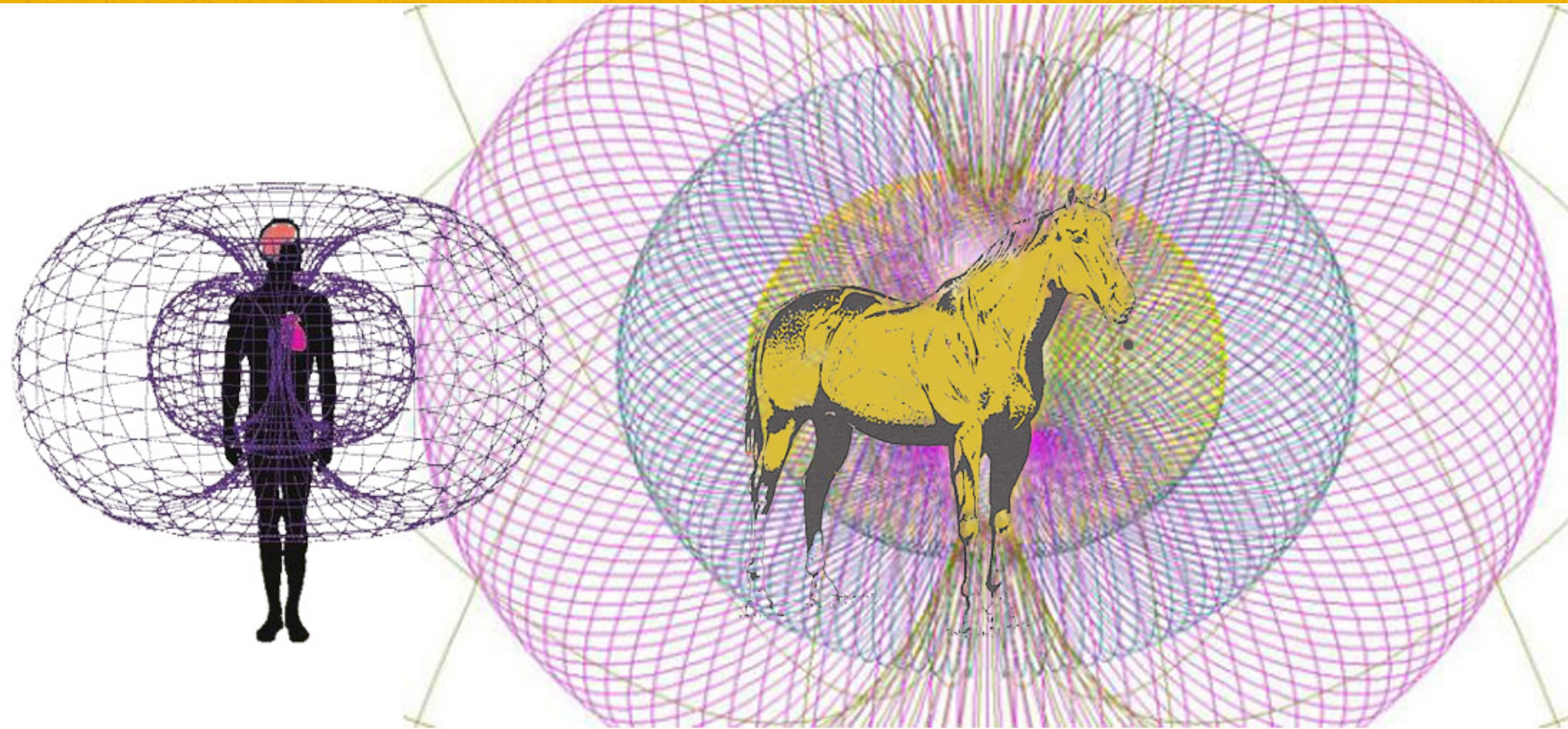
The Four Levels of the Psyche

Explore the things that horses teach us

- Heightened sensing of our environment / energetics
- Return to calm – emotional resilience / modulating our energy
- Herd dynamics – the power of community
- Congruence/truth telling vs incongruence – ego vs. heart discernment, true vs false self
- Archetypal companionship – accessing our mythic lives
- Living from large heartedness – shift in consciousness
- Increase our literacy with body language – expressing ourselves with our whole bodies, head, heart, gut.

