

Kaleidoscope Learning Circle, llc.
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HORSES

Horses, even domesticated ones, instinctually live in a family system that has rules or “non-negotiables” that can help people learn about human beliefs and behaviors. A few salient facts about horses: they are herbivores, and thus are prey to other animals, they live in herds with a hierarchy, and they primarily communicate nonverbally. The herd is important because it means that each horse relies on another for their safety. Two keys to survival are effective communication and developing relationships with other members of the herd. Like humans, these relationships can be friendly or the opposite, bullying, can also exist. In the wild, death can be the price paid for a prey animal that does not communicate well or misunderstands the herd’s message. A hierarchy or “pecking order” exists within all horse herds. This is not stagnant, but rather is fluid and can be a changing process as individual horses challenge the horse above them in the order. The position in the herd is important, determining who eats first or who eats at all if there are limited resources, who comes in from the field first, etc. Much of the recent “horse whispering” phenomenon is based on creating a mutually respectful relationship, between the horse and the human, while establishing the human being as the leader in the horse herd.

Nonverbal communication is critical to all animals, and while many humans may think they are primarily responding to the verbal communication, research has shown that we instinctually and unconsciously read and react to nonverbal signals in greater proportion than the spoken word. Horses and other large mammals are masters at reading subtle changes in body language and other nonverbal cues to communicate (Friend, 2004). For example, a horse’s ears tell you many things about their mood, where their attention is, and in combination with their eyes they can be very expressive and interpretive. Learning to understand the subtle cues of the equine language requires focus in a way that can help people really “see what they are looking at,” forcing one to stay in the moment.

DIVERSITY/PLURALISM

Once considered a “good idea,” diversity awareness and training is now considered necessary for companies and organizations to remain competitive. Developing an effective diversity training program is not an easy task, as simply defining diversity is challenging. Diversity may be viewed as an objective or subjective state that involves visible or invisible differences. It may reside in the target, the perceiver of the target, or in the perceptual space that exists between those two entities. It can be approached from individual, dyadic, group or organizational, or society perspectives. It can range from the member of an oppressed group to being in a group that shares a set of values, attributes, or personality characteristics (Ragins, Gonzalez, 2002). A move toward cultural competence though, will not only enhance

relationships and create opportunities for different people to succeed, but has farther-reaching organizational effects (Barbian, 2003).

According to Malcolm Gladwell (Blink, 2005) our attitudes toward things like race and gender operate on two levels. First, we have our conscious attitude, this is what we choose to believe; these are our stated values, which we use to direct our behavior. A second level of our attitude is our unconscious level; these are the immediate, automatic associations that arise before we have time to think. One way to test your own conscious/unconscious divergences is to visit Harvard's implicit website at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit>.

We may not even know what resides in our unconscious level of awareness. It is formed from our experiences, lessons learned, books, media, etc. The unconscious level is a powerful predictor of how we act in spontaneous situations. One may wonder if our unconscious level has a bias or prejudice that our conscious level does not, does this translate into racism, sexism or one of the other "isms"? If you are concerned that your unconscious may not match your conscious values; Gladwell's premise is that there are two critical factors to facilitating change of people's unconscious awareness. First, we must acknowledge that there are subtle differences that can alter, undermine or bias the products of our unconscious. Keeping in mind the perspective that people are the experts on their own lives, each individual is the authentic chronicler of their own existence. Secondly, combine the awareness that rapid cognition exists with controlling the environment, so that any unconscious bias cannot interfere and direct our decisions. Because we do not see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs; we must learn to listen in a way that requires us to open our ears, eyes, hearts and minds (Delpit, 1988).

EQUINE ASSISTED LEARNING and DIVERSITY/PLURALISM

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) is an experiential learning modality that brings people and horses together in a situation with the goal of creating a learning opportunity for the human. By creating a learning environment, we seek to suspend the rules of habit that often stop people from becoming aware of any incongruence between their beliefs and their behaviors and values. Additionally, horses, through mirroring or reading the emotions of the individual or group can further enhance the learning experience.

EAL celebrates the application of diversity and promotes pluralism by offering participants the opportunity to...

- increase diversity consciousness and cultural sensitivity by challenging, exploring, and questioning assumptions and habits.
- learn in a supportive and nurturing environment, interacting, developing, and implementing creative, strategic ideas and seeking to identify core values.
- recognize similarities and celebrate differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

- experience a flexible, fluid team exercise where participants define and seek to understand their roles and where there is a high tolerance for ambiguity.
- discover the freedom and autonomy of creating their own consequences, facilitating the exploration of rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic), risk, and failure.
- share feedback and reflect through dialogue; possible discussion themes include: identifying mental models and other barriers to change, decision making, linking theory to practice, problem solving, and communication.

Equine Assisted Learning can help people create climates of inclusiveness or cultural competence in two ways: First, through increased awareness. EAL exercises are designed to create an environment that allows for people to explore their reactions, then reflect on the experience, build understanding, and seek to transfer the generalized learning from the experience to specific situations.

Secondly, EAL can help diversity relations and create positive organizational cultures by moving beyond awareness. Cultural competency requires us to ask “now what” as part of the diversity/pluralism conversation. The reality is that diversity exists. Period. The question is how to develop a trusting, respectful environment that celebrates differences and acknowledges similarities in a way that helps individuals and organizations reach their goals. EAL has the potential to help people enhance their diversity skills through identifying what can be changed in order to create a place that invites and encourages enriching relationships.

A human being is a part of the whole that we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest--a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This illusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for only the few people nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature. ~ Albert Einstein

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