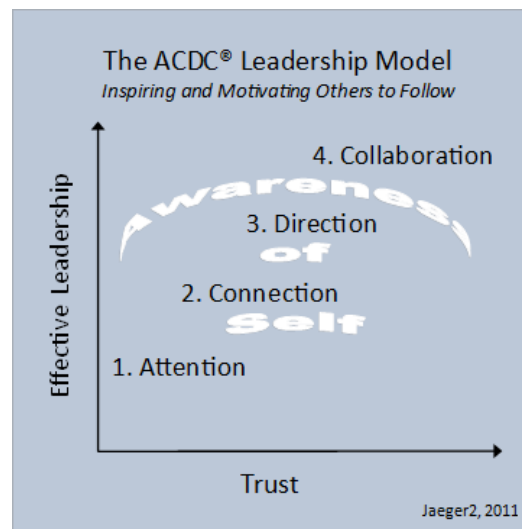


The ACDC® Leadership Model - From Horses to Humans

By Shari Jaeger Goodwin, September 2011

Abstract

Do you get the respect and performance you desire? The ACDC® Leadership Model provides a four-part stepwise approach for leaders to inspire and motivate others to effectively meet goals: 1) Get Attention, 2) Make a Connection, 3) Give Direction, and 4) Collaborate. The model is based on my integration of more than 20 years of business leadership and sales experience with over 25 years working with horses. Using the ACDC® Leadership Model, many individuals have transformed their leadership abilities to be more confident, clear and effective. The model is premised on an understanding of emotional intelligence articulated by Daniel Goleman and others, as well as nonverbal communication and an awareness of our mind-body connection. The model has been shown to be profoundly effective in leadership and sales training environments and has broad application in the business world. We currently use the ACDC® Leadership Model in our proprietary *Alpha Horse Leadership Training for HUMANS®* workshops and in sales training seminars.



Background

The ACDC® Leadership Model was developed following years of observation and direct experience in leader-follower interactions, both horse and human. As prey animals in the wild, a horse's survival is based on accurate assessments of another's intentions; if a horse misreads the intention of a predator, the consequence could be death.

Horses show a keen ability to accurately assess a human's intention and only follow confident, clear, and congruent leaders. A horse will never follow a doubtful, aggressive, or passive leader. When interacting with us, a horse's behavior reflects our emotional state; if we are calm, sincere, and clear, the horse will typically follow our lead. If we are nervous or doubtful, the horse will respond in kind and will not take our direction. The horse also mirrors our true intentions; if we are requesting one thing, but believing something different, the horse will pick up on this incongruence and will be confused and unable to properly respond to the request. These types of responses give us profound insight into how

we may be perceived by others. In this way, horses provide real-time feedback on the effectiveness of our leadership approach and style.

Horses also stay fully present in the moment and readily respond to shifts in our emotional state and intentions. This gives us an opportunity to frequently adjust our emotional state, clarify our goals, and optimize a leadership approach. Our success is gauged by how readily the horse accepts and follows our direction. Unmounted exercises with many horses were conducted to test the effectiveness of various human leadership approaches and styles and to refine the model.

The ACDC® Leadership Model prompts a problem-solving process of inquiry and self-discovery in which the leader ultimately answers the question: how do I inspire and motivate this horse/human to follow my lead and accomplish a goal? Responses to this question are directly relevant to leadership challenges between humans.

Elements of the ACDC® Leadership Model

My observations and experience in both the business and horse worlds show that four basic elements are necessary to effectively inspire and motivate others to follow a leader. These elements comprise the ACDC® Leadership Model and include:

1. Get Attention
2. Make a Connection
3. Give Direction
4. Collaborate

The sequence of the elements is key to the model and reflects an increasing level of trust in the leader. Underlying the model is the ability to use all parts of sensory awareness, our brain (rational center), our heart (feeling center), and our gut (intuition). All three areas consist of dense neural networks that communicate with each other and inform our choices and actions throughout our lives, both consciously and subconsciously (Cooper 2001). Awareness of the unique feel emanating from each of these nerve centers affords a powerful ability to adjust to nonverbal and energetic cues critical to successful leadership.

