



Professional Implications of Working with Horses as Sentient Beings in Equine Facilitated Practices

The Story of Mystic and Jan



Sentience defined

Wikipedia:

the capacity to feel, perceive, or experience subjectively. Eighteenth-century philosophers used the concept to distinguish the ability to think (reason) from the ability to feel (sentience). In modern Western philosophy, sentience is the ability to experience sensations. In Eastern philosophy, sentience is a metaphysical quality of all things that requires respect and care. **The concept is central to the philosophy of animal rights because sentience is necessary for the ability to suffer, and thus is held to confer certain rights.**

Foundations:

PATH Intl Equine Specialist Certification

- Equines are sentient beings with feelings, thoughts, emotions, memories, and empathetic abilities.
- Equines can be active facilitators, evoking emotions in those who work with and around them.
- Equines function as partners in EFMHL sessions and as such all sessions must be conducted to be mutually beneficial for all participants (including equines).
- Equines are not to be manipulated, scared or teased or used as a tool or props.

Foundations:

Role of the Equine as Partner in EAAT

from PATH Intl Education Materials

New scientific research continues to reveal critical information about equine sentience- their abilities of perception, cognition, memory and emotions such as pain and fear. Equines are able to perceive, respond to and learn from the impressions they receive from minimal sensory stimuli. The stimulus may originate from changes in human biochemistry, body language or vocal intonations. It can also come from changes in the equine's environment, relationships with other equines or the equine's general health. In this way, equines make decisions based upon the stimuli they experience from others or from their environment (Hangg, 2005; Nicol, 2002; Proops, McComb, & Reby, 2009; Saslow, 2002). . . . (more)

Continued: Role of Equine

These abilities are based in natural, biological, physiological and psychological traits of equines. Each equine is unique in personality, and has individual likes, dislikes and habits. The information gained from equine communication can be highly useful in all EAAT settings. Listening to equine communication can have an effect on the care of the equines, their rate of burnout and the success of the human-equine interaction. In EAAT sessions or lessons, viewing the equine as a partner invites opportunities for relationship building and skill building with all participants served.

Foundations:

The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness

On July 7, 2012, a prominent international group of cognitive neuroscientists, neuropharmacologists, neurophysiologists, neuroanatomists and computational neuroscientists gathered at The University of Cambridge to reassess the neurobiological substrates of conscious experience and related behaviors in human and non-human animals.

Their conclusion:

“Nonhuman animals possess consciousness”

Evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Nonhuman animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.

Foundations:

We share emotional states

Temple Grandin draws on Jaak Pansepp's work in describing how an appreciation of the primal emotions that we share with our horses can improve our care for them:

- Play
- Panic/Grief
- Fear
- Rage
- Seeking
- Lust
- Care

Sentient Beings



Equines are **sentient beings** who can be **active facilitators**, and function as partners in sessions. Therefore, all sessions are **mutually beneficial** for horses and humans. We strive to **model respectful and dynamic relationships**: no teasing, scaring, manipulation or use as tools.