The Energy Field of the Horse

Institute of Heart Math Research



Heart Field - Human: 15 feet Horse: 60 feet
Coherent heart rhythm

4 Aspects of Working from the Heart Center



To take on the big tasks and be sustained, we must have a strong connection to the heartfelt things in life:

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

COMPASSION

INNATE HARMONY

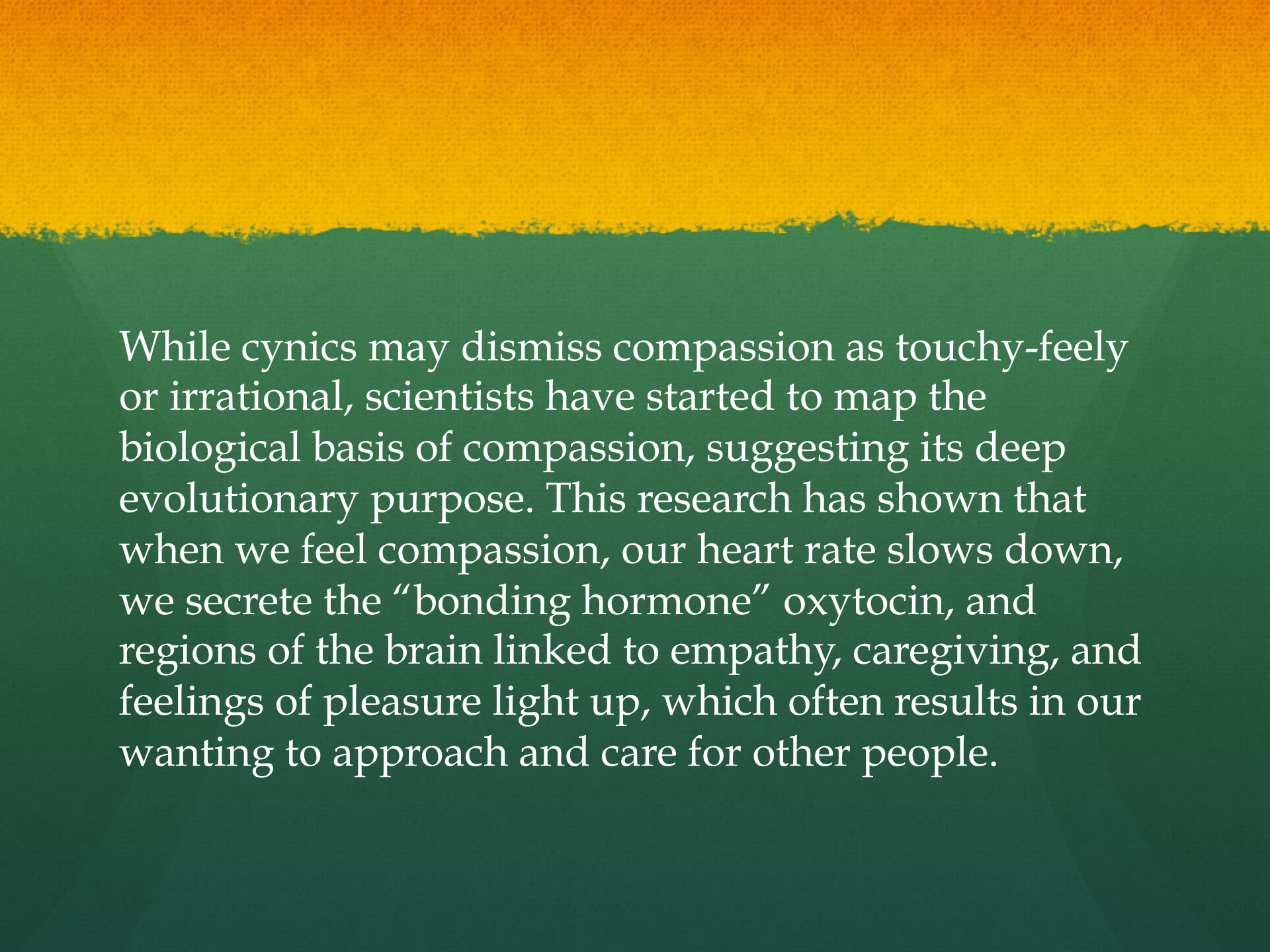
HEALING PRESENCE

More about Compassion

-Greater Good Magazine,
Science-Based Insights for a Meaningful Life

Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

Compassion is not the same as empathy, though the concepts are related. While **empathy** refers more generally to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person, **compassion** is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help.



