

Using Horsepower to Climb the Ladder to Success

By Linda Roberts (Originally Published in the *Loudoun Business Journal*, Fall 2012)

I entered the spacious, sunlight-filled indoor arena with my two business coaches for a morning session in leadership skills. At the base of Cobbler Mountain near the tiny village of Delaplane, Virginia with the spring chirping of birds as background noise, we were about as far as possible from anything that resembled a board room or corporate office.

And, when one of your coaches is a 1,200 pound horse, file those thoughts of conventional business training and allow the Zen of horsepower to take over and work a little magic.

“Horses read your intentions. And there’s really no place for human ego in horsemanship,” said my human coach, Shari Jaeger Goodwin, as we talked prior to starting the training session. Goodwin is the owner and chief strategist for Jaeger2, LLC, a business consulting firm with an equine-assisted coaching practice that incorporates her own carefully crafted leadership model for targeting success—in business and in life.

Goodwin embraces an exuberant passion for the unique, multi-faceted business she founded a little over a year ago. Playing a key role in her venture is Goodwin’s stable of four-legged equine assistants, each with his or her own sage outlook on life and the ability to pay for their own hay and oats as Jaeger2 instructors.

Arriving at Cobbler Corner Farm with no prior knowledge of Goodwin’s training techniques except for a review of her website, I was excited to learn firsthand how my own lifelong interest in all-things equine could sync with a business training model. It wasn’t long before I realized that perhaps I’d brought a smug bit of ego from my own background with horses out to Cobbler Corner. Before Goodwin turned me over to her senior assistant, a large white mare nicknamed Cali who stood patiently watching us, my mini-session began with a simple mind-centering exercise designed to clear stress and promote open pathways of thought. Fair enough, I reasoned—a good way to gain a sharper focus on whatever the task is at hand. And, I felt much more relaxed, centered, and at ease as the result.

However, this calm state didn’t fully prepare me for the next step.

Goodwin pointed to a long pole lying on the ground near us, and directed me to have Cali walk over it. Sure, not a problem, I’d led plenty of horses around and over poles. But her second directive was a show stopper. I couldn’t touch Cali, or even use a lead rope, to have her cross the pole. And, worse yet, the mare was totally disinterested when I did my best to politely cajole her into taking a collaborative step with me toward the pole.

Without giving away how the exercise ended, and, yes, without touching the mare, I eventually discovered that assertiveness worked quite well with Cali—just as it most often does in business. I even received a reward noting a successful outcome, as my equine coach provided a soft nuzzle of acceptance at the session's end.

That simple exercise aptly illustrates Goodwin's philosophy of inspiration and motivation, which is based on the four points of attention, connection, direction and collaboration, and trademarked by Jaeger2 as the ACDC™ Leadership Model. The core of Goodwin's strategy to success is her Alpha Horse Leadership Training for HUMANS™ workshops that centers on an understanding of emotional intelligence, nonverbal communication, and an awareness of the mind-body connection. "I like to distill things to the most simple form," said Goodwin, "and then build on my clients' leadership skills from that point, as the ultimate goal is not to 'make' someone follow you, but to build a relationship based on trust."

Goodwin noted that "the ability to see ourselves clearly" is one of the largest hurdles to overcome in personal growth. "Our self perceptions do not match the way others experience our being. Horses reflect back to us our authentic self, the self underneath the superficial societal self that walks through everyday life. They see beyond the mask to our true intentions, doubts, and insecurities," she said.

A lifelong animal lover who became a skilled horsewoman, Goodwin found her niche in life by combining an inherent sense of connecting with animals and nature with academic degrees in English and zoology. A master's degree in environmental biology led to employment as an environmental scientist where her leadership and management skills quickly surfaced. This background combined with years of experience in management strategy eventually led to directorship of The Jaeger Group, a family-owned information technology staffing firm, where Goodwin produced over \$2 million in new revenue through cold call sales in the firm's first year. Personal and executive coaching training, equine-facilitated learning techniques, natural horsemanship skills, and her own background as an accomplished rider and trainer, paved the way for Goodwin to found Jaeger2 from her interest in helping people affected by the economy's downturn.

"Studies show that as humans we use about 10 percent of our potential," said Goodwin. Enabled by her equine coaches in unmounted training sessions, Goodwin said she helps her clients tap directly into the other 90 percent of their potential abilities in their personal lives and in business. Her clients agree that the results are powerful.

Northern Virginia business woman, Sarah Atkins, who has been working with Goodwin almost since Jaeger2 was formed, commented, "Not only has it been a wonderful experience, but I estimate that my ROI on the investment I've made is on the order of 1,000 percent!"

“I need to be where I can add the most value to the world,” Goodwin said of her new venture, which seems to know no bounds due to its visionary and energetic leader. In the first four months, Goodwin created her own access to 16 speaking engagements. As a published author, she finds outlets for her articles dealing with business development and leadership strategies.

And although her clients currently include both men and women, it’s the women in business who seem to naturally gravitate to Goodwin’s programs and services. A certified woman-owned small business, Jaeger2 is redirecting its outreach to reflect this client base. “I’m refining my market,” laughed Goodwin.

The leadership strategist and her equine coaches sometimes find that the coaching sessions bring unexpected emotions bubbling to the surface that at times leave clients feeling vulnerable. “This is a safe place to let that happen, as what is said here stays here on the farm,” Goodwin said.

After a tough day of promoting her business, encouraging personal growth, business strategy and leadership skills in others, what do the coaches do to unwind? For Goodwin, it’s a Reiki session or a walk through the pastoral beauty that surrounds Cobbler Corner Farm. For “the herd,” as Goodwin refers to her assistants, they can’t wait to kick up their heels in the pasture after another day on the job. For detailed information, visit www.jaeger2.com

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