**If its not good for both the horses and the people,
then it's not good for either one.**

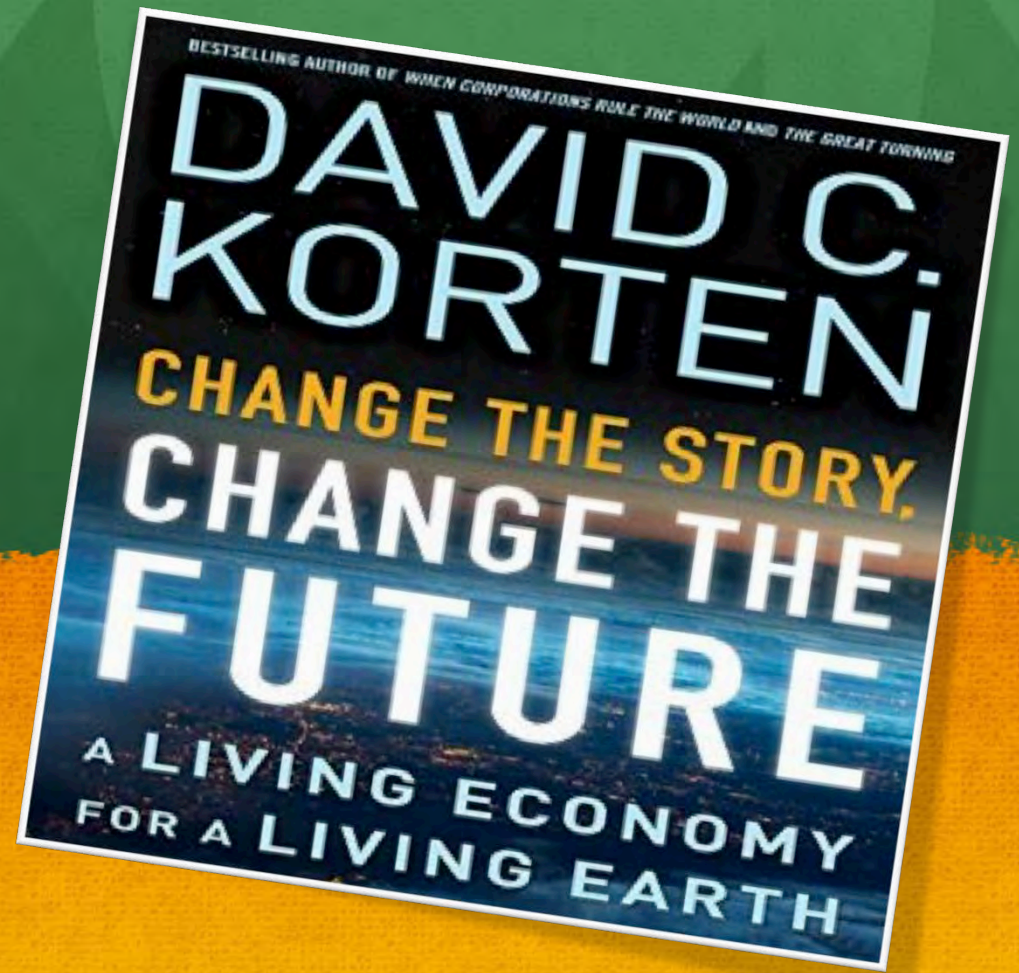
Some of the Gifts for Humans from Horses' Sentience

- Encounters with a being of large heart
- Heightened sensing of our environment / energetics
- Return to calm – resilience dial / modulating our energy
- Herd dynamics – the power of community
- Congruence (truth-telling) vs. Incongruence/Ego vs. heart discernment / True vs. False Self
- Archetypal companionship - accessing our mythic lives

Today's Focus on Professional Implications for Equine Facilitated Practices

- FIRST, developing and maintaining collaborative relationship between your horses and all the people working with them.
- SECOND, developing effective, creative, ethical activities that teach qualities like leadership, partnership, responsibility, trust, empathy and compassion.
- THIRD, assessing what you've done before and the work of others in this field.
- FOURTH, committing to a path with your horses for personal transformation.

Our Context:
The Big
Picture



We humans live by stories, and the stories that now govern our society set us on a path to certain self-destruction: the Sacred Money & Markets Story.



Current story:

The Sacred Money & Markets Story

Money is the measure of all worth and the source of all happiness. Earth is simply a source of raw materials. Inequality and environmental destruction are unfortunate but unavoidable.



New story:

