

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE HERD

PART ONE

LEADERSHIP

The seven Waterhole Rituals have been created by Carolyn Resnick. Now **Julia Felton** shows how they can be translated into skills for life and business

Horses are master teachers and I am passionate about helping people understand the life and business lessons that horses can teach us. So in this series of articles, exclusively for Horsemanship Magazine, I am going to be showing how natural horse behaviour can provide us with a blueprint for how we live our lives and behave in business.

In previous issues of this magazine you will have read my articles on the Waterhole Rituals™. Although they were derived by Carolyn Resnick from the observations of wild horses, their application is possible and relevant to life in general, as they provide a formula for achieving greater potential for anything we

do. Time and time again I find myself referring back to how the herd interacts in order to learn lessons about how I need to behave to resolve any situation in my life.

In this article I will be sharing with you how herd dynamics and the leadership positions within the herd can be effortlessly applied to your workplace situation. Before I start let's just get clear on what leadership is and who a leader is. To me a leader is simply someone who makes a request. Leadership is not about power, it is about motivating, directing and inspiring others. So who is a leader? Everyone is!

The title leader is often assumed to apply just to those who have senior management positions

within companies, but to my mind we are all leaders. Think about these leadership roles: a parent leads the family, maybe you are a leader of local community group, you might lead a group of others to arrange an event. In many roles in life you are a leader, you're inspiring and motivating others. You are also the ultimate leader of your own life, a concept I call leader-self. In all instances you simply cannot motivate others, people or horses, through force but rather you need to influence others and empower them to work alongside you in a partnership that is mutually beneficial.

WILD HORSE LEADERS

So what lessons can we learn about leadership from horses? Firstly, let's remind ourselves of how a herd of wild horses is structured. Typically the herd is

comprised of a band of mares and a stallion. Within the mares there will be one lead mare. The lead mare and stallion work together to maintain the security and safety of the herd.

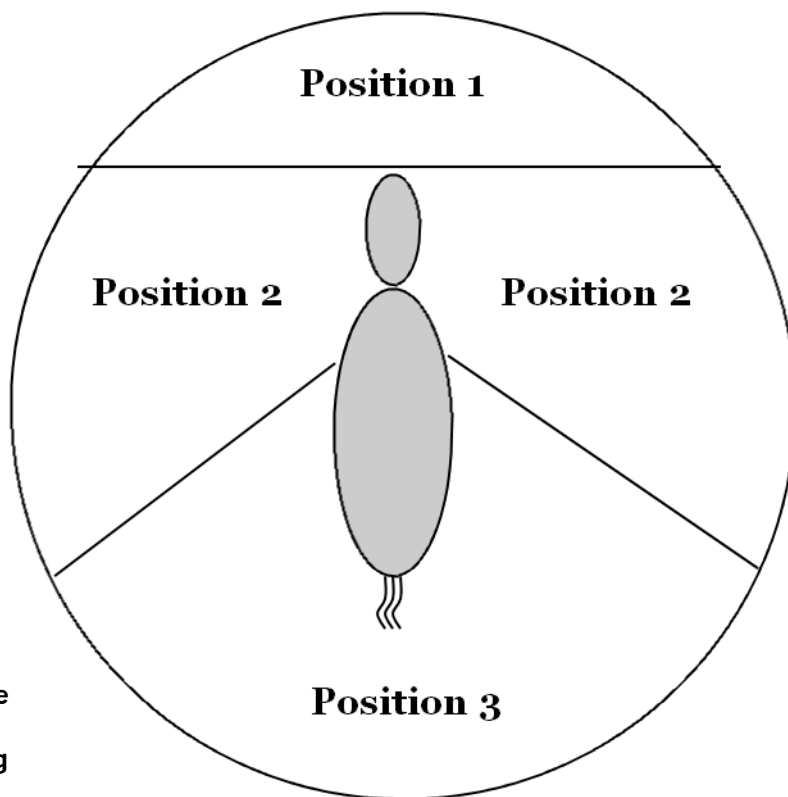
The stallion is typically found at the rear of the herd of horses. From here he can keep an eye out for approaching danger and also influence the direction of the herd by gently pushing them from behind. If he pushes too hard his herd of mares will disband. Unlike a business where employees often feel obligated to stay with their employer for income security, the stallion has no such control over his herd. Any inappropriate leadership and his herd of mares can just run away; he has no fences to keep them in. From the rear of the herd the stallion sets the pace and direction that the herd needs to move in, particularly at a time of danger.