Ideally, a leader's messages from all three nerve centers, head, heart, and gut, are congruent and result in followers eager and willing to accept direction. However, if a leader is doubtful or unclear, messages from the leader's three nerve centers will be in conflict, and the leader's energy will reflect that conflict. Humans typically feel this conflict at a subconscious level but are often unable to consciously recognize and reconcile the conflict; horses see it clearly and will never follow a conflicted leader.

The goal of the ACDC® Leadership Model is to teach leaders how to be more self-aware, better understand their impact on others, and make conscious shifts in their emotional and energetic states and leadership approach to best influence a desired outcome.

Each element of the model is discussed below. The model is implemented after the leader has established an objective and is ready to approach and engage others to accomplish a stated task.

1. Get Attention

Effective leadership starts with our ability to gain the full attention of the subject. This requires us to also give full focused attention to the subject. In today's electronic gadget-filled and "multi-tasking" world, giving and getting full attention can be a challenge. Questions for a leader to consider before requesting the attention of another include:

- How does it feel to give someone your full attention?
- How does it feel to receive the full attention of another?
- What does a state of full attention look like?
- What is required to achieve a state of full attention?

Giving full attention requires us to slow down, listen, and acknowledge another. It also requires self-awareness; our three nerve centers (head, heart and gut) should be clear of chatter and open to receive. When we give full attention, we are quiet in our head, open in our heart, and receiving in our gut. This is the place where a true connection can begin and mutual respect and resonance with another can flourish. Good leaders set a deliberate intention and energy level to optimize their ability of attracting the full attention of another.

Getting the full attention of an individual or a group is an art; the leader must quickly and carefully assess the best method to get attention and offer it at the optimal time. Human-human methods may include asking a question, telling a joke or story, using a signal such as a clap or whistle or flag, or other specific call to attention. Getting the full attention of a horse may involve moving closer or farther away from the horse, making a sound, picking up an object, or other approaches. Horses demonstrate full attention unequivocally - they look directly at you, ears pricked forward, waiting for your next move or request. Humans at full attention will look directly into your eyes and often lean forward. However, horses are like people, each responds differently to a call to attention; what works for one may not work for another - good leaders must be able to offer various approaches.



"Noble" giving and receiving full attention. (Photo: E. Linares)

Once full attention is achieved, it must be maintained. As a leader, we must be deemed worthy of continuing to receive the full attention of another, e.g., why should an individual or horse continue to pay attention to you? This is accomplished by creating a connection.

2. Make a Connection

Connection is a feel, an empathy felt in the heart and eventually an intuitive sense of trust felt in the gut. As humans, we typically connect by appealing to a common interest, emotion, and/or experience to show that we truly understand each other. From this appeal, we start to build trust and respect which are key to getting others to follow.

Making a connection involves both an awareness of self - our emotional state, our preferences, and our true intentions - and an ability to shift our emotional state to be fully open and available to hear and respond to the needs of another. Successful connections are “other-oriented,” and may take time to develop. One way to establish trust and respect is to work to fully understand the other’s preferences and not push beyond their comfort zone.

Questions for a leader to consider prior to reaching out to make a connection include:

- What energy and emotions am I bringing to this interaction?
- Where is my energy focused - in my head, heart or gut? Does it need to be rebalanced?
- What do I already know about the other party based on observations from the “attention” exercise? How can I integrate this information into my approach to making a connection?

Comfort zone

Our comfort zone is the physical and emotional state where we are calm and comfortable and able to process information clearly. Every human and horse has unique comfort zone preferences. As leaders, we must be respectful of the other’s preferred distance, physical and emotional, and not approach too close too early when building a connection.