The Sacred Life and Living Earth Story

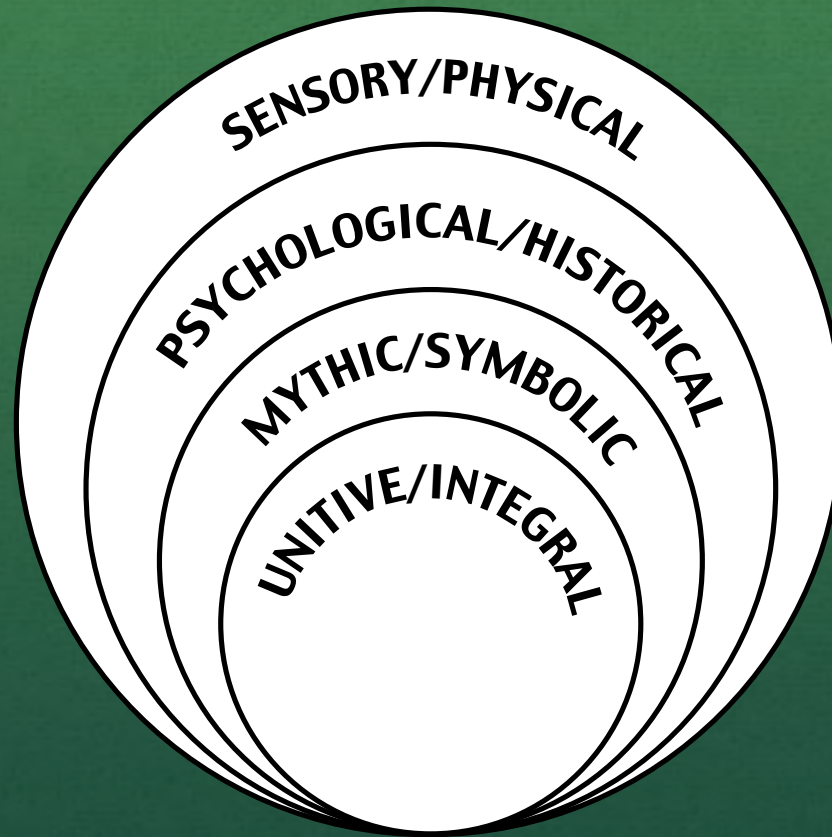
We are living beings born of a living Earth, itself born of a living universe. A connection to nature and community is essential to our physical and mental health and well-being.



The critical elements of this Sacred Life
and Living Earth story live in the human heart.

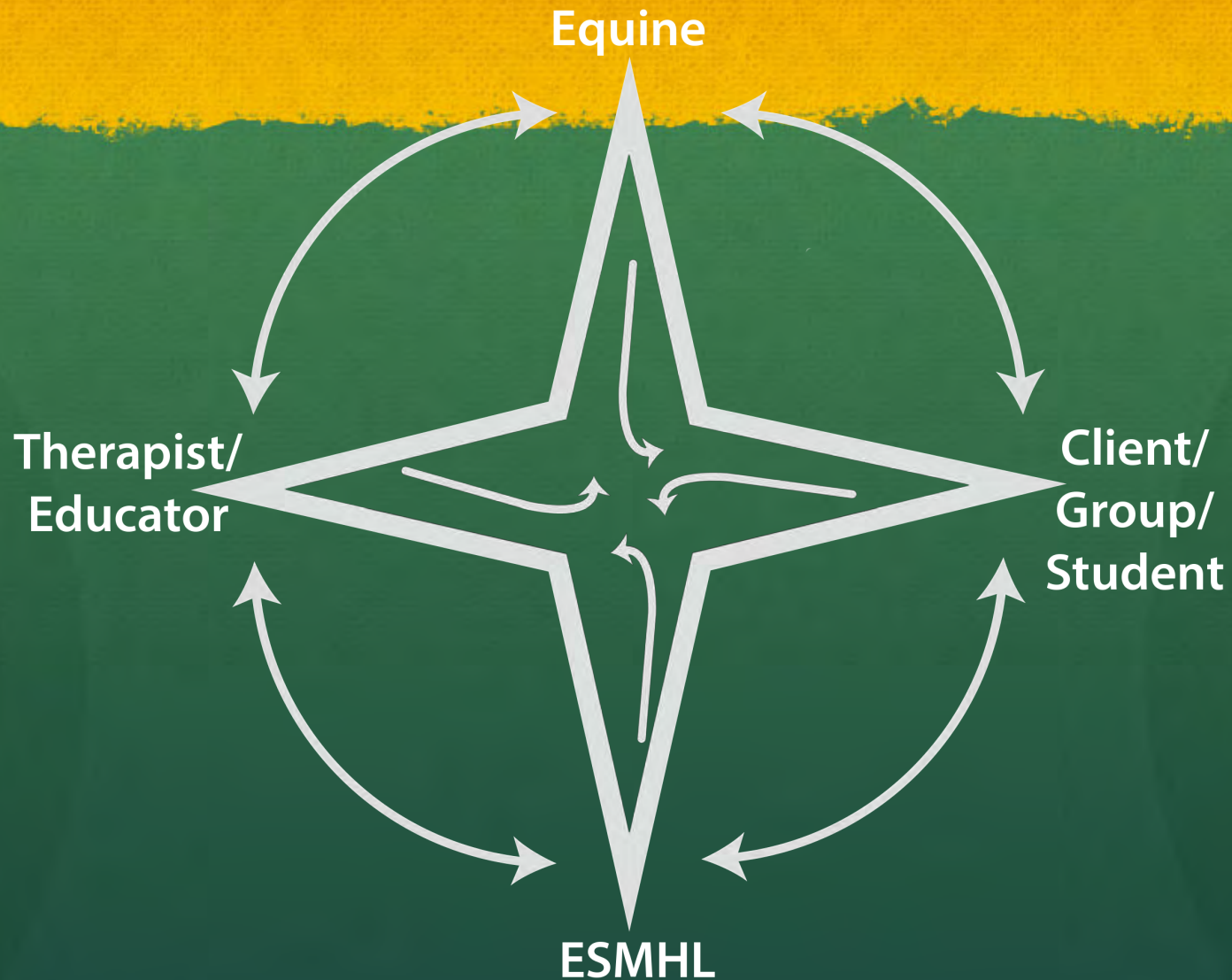
It must become our shared public story.