The lead mare is typically found at the front of the herd and her role is to find suitable grazing. She works in conjunction with the stallion leading the herd to lush pastures and streams so they can stay nourished and refreshed. Whilst the herd is grazing, you will often find the lead mare roaming through the herd, hanging out, making sure everyone is fine and paying attention to the environment.

In his book *Dances with Horses*, Klaus Hempfling has identified three leadership positions that can be adopted when leading a horse, or indeed any organisation. They work on the principle of pull-push leadership with certain styles being more effective in different circumstances.

From the diagram above we can clearly see position three that the stallion adopts at the rear of the herd, whilst the lead mare generally adopts leadership position one at the front of the herd and during rest times she

The three leadership positions naturally adopted by the lead mare and stallion when moving the herd



adopts position two, where she just hangs out with the herd.

LEADERSHIP POSITION ONE

In the workplace I would suggest that leadership position one is most effective in emergency situations when there is a need to take control because of some threat of danger. In this situation you just want people to follow and you don't want them to question how or what you are doing, you just need people to trust you and act now, as you prescribe.

The challenge with maintaining this leadership position indefinitely is that it is a very tiring and lonely place to be for the leader. For team members it is equally challenging as they are constantly being told what to do. They become demoralised and quickly lack focus and engagement. It does not take much to get them off-track and they will wander off in their own

direction, doing their own thing so that they can get some sense of being and self.

I often observe this occurring in organisations and indeed have witnessed it first-hand; by becoming too controlling and micro-managing all aspects of the team, employees have started to disconnect and lose interest and focus in their work. The net result is less than optimum results for the business, as the team is not pulling in the same direction.

LEADERSHIP POSITION THREE

This is a classic example of the fourth Waterhole Ritual Leading From Behind and is, in my opinion, the most powerful leadership position to be in. It relies on setting a course and then inspiring the team members to achieve it. It is an empowering and creative position for both the leader and the team members as everyone feels engaged, responsible and committed to

It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.
Nelson Mandela

achieving the goals. I have often heard it said that team members use less than 40% of their potential at work. Leading from behind helps unlock that remaining 60%, resulting in significant improvements in productivity, attendance, motivation and commitment from team members. The challenge for many leaders using this leadership style is that it involves setting the course and then allowing the team members to get there in their own way, which might be a very different way from the one the leader envisaged. Continually nagging team members will not be successful and indeed may result in the team disappearing in another direction. This leadership position involves creating trust and empowering others.

LEADERSHIP POSITION TWO

This is what might be described as a supportive leadership position. It is a position of true partnership and equality and has been likened to the time when you go down the pub with your team members. It is not a position that offers leadership and direction but is required to balance the other two leadership positions. It is the leadership position aligned with the Waterhole Ritual Companion Walking.

So how do you lead others or how does your boss lead you at work and which leadership style do you prefer?

Typically, as in the herd, you will use and experience a mix of these three different leadership styles because each has their own appropriate time for application. Use too much directional leadership, position one, and, like your horse, team members will lose engagement, become bored and take little or no responsibility for their actions. Of course leading from the front means you cannot see what is happening behind you, which might make you slow to react. Perhaps you have experienced leading your horse from position one and he heads off to eat the green grass. Since you have been paying attention to where you are going, you have failed to notice your horse eyeing up the grass until it is too late and he is dragging you off to the verdant pasture.

Whilst leadership position three is very inspiring and motivating it relies on clear communication and everyone going in the same direction. Those of you that have tried this fourth Waterhole Ritual will probably know that at the beginning your horse often runs off and doesn't go where you want him to go. The communication is not clear and given a free rein your horse chooses to do his own thing. Contrast this with a work situation where, unless the boss gives clear direction on the project that he wants completed, everyone delivers something different.



Leadership position two is like when you go down the pub for a drink with your team



LEAD YOUR LIFE

Join the discussion

- Which leadership position do you favour?
- Can you now see how your horses can teach you more life and business lessons than you ever imagined?
- What you have learnt about your leadership style?

Join the discussion with Julia on the Horsemanship Magazine Facebook page

Julia Felton is the founder of Business HorsePower and author of *Unbridled Success*. She helps women entrepreneurs accelerate the growth of their businesses. She is also an Accredited Instructor of the Waterhole Rituals.
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