Neuroscience shows that as discomfort or anxiety increases, a part of our brain called the “amygdala” starts to engage, flooding our system with “flight or fight” hormones. These hormones increase our respiration and heart rates, elevate blood pressure, constrict blood vessels, reduce oxygen to the brain, and decrease our ability to think clearly (Schwartz and Gladding 2011). Even small increases in discomfort can start to trigger this process. Evidence of discomfort in humans may manifest in arms folded across the chest, a defensive stance to protect the heart; an avoidance of eye contact or eyes nervously shifting from place to place; backing up or otherwise trying to create more distance (avoidance behavior); and/or talking loudly and taking over the discussion. Violating a horse’s comfort zone may result in the horse turning its back to you, not looking at you, moving away from you, or finding something else to pay attention to. Some horses may even react defensively with a kick or become aggressive and bite.

Determining someone’s comfort zone takes practice. Frequently, we get absorbed in our agenda and lose sight of how the other is reacting. Sensitivity to comfort zone preferences is developed through intuition and reading body language, voice inflections, and energy.

The other person must subconsciously invite you into their “space,” their comfort zone, which signals a readiness to receive. This part of the process sometimes takes patience and creativity as comfort zones can fluctuate throughout a conversation. Jumping in too soon may kill a deal or raise suspicion of your motives resulting in a lack of trust and resistance to follow your lead. However, missing an “invitation” to come into the comfort zone may be interpreted as a lack of confidence on the part of the leader.



Making a connection with “Frescoe” through play.
(Photo: E. Linares)

Congruence

In addition to comfort zone awareness, we must be congruent when reaching out to another to make a connection. Our words, actions, feelings, and beliefs must be in harmony. If we're lacking confidence in what we're saying, or don't believe what we're saying, conflict will be created between the head, heart and gut nerve centers. This conflict will resonate out to the other party, but may not be consciously acknowledged. However, the conflict will be felt by the other party at a subconscious level and will influence how they respond to your leadership.



Making a connection with "Lila." Note the matching stride of horse and human and similar focus. (Photo: S. Goodwin)

Horses are great detectives of incongruence. When we're pretending to be something we're not, or there is a discrepancy between what we really feel and how we're behaving, the horse knows and will not usually connect with us. This is an opportunity to review our emotional state and identify the core issue causing that state. Once we uncover that core issue, the horse will usually acknowledge us even if our issue is not resolved. Horses look for authenticity - we do not have to be perfect, but we have to be congruent. Most people respond similarly.

Making a connection with a horse or human may take time and several attempts. Sometimes it is best to get attention and then depart, waiting until another day to develop a connection. Other humans and horses are ready to connect immediately and readily offer trust and respect.

3. Give Direction

Once a leader has the attention of a subject and has made a connection, direction may be given.

Questions for leaders to consider before giving direction:

- What is my goal/intention? Am I absolutely clear on what needs to be done to meet the goal (plan to meet goal)?
- How do I feel about this goal in my head, heart and gut? Do I need to make emotional adjustments or shift my energy?
- Is the subject(s) ready to take direction? Do I have their attention? Do I have a connection, i.e., their trust?

After we have succeeded in gaining the attention and trust of the subject, we need to recheck our emotional state to ensure that we are balanced in our head, heart, and gut, and clear on the overall goal. Then we can issue direction.

Direction should be given with sensitivity to the timing and intensity of the request. The request should be timed to afford optimal execution and balanced with the amount of assertiveness appropriate to best inspire and motivate action. Individuals will differ in how they best respond to direction and situations will require flexibility in approach. Too strong an approach may cause fear and over-reaction or paralysis, while too meek an approach may not be respected. Having a strong connection and understanding of the other party will inform you as to the best way to give direction.

Once direction is issued, we must guide the process forward to ensure the goal is accomplished. If confusion arises, we must regroup. We must regain attention, rebuild the connections, and clarify the goals before moving forward. This is an iterative process until the goal is accomplished.

In working with horses, we can easily see if a leader is effective in issuing direction. The horse either embarks on the task, or it does not. Sometimes, the horse will move forward initially and then stop or move in a different direction than desired. This signifies a need to recheck our emotional state and intention, regain the horse's attention, ensure that the connection is strong, and redirect the horse towards the goal. Like people, some horses need more assertive direction than others. With people, a lack of attention, connection, or effective direction may be demonstrated by distraction with other tasks, procrastination, or confusion, among other responses. In these situations, the leader needs to refocus the people and clarify the objectives.