Work with the Whole Person/Whole Horse: Tend to Depth Issues



The Four Levels of the Psyche

Diamond Model



What comes from each impacts the other.

#1 Developing and maintaining horse/human relationships

Develop collaborative ways of working with your horses that are heart and relationship-centered, with performance and obedience as secondary goals.

Shift from human-centric perspectives to horse-centric perspectives.

Liberty work for willingness, trust, interaction, understanding, respect



7 Waterhole Rituals

-Carolyn Resnick

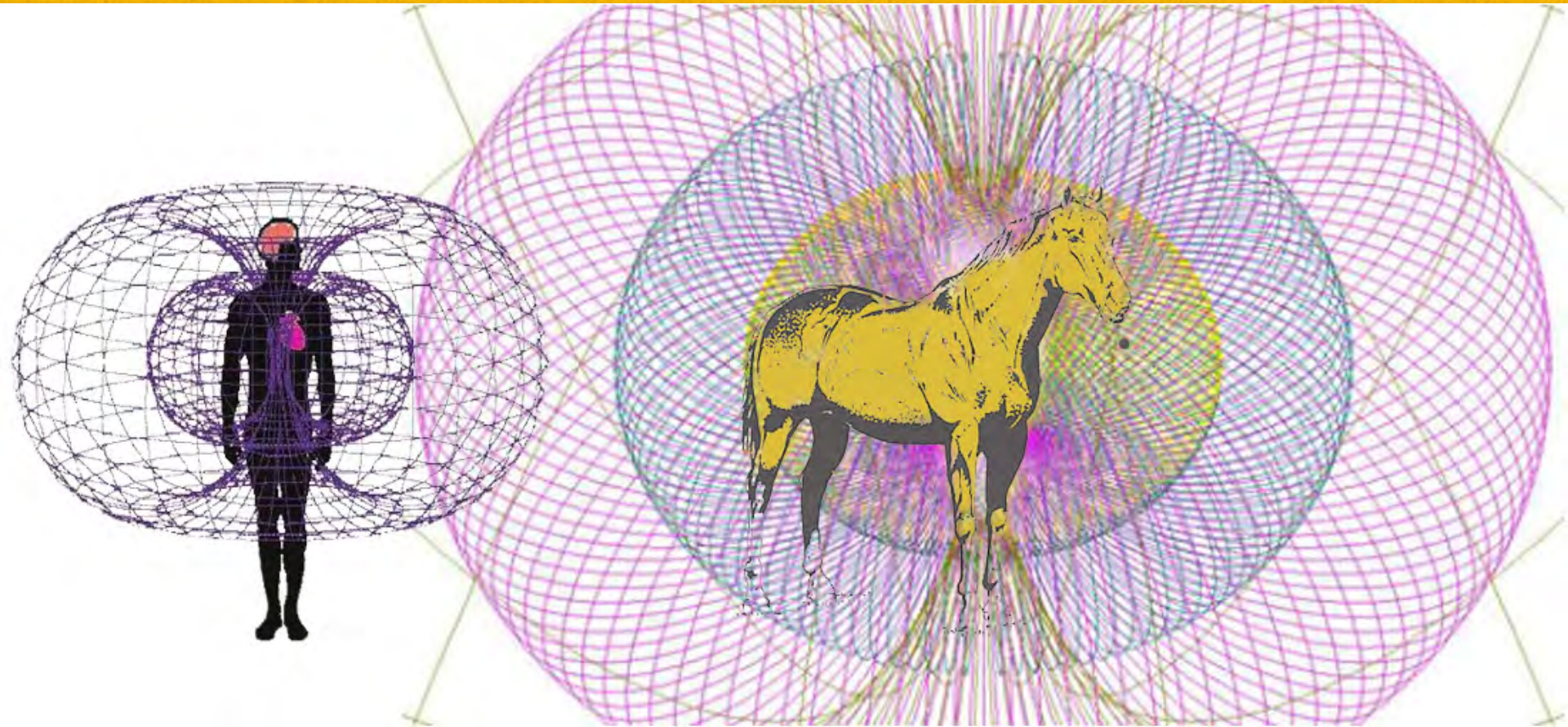
- **Sharing territory:** bonding, acceptance
- **Mutual greeting:** trust
- **Taking territory:** leadership, respect
- **Leading from behind:** willingness, work ethic
- **Eye contact:** focus, responsibility
- **Companion walking:** magnetic connection
- **Go trot / come back:** playfulness, leadership, consistency