While cynics may dismiss compassion as touchy-feely or irrational, scientists have started to map the biological basis of compassion, suggesting its deep evolutionary purpose. This research has shown that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, we secrete the “bonding hormone” oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving, and feelings of pleasure light up, which often results in our wanting to approach and care for other people.

Still More

-Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

... The meaning of compassion is often misunderstood:

Genuine compassion is based not on our own projections and expectations, but rather on the rights of the other: irrespective of whether another person is a close friend or an enemy, as long as that person wishes for peace and happiness and wishes to overcome suffering, then on that basis we develop a genuine concern for his or her problems. This is genuine compassion.



Examples of
Ground Work Activities
that Honor
Sentience of the Horse and
Enlist Horsemanship Skills to
Address the Whole Person/Whole Horse

Examples of Activities that Honor Sentience of the Horse

- Reading the Whispers
- Engaging in Conversations with the Horse
- Exploring the Mythic Power of the Horse
- Building Coherence
- Getting Creative: Assess

Reading the Whispers

- Learning to read horses' body language is a cornerstone for building a relationship with a horse: reading and responding to ears, eyes, breath, head movement and head placement, subtle movement, and more.
- Horses pantomime who they are and how they feel about who they are and about others: horses, people, and elements of the environment.

Reading the Whispers

#1 OPEN THE SENSES

Practice in heightening one's senses to match those of the horse is a vital preparation for effective observation and interaction with horses. It encourages people to become grounded and centered in their whole body. Debrief after any of these before moving on.

- Lean On Me
- Scrubbing the Senses
- Nonverbal Greeting of One Another

Reading the Whispers

#2 OBSERVE A HERD OR SMALL GROUP

Introducing and studying the subtle language of the horse.

Watch a herd actively interacting, or gather 2 or more horses in an arena. To encourage more activity, place some items in the arena that will attract their curiosity.

Explore together with students their observations of subtle expressions with ears, eyes, movement, etc:



Some questions to consider:

- What is the purpose of their behavior?
- What are they communicating and how?
- What personality traits are being expressed?
- How do they set boundaries with one another?



#3 CON SU PERMISO

Beginning a CONVERSATION by a mutual greeting between horse and person, establishing trust and bonding.

- Engage grounding and a coherent heart state by equal breathing in and out. Engage other techniques of aligning with and balancing feeling, doing, and thinking.
- Do a body scan.
- Instructor and client approach the horse across arena, noticing acknowledgement, seeking invitation from the horse: eyes and ears forward, movement toward the client, etc. If the horse turns attention elsewhere, stop and rock back or step back. Wait for the invitation, or elicit one.
- Alternatively: horse is at liberty.

Reading the Whispers

Considerations:

Practice noticing three awareness zones of the horse and how the horse is reading you at each zone:

- A long distance away (1/4 mile)
- Decision-making zone. In the arena, where they can ignore, approach, or run.
- Personal space zone (10 feet away)