Horses will only take direction from a calm, focused, confident, and assertive leader. Each horse is inspired and motivated to meet a request in a unique way. Each horse also requires a specific level of intensity with the request. If a leader has doubt in their ability or is unclear about what exactly they want, the horse will reflect that emotion in its response to the request.



Directing "Noble" to halt and stand quietly. Note the similar stance of horse and human. (Photo: E. Linares)

For example, during an equine-assisted leadership workshop, a participant directed the horse to walk over a pole on the ground. At first, the horse would not move and stood with its hind-end facing the participant. After some verbal encouragement from the participant, the horse began to walk toward the pole. However, the horse walked slower and slower as it neared the pole, then stopped about one yard out and wouldn't budge. After the participant waved her arms at

the horse, the horse moved slowly toward the pole, but stopped with just two front feet over the pole. The participant took a visible deep breath and repeated the request - suddenly the horse walked across the pole with vigor. What changed?

The participant reported that at first she was nervous about whether or not she could get the horse moving and keep it moving over the pole. After the horse put two feet over the pole, the participant took a breath, rebalanced her emotional state, and made a decision that the horse was going to go over the pole and was totally confident that the request would be heard and perfectly executed. The horse responded to this confidence and clarity with the desired outcome. Other participants working with different horses have experienced a horse side-stepping the pole at the last minute or turning around and walking the other way. In each instance, doubt and uncertainty in approach were the culprits. However, in each case, when the participant made a conscious effort to shift their emotional state, clarify their intention and ask again with assertiveness, the horse responded with the intended outcome.

4. Collaboration

Collaboration is the final element of the ACDC® Leadership Model. Once you have successfully attracted one's attention, created a connection, and executed a direction, its time to firm up the relationship for the long-term. Collaboration is the sharing of strengths toward a common goal. This is where you take the relationship to the next level, hearing the ideas and innovations of those that you lead (and your clients) and co-creating something better than you could on your own. Effective collaboration requires the highest level of trust in leadership for people to feel safe to express themselves.

In a typical workplace, collaboration would be initiated by the leader who may convene a staff meeting to brainstorm ideas on how to approach a project, improve a product or service, or create something new. Ideally, collaboration would occur among co-workers as well as with the leader to inspire fresh approaches and continually rejuvenate staff's commitment to the firm's overall goals. The leader would also work to collaborate with clients and other partners to ensure that products and services always meet or exceed the client's expectations. For solopreneurs, collaboration could involve working with existing clients to solicit feedback on product/service performance and new needs, or working with a joint venture partner to broaden offerings. In all cases, collaboration involves reaching beyond yourself and being open to change all while keeping an eye on the overall goal.

Collaboration may be demonstrated with horses by assembling a team of people and one horse. The team designs a strategy for moving the horse around an obstacle course. The strategy must address specific criteria, e.g., walk over a pole in both directions, go around the barrel once, make a left at the cone, or other requirement. The group works together to get the horse around the course without using a lead rope. This exercise builds on the strength of the previous elements - getting attention, building a connection and giving direction. Any breakdown in communication between team members is shown by the horse who may stop, turn around, walk or trot off in another direction, or otherwise demonstrate a lack of understanding of expectations. Solidarity and trust between team members combined with a clear goal typically result in the horse readily following the team around the obstacle course.



"Cali" and team working together around an obstacle course. (Photo: S. Goodwin)

Other Applications of the ACDC® Leadership Model

The ACDC® Leadership Model has broad application among many industries. Along with leadership of staff in a business environment, the ACDC® Leadership Model can be effectively applied to sales (e.g., as part of the sales process), advertising (e.g., as a structure for writing compelling copy), and in educational environments (e.g., how to connect most effectively with students). To learn more about the ACDC® Leadership Model, go to www.jaeger2.com or contact the author at shari@jaeger2.com.

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