



PART FIVE

LIFE LESSONS
FROM THE HERD

TEAMWORK

Success is a team sport. Julia Felton looks to the herd to demonstrate the value of collaboration

In previous articles we have looked at the life and business lessons horses teach us in regard to leadership, communication, community and sales. In this issue we examine what we can learn from horses about the art of teamwork.

A team has been defined as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. In virtually every aspect of life and business we find people working

together in teams. Sometimes the teams are formalised and sometimes they are not but teams help us fulfil our desire for significance and contribution. People, just like horses, are social animals and have a need to fit in, and there is nothing more rewarding than contributing to others and feeling needed.

There are a number of benefits of being in a team. It makes more resources, such as time, ideas and energy, available than a lone individual would have. Teams allow a leader to maximise their potential and minimise their weaknesses. A team provides multiple perspectives on how to reach the goal, allows for the creative flow of ideas and stumbling blocks can be more

easily navigated. Teams share the credit for victories and the blame for losses which can foster genuine humility and authentic communication. Teams keep leaders accountable for the goals and can simply do more than the individual.

That said, I increasingly observe people in society trying to do everything themselves. This is not our natural state. Just as horses don't like being alone, humans have a need to belong. As prey animals, horses live in herds to ensure their safety and meet their need for companionship. The rigid rules, clearly defined roles and established hierarchy holds the herd together with trust that helps each herd member feel safe and secure in their position. In

An empowered organisation is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire, and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organisational success

Steven R Covey

business teams trust is a crucial element of success. When trust pervades an organisation there is greater productivity and team members love showing up for work. Work is fun, communication is clearer and harmony reigns.

The herd maintains trust by ensuring everyone is clear about their roles through clear communication. Disputes are settled quickly and grudges aren't held as horses don't fret about what happened last week, they just accept the situation and move on. In business however, personal agendas come into play which is why creating trust and harmony in teams can be hard, but once a business manages it, the results are formidable. It is estimated that the most trusted companies, like Apple, Google and Coca Cola, outperform their competitors by as much as ten times.

As a horse owner I know that you will appreciate the importance of teamwork when working with or riding your horse. We want our horse to show up as a willing partner, but that will only happen if your horse trusts you. I was reminded of this as I took my horse Toby on a short ride to the local watermill. He had never been there before and in fact had not been separated from the herd for nearly a year, so just leaving his friend was a big deal for him. He was a little apprehensive to begin with, but he trusted that I knew what I was doing and he was willing to come with me.

Trust fuels the creation of

high performance teams that are able to achieve more than the sum of the parts. I love the acronym for TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More. Each herd member achieves more and maintains their safety by being part of the herd. Just imagine how hard it would be for a horse to be alone in the wild with no support. As a prey animal he'd be living in fear of his life. By partnering with the other horses he is able to live a more relaxed, stress free life.

Synergy is one of the most beneficial outcomes of teamwork, yet few people know how to create it because often it is achieved through trial and error. Think about the first time you rode your new horse. Neither of you had a high level of trust in each other and the outcome was probably not great. But fast forward a few months and, as the bond, trust and respect developed between you, you have achieved better results. It is the same with high performing teams of people. Typically they are not satisfied with the status quo and they do not want to accept mediocrity or failure. True teams want to be the best they can be and 'win' so they find out how to work better, smarter, faster. They create a mindset that causes individuals to truly work together, create and use efficiency systems and they continuously learn and improve.

If you hitch two horses to the same wagon you get more pulling power than adding what the two horses could pull separately. If a horse can pull 9,000 pounds, the a pair of horses doesn't just pull 18,000 pounds, a mere doubling of their individual efforts, they can pull 35,000 pounds. Now that's synergy!

So why is it that some people insist on adopting the Lone Ranger approach and doing it all themselves? Some reasons might include:

Ego. It can take a lot to admit

that you can't do everything. As Andrew Carnegie once declared, "It marks a big step in your development when you come to realise that other people can help you do a better job than you could do alone."

Insecurity. Leaders may feel threatened by their team members but by failing to promote teamwork the leader undermines their own potential and erodes the best efforts of the people with whom they work. They would do well to listen to the advice of former US President Woodrow Wilson who said, "We should not only use all the brain we have, but all that we can borrow."

Naiveté. Underestimating the difficulty of achieving big things.

Temperament. Some people simply do not think in terms of working with others or enlisting their support. However, working alone creates huge barriers to their own potential. Dr Allan Fromm noted, "People have been known to achieve more as a result of working with others than against them."

So if you have any fear and mistrust about working with others and being a team player I urge you to take a hard look at how the herd behaves and ask yourself how can you help others trust you. Step up and show others the way. Be the leader for your group or business unit and demonstrate trust in others so they will gain more trust in you. The rewards will be more harmony and fun in the workplace, and you'll be even more productive which will lead to improved financial performance, and maybe even a pay rise!



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