#2 Develop effective, creative, ethical activities

- Develop activities that teach qualities like leadership, partnership, responsibility, trust, empathy and compassion in the context of the horse/human relationship and horsemanship skills.
- Open the creative portals for designing activities that are safe and effective for meeting client goals, utilizing the star model and ethical relationships with horses.

The Energy Field of the Horse

Institute of Heart Math Research



Heart Field - Human: 15 feet Horse: 60 feet
Coherent heart rhythm

4 Aspects of Working from the Heart Center



To take on the big tasks and be sustained, must have a strong connection to the heartfelt things in life:

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

COMPASSION

INNATE HARMONY

HEALING PRESENCE

More about Compassion

-Greater Good Magazine,
Science-Based Insights for a Meaningful Life

Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

Compassion is not the same as empathy or altruism, though the concepts are related. While **empathy** refers more generally to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person, **compassion** is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help. **Altruism**, in turn, is the kind, selfless behavior often prompted by feelings of compassion, though one can feel compassion without acting on it, and altruism isn’t always motivated by compassion.

While cynics may dismiss compassion as touchy-feely or irrational, scientists have started to map the biological basis of compassion, suggesting its deep evolutionary purpose. This research has shown that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, we secrete the “bonding hormone” oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving, and feelings of pleasure light up, which often results in our wanting to approach and care for other people.

Still More

-Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

... The meaning of compassion which is often misunderstood:

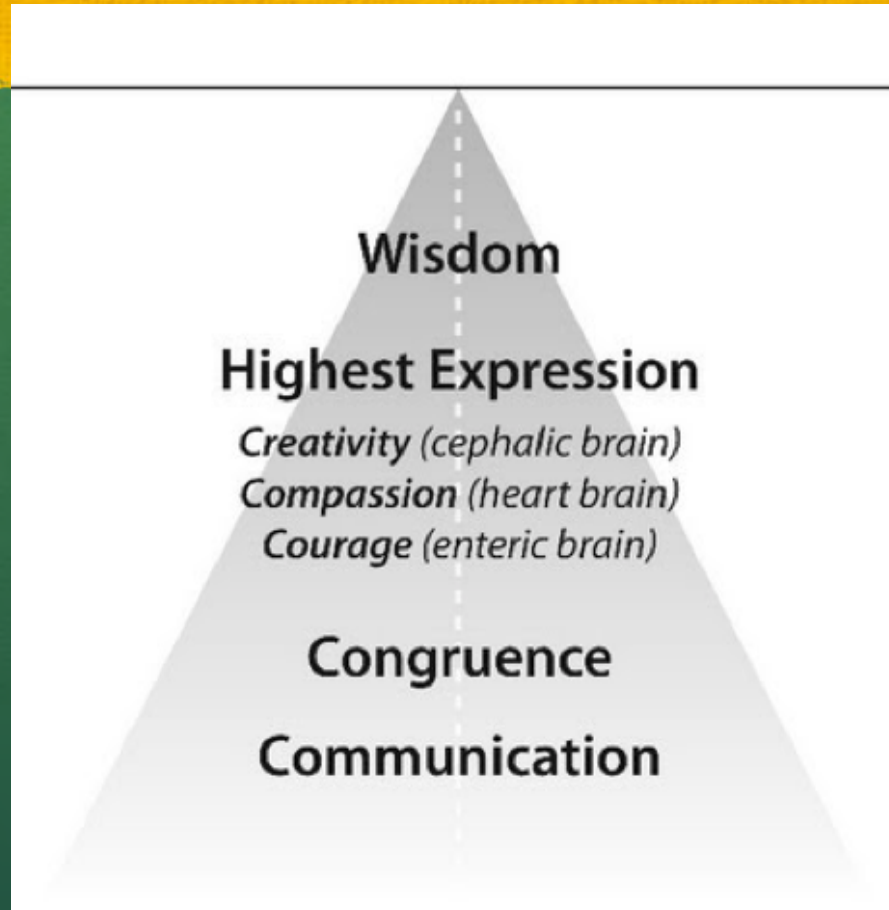
Genuine compassion is based not on our own projections and expectations, but rather on the rights of the other: irrespective of whether another person is a close friend or an enemy, as long as that person wishes for peace and happiness and wishes to overcome suffering, then on that basis we develop a genuine concern for his or her problems. This is genuine compassion.