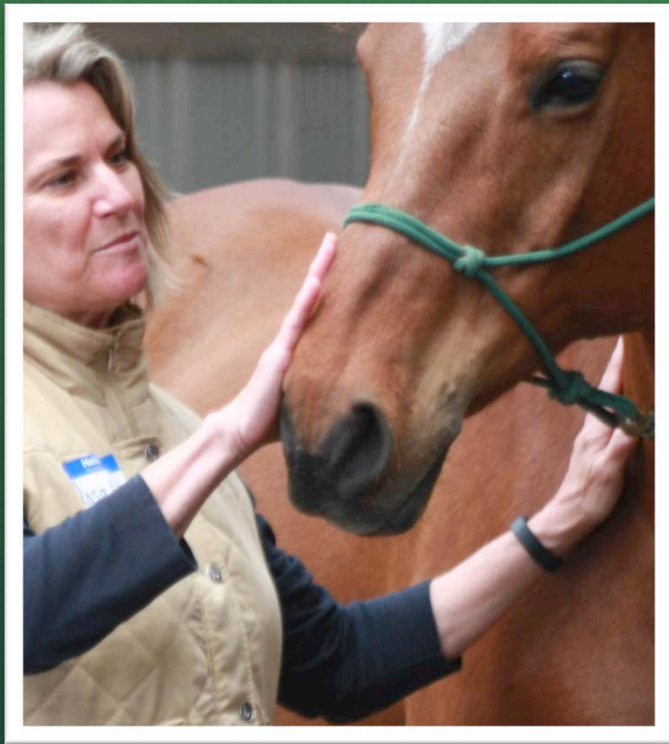
Follow greeting with observing horse interaction with no touching by student. Then introduce touch on horse's shoulder, back, etc as is appropriate for that horse. Notice the horse's response, the feel of the horse on student's hands. Where does horse like touch, not like touch?

Reading the Whispers

#4 HALTERING AS A PRACTICE IN SUBTLE CONVERSATION

- Enlist the horse to be level-headed in haltering process to teach the importance of body position. Level head = trust, endorphins vs. cortisol, adrenalin. Endorphins imply safety, trust and respect between student as leader and horse.
- Where is your belly button? Learn to notice what it communicates: Push (rear) / Block (front) / Draw (side).

Reading the Whispers



#5 See **HORSES IN TRANSLATION**
by Sharon Wilsie

For many more ideas on conducting
CONVERSATIONS WITH HORSES.

Engaging in Conversation

Engage with horses in a setting where the horse is at liberty, and they have choices in their responses:

An arena, at least the size of 3 round pens, provides opportunities for many learning experiences about the horse/human relationship.

Engaging in Conversation

Practice give and take communications. asking horse to move, allowing horse to approach or move away, practice the pause, etc. The skill is to engage coherent and clear energy in requests to horse and responses to their communications.

The teaching progression:

Student shadows instructor.

Instructor shadows student.

Student works alone with horse.

Engaging in Conversation

- Halter, groom, lead at liberty. Add an obstacle course.
- Ask horse to move through or over obstacles.
- Teach student how to express praise and appreciation with touch that the horse enjoys and experiences as a marker for wanted behavior.
- Practice the Pause.
- Teach the Seven Waterhole Rituals of Carolyn Resnick over an extended period. See carolynresnick.com.
- Gather “games” from Sharon Wilsie and others.

Engaging in Conversation

Use Horsemanship Skills to Teach:

- The difference between predator communications and prey communications in these interactions.
- Distinction between forceful corrections vs. clear body language based on coherence. Striving for what we are doing "with our horses" in contrast to "to our horses."
- How to gain emotional authority: leadership of the horse, without using a halter.
- Curiosity, awareness, discovery and accountability on the part of the student for where they can personally develop through their interactions with the horse.

