

# Welcome to Equine Assisted Coaching!

## Why horses in Coaching?

- **Intelligent prey animals:** To evade predators, horses are extremely sensitive to their environment. They instinctively analyze and react to our body language and other nonverbal cues, helping us have greater awareness of the energy and intention we carry in our lives.
- **Large and powerful:** It's hard to ignore a horse with their size and presence. Approaching horses helps us reflect how we approach our challenges and how we can face other big or overwhelming things in our lives.
- **Connection:** Our relationship with horses is ancient. For centuries humans have relied on horses to externally expand civilization through transportation, farming, exploration and war. Now horses can help humans with internal expansion, by providing a mirror to our unconscious behavior.

## What is a Session Like?

Here are some examples of coaching with horses:

1. **Confidence Booster:** A client was working on her leadership skills, specifically confidence. She was afraid of horses so we talked through fear as a common challenge of leading and bringing people to a common goal. The client tried created an obstacle course that represented how she felt with her leadership struggles and then was asked to lead the horse through the course. The first time leading the horse she felt unsure and worried how the horse would react. In turn, the horse was cautious, not engaged, unsure and reluctant and would not move forward. The second time through she reflected on a time when she felt 100% confident in her decision or leadership. When she was able to reconnect to that experience and feel the emotion, the horse followed easily and freely! She walked away with a better understanding of how she was communicating her lack of confidence non-verbally, what it felt like for others to follow when she was not confident, and some strategies to reconnect and feel confidence in future leadership situations.
2. **Remembering Fun:** A client was exploring how he could manage his fear at work, whether in work performance or interacting with others. When he entered the arena, the horse immediately went straight for a bin filled with horse "toys" such as cones, pool noodles, brushes and other props. In other sessions, the horse rarely engaged with the toy bin. We then framed the discussion around how play and fun show up at work, he was surprised to realize how long it had been absent. The focus turned to why he became an engineer in the first place (to build and create) and how to bring back fun elements into his job as a means to dispel fear and foster better connection with colleagues.
3. **Creating Connection:** A client was having difficulty with his manager because he felt his manager was not engaged or connected with him. When entering the arena, the horse mirrored the actions of his boss by turning its back to us and focusing outside the arena. As we spoke, the client realized he could "just go get the horse" and bring it in. We began to explore ways for him to "just ask his manager" what he needed and how to improve communication.
4. **Team Building:** A new team at Columbia Sportswear was having difficulty forming and working productively together. The team came to the arena with 3 horses and were tasked to build a representation of their current work environment. While the team was building their environment, each person was doing their own thing, not communicating or collaborating. The horses mirrored the behavior and spread out in each corner, ignoring the people and each other. Next we asked the team to build a representation of what would be a fun home for the horses. Instantly, the team came together and began designing and collaborating. The horses came in, responded to the team's energy and began engaging and playing with the team members and what they were building. Everyone was laughing, talking and connected. The then team began reflecting on why they don't connect like this in their daily

work and started to brainstorm how they could do that going forward. Coming up with their own solutions, the team had several next steps to try outside of the arena to continue their relationship building.

**What to expect:**

Coaching sessions are in a medium size arena with 1-3 horses at liberty. At liberty means the horses are free to move around and interact with you. No riding is involved.

Equine coaching merges experiential learning with coaching methodology. This simply means learning by doing. During the session I will ask questions, observe the horse's behavior and translate in human terms, and ask you to do interactive activities with the horse.

You may feel worried about interacting with the horse, if the horse will "like" you or if an activity is done the "right way". Please know there is no right way. The session is just about exploring, being present and using the opportunity to reflect and build awareness around a challenge or situation.

It's common for strong emotions to suddenly arise either when first stepping into the arena or throughout the coaching session. The arena and horses provide a safe place to explore and understand the messages behind the emotions and I encourage you to notice, honor and trust what arises during the session.

**What to wear and bring:**

Wear cloths and sturdy boots you don't mind getting a little dusty or muddy. And bring some tissues just in case 😊