Examples of Activities that Honor Sentience of the Horse

Explorations of Multiple Brain Integration Techniques (mBIT)

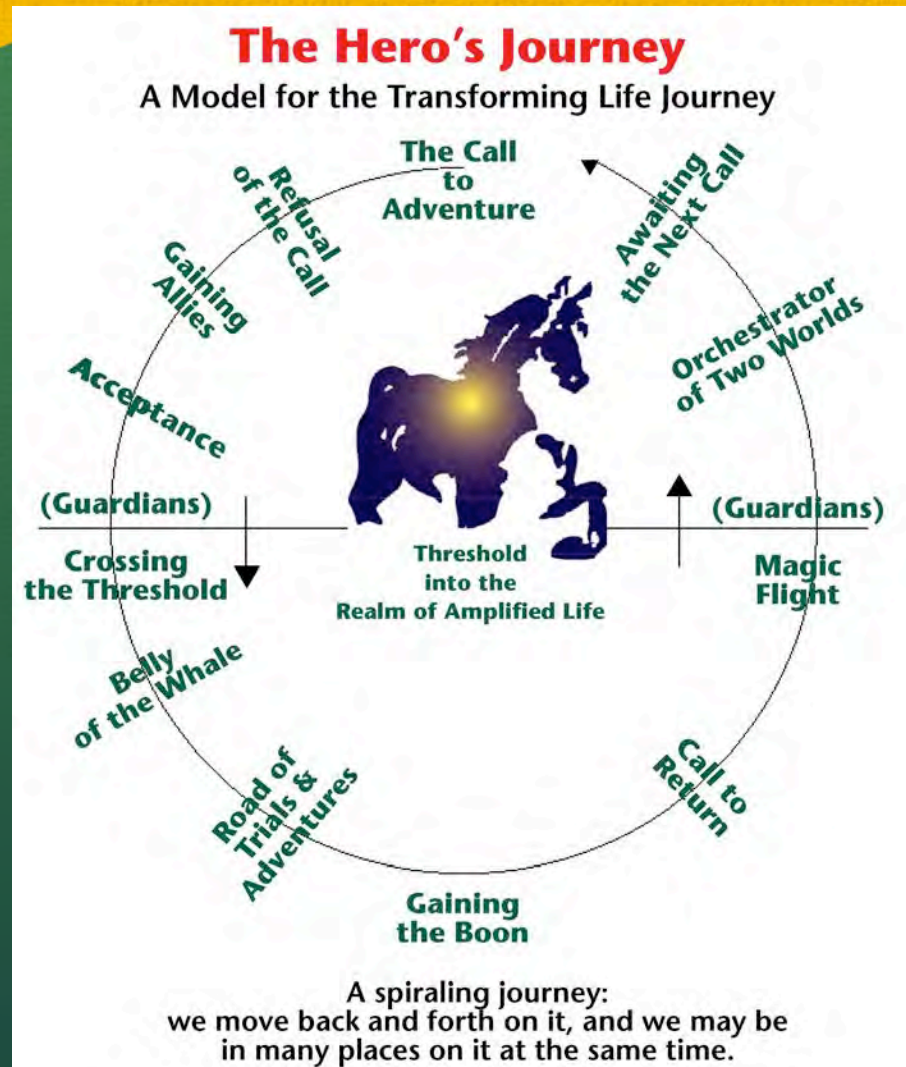
- **Head** <CREATIVITY>
Cognition
Thinking
Making Meaning
- **Heart** <COMPASSION>
Emotions
Values
Relationships
- **Gut** <COURAGE>
Core identity
Self-preservation
Mobilization