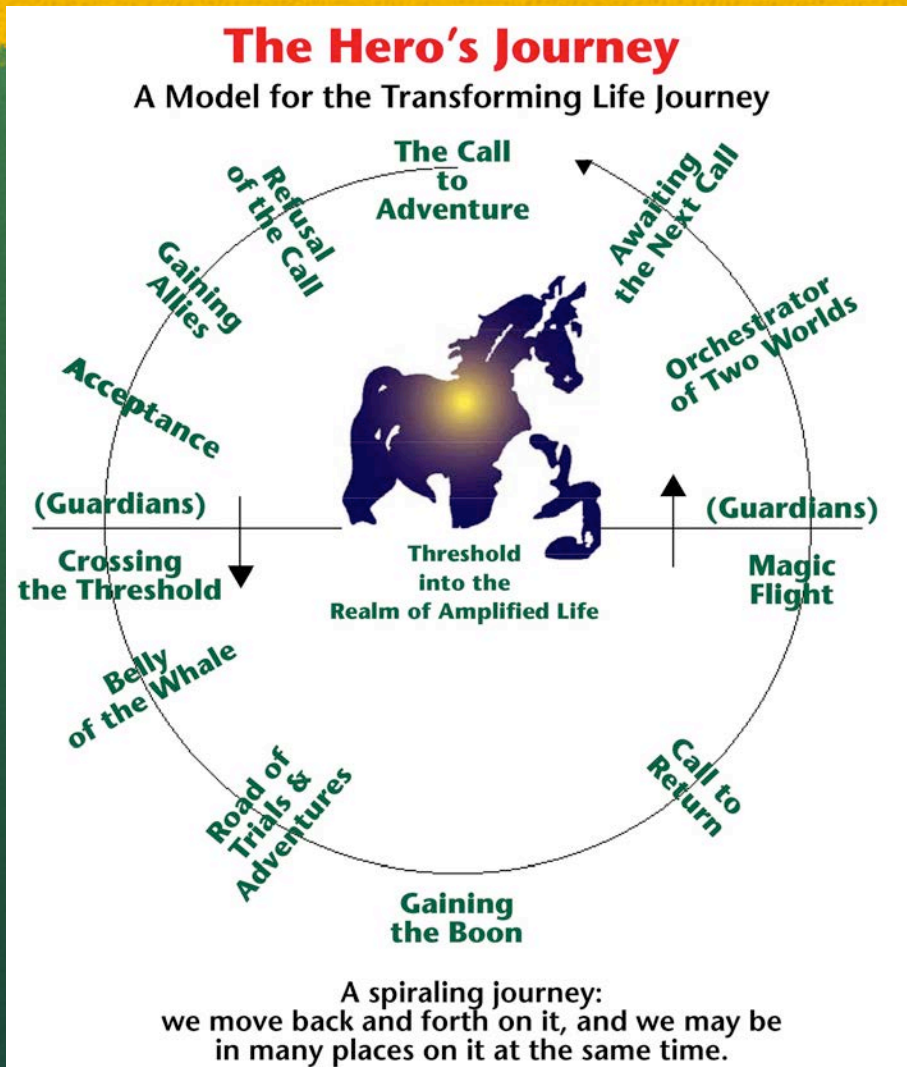
Exploring the Mythic Power of the Horse/Human Connection

Engage the power of story for exploring purpose, meaning and direction in one's life, empowered by something larger, in this case, a horse. Harnessing the power of the imagination for building coherence.

- ADVENTURE GAMES
- JOURNEY TO HEART'S DESIRE

See: *Riding Into Your Mythic Life: Transformational Adventures with the Horse*, by Trish Broersma, Amazon.

Adventure Games Engage the Power of Story



- Creative obstacle course
- Map out an adventure with hero's journey elements
- Teach feeding the demons and other values