mBIT Roadmap to Wisdom



See mbraining.com for more on mBIT

Activities which Engage the Power of Story



#3 Assess Possible Activities

Assess your current curriculum and the plentiful, published curricula, from the standpoint of ethics and collaboration. How can you tweak exercises to accomplish the same goals, e.g. observing herd behavior, by designing activities which honor sentience?

#4 Commit to a Path of Personal Transformation

- Commit to a path with your horses of “personal transformation - going for the breakthrough, for the growth, the meaning and the miracles” for you and your clients (--Equine Alchemy)
- Work together as staff/volunteers to explore the work for yourselves.
- This points to the necessity of ongoing volunteer and staff training in the presence of horses.

Issues for Staff Training

- Everyone: develop curiosity and intelligence about your reactions to the issues of your clients and how they show up in your life.
- Horse handlers require extra training/experience to learn liberty work and its implications. Work in teams.
- Allow time after each session for group processing.
- Anchor therapeutic environment for horses and humans before clients arrive:
For instance, call in six directions.



21 Step Checklist

-The Horse Leads the Way, Honoring the Horse's True Role in Equine Facilitated Practice , Angela Dunning

- The horse has clearly indicated that he/ she is happy to undertake equine facilitated practice.
- The horse is regarded as a sentient being in his/ her own right.
- You seek to provide a service in equal partnership with your horse, offering an inter-species modality for the benefit of your clients and enjoyment of your horses.
- The horse has a choice about working or not on any particular day, and also which client/ s or not to work with as far as possible.
- The horse has a voice and it is listened to.
- The horse is kept well, healthy and fit enough to do this work, otherwise he/ she has time off.
- The horse lives out in a herd with sufficient access to company, shelter, food and water.

21 Step Checklist, continued

-The Horse Leads the Way, Honoring the Horse's True Role in Equine Facilitated Practice , Angela Dunning

- The horse's lifestyle is balanced with regular breaks, time off and opportunities to engage in other activities that he/ she enjoys.
- You work towards removing all forms of control and dominance in your relationships with your horses, including techniques and equipment and in your relationship approach.
- The horse's physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries are respected at all times.
- You trust your horse to carry out his/her role and do not interfere with his/her suggestions, feedback or actions unless safety become the priority.
- You pay attention to your horse's feedback at all times and strive not to ignore or override it.
- You carefully manage the ratio of number of people to each horse, to avoid overwhelming, pressuring or frightening the horse.
- You manage your own boundaries and avoid projecting your needs onto the horse.

21 Step Checklist, continued

-The Horse Leads the Way, Honoring the Horse's True Role in Equine Facilitated Practice , Angela Dunning

- You turn your horse out as soon as the session with the horse is finished.
- You hold the “sacred space of possibility” and teach all your group participants how to do this in order to ensure a calm, mindful environment for the horse to work in.
- You adopt a flexible approach, non-reliant on agendas and you keep your False Self in check.
- You are willing to be humble and defer to your equine partner's suggestions and lead.
- You are connected to your body, emotions and energy at all times to ensure congruency when working with your horse and adopt a mindful approach.
- Your work focuses on relationship with the horse at all times and this takes priority over task completion or outcomes and is not outweighed by benefits to clients.
- You support your horse's well being through a blend of veterinary care and holistic management using appropriate complementary therapies to maintain his/her health and balance.



The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

-- William Stafford

Resources

- *Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth.* David G Korten
- *The Horse Leads the Way: Honoring the True Role of the Horse in Equine Facilitated Practice.* Angela Dunning
- *The Compassionate Equestrian,* Allen M. Schoen, DVM, MS, and Susan Gordon
- Carolyn Resnick's blog: carolynresnickblog.com
- *Riding Into Your Mythic Life: Transformational Adventures with the Horse.* Patricia Broersma
- May 18, 2017 New York Times Magazine, Health Issue on Animals as Sentient Beings
- <http://fcmconference.org/img/CambridgeDeclarationOnConsciousness.pdf>
- *Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals,* Temple Grandin



Thank you!

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