Journey to Heart's Desire for Preparing the Way

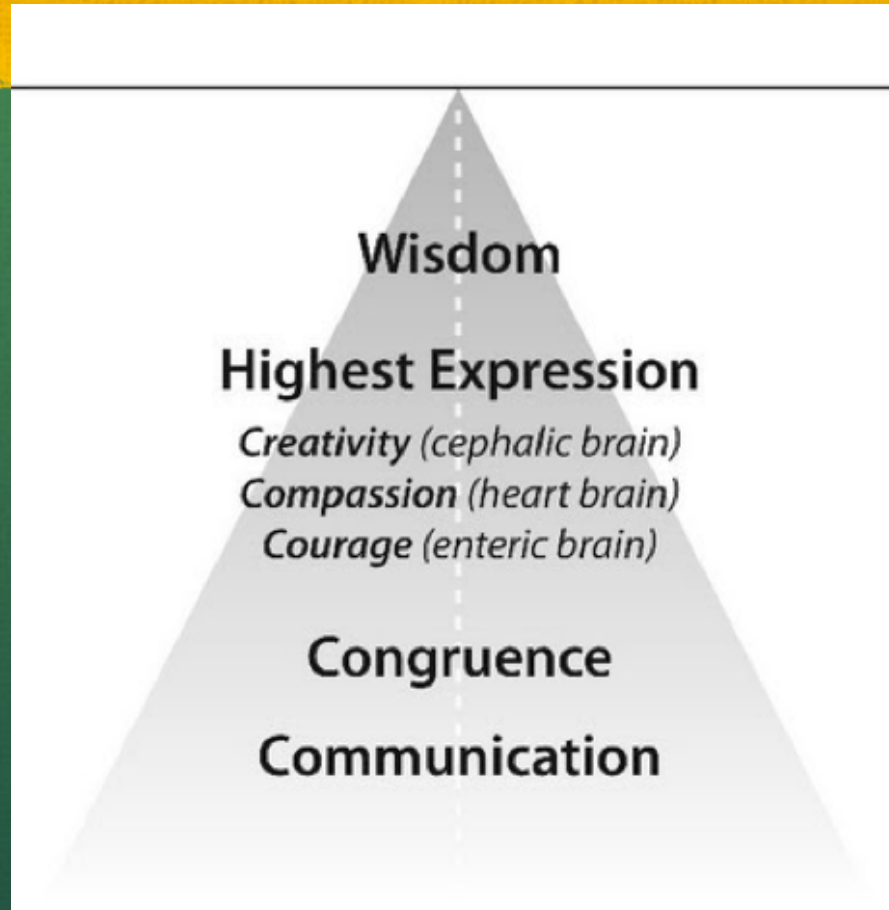
- Set up obstacles in middle of arena: bucket, toy car, shovel, large rock, chair, etc.
- Articulate personal heart's desire.
- Write down things standing in the way on separate pieces of paper: personality, people, money, etc.
- Tuck them into relevant obstacles
- Place rock which symbolizes heart's desire at one end of arena
- Start at other end, leading horse. Evoke sense of larger purpose: leading from past into future.
- Move through and pick up obstacles, sharing with horse, taking in their perspective.
- Claim heart's desire. Take it home and keep in special place.
- Bury or burn the obstacles: transmute their energy.

Building Coherence

Explorations of Multiple Brain Integration Techniques (mBIT)

- **Head** < CREATIVITY >
Cognition
Thinking
Making Meaning
- **Heart** < COMPASSION >
Emotions
Values
Relationships
- **Gut** < COURAGE >
Core identity
Self-preservation
Mobilization
- **IMBALANCES**

mBIT Roadmap to Wisdom



See mbraining.com for more on mBIT

Discovery Exercise

DISCOVERY EXERCISE FOR DISTINGUISHING HEAD HEART GUT BRAINS

- After exploring differences verbally and kinesthically of the three brains, student leads horse on halter through a simple obstacle course for three rounds, focusing first on heart, then head, then gut area of their body. Either partners or group observe how the three rounds differ, as does the student, noting differences in horse's and student's behavior.

See mbraining.com, Institute of Heart Math. for many more variations that can be adapted to horse/human communication to bring balance and access to the three brains, give access to full body wisdom for problem solving in day to day life.

Use Available Tools

- Breathwork
- Music
- MORE: Study, explore what interests you.

Practices

- Breathwork: Equal breath rhythm before horse contact/ diaphragmatic breath on rising.
- Aligning Head, Heart and Gut Brains: Introductory awareness exercises.
- Developing the imaginal body: Group exercises/ deepening contact and bodily awareness.



Practices

- Exploring the larger life story: Journey to Your Heart's Desire.
- Heart opening interactions with horses and people: The horse at work/
group interactions.
- Illuminating patterns in our lives: The Hero's Journey.



Practices

- Synchronized movement to music: Ground walking/
Riding
- Creative writing and other creative expressions: Write praise songs/Improvisations/
Art/Story-telling.

Four session themes:

- Encounter with a Being of Large Heart
- The Things that Horses Teach Us
- Any Wound Has Its Sacred Aspect
 - The Larger Story Beckoning to Us



**Freedom reigns unbridled
in the heart of horse.
Ruled by the wind she gallops
eternally within the spirit
of all people.
Together we roam the earth
bound by our
hearts that beat as one.
-Duane Hinson**

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#3 Assess: Get Creative

- Evaluate your current activities and those from many available sources - plentiful, published curricula - then tweak them to become ethical, promoting relationships that are truly nourishing and effective for both horses and humans.

#4 Commit to a Path of Personal Transformation

- Commit to a path with your horses of “personal transformation - going for the breakthrough, for the growth, the meaning and the miracles” for you and your clients (--Equine Alchemy)
- Work together as staff /volunteers / board members / horses to explore the work for yourselves.

This points to the necessity of ongoing volunteer and staff training in the presence of horses.

Issues for Staff Training

- Everyone: develop curiosity and intelligence about your reactions to the issues of your clients and how they show up in your life.
 - Horse handlers require extra training/experience to learn liberty work and its implications. Work in teams.
 - Allow time after each session for group processing.
 - Anchor therapeutic environment for horses and humans before clients arrive.

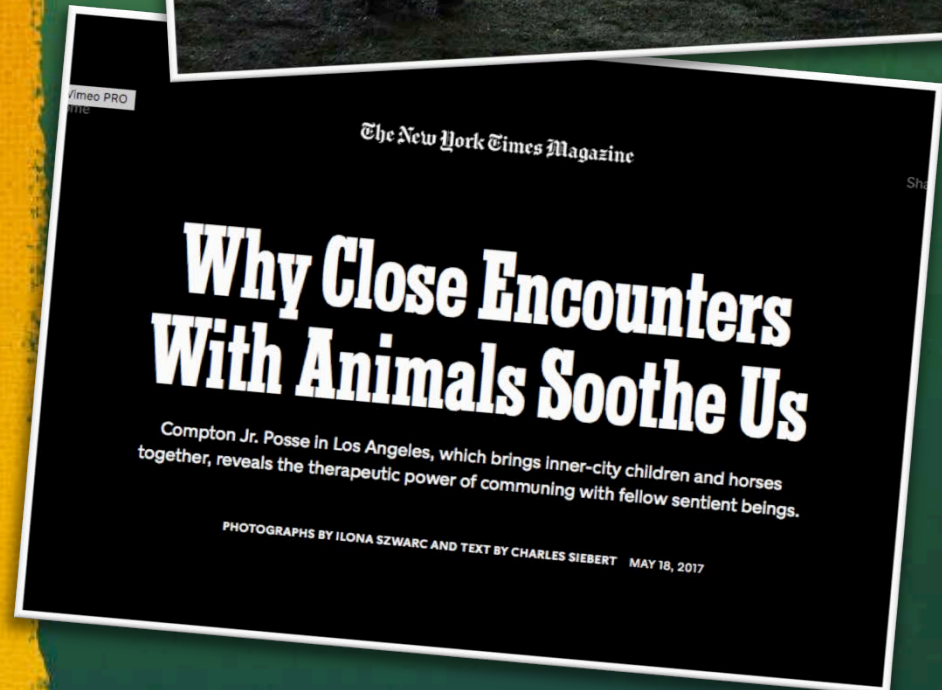


Develop Creative Ways to Educate Everyone

Give board members a personal experience of horses as sentient beings.

Harvest from the internet and send out fresh videos and articles on a regular basis to everyone via email, Facebook: staff, board, clients, friends.

In particular, give parents of students and clients handouts and videos that prepare the way for this new definition of horsemanship.



PS: Brave the Wilderness

Practicing gratitude, joy, true belonging, vulnerability and courage when you take on the wildness and wilderness of pioneering anything new.

Here is a guide:

Brene Brown's

**Braving the Wilderness,
The Quest for True Belonging**

Resources

- *Horses in Translation*, Sharon Wilsie
- *The Horse Leads the Way: Honoring the True Role of the Horse in Equine Facilitated Practice*. Angela Dunning
- *The Compassionate Equestrian*, Allen M. Schoen, DVM, MS, and Susan Gordon
- Carolyn Resnick's blog: carolynresnick.com
- *Riding Into Your Mythic Life: Transformational Adventures with the Horse*. Patricia Broersma
- May 18, 2017 New York Times Magazine, Health Issue on Animals as Sentient Beings
- *Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth*. David G Korten



Gratitude to
Cathy Languerand
Molly Sweeney
Emily Berg
Jenn Lieber

Thank you!

Find more learning opportunities at

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RidingBeyond.org

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