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# Get Out!

An Occasional  
Newsletter from  
Think Outside



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## Communication and Team Development: Equine Assisted Course

“Perspective—trying to learn when to step back and look at the big picture,” one participant’s new understanding learned from our four hour Communication and Team Development: Equine-assisted Course on November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Another noted, “The similarities horses share with humans—personality wise. It shed light on how I act with people.” We spent four hours on Friday working with a small group of staff from West Virginia University, mostly from the Adventure West Virginia program. What a terrific group of folks! Their open hearts and minds led to a fun and insightful day.

We began by observing a group of four horses establishing their order and then leading participants into interacting with the horses both individually and as a group. This begs the question, “Why do we use horses and why is this kind of engagement effective?”

First of all, horses are prey animals and their survival has been dependent on understanding the intent of other animals, including humans. Throughout the day, the horses reacted toward the individuals, the group as a whole, and their needs. For example, when people initially went to meet each horse, most of the horses were engaged and interactive. However, later when a group of people who were “connected” together (by holding hands or touching shoulders, etc.) came to catch the horse or to move the horse toward a particular place in the arena, several of the horses became more difficult and unsure. Not only did this “group” look and move differently from a singular human, but this group was focused on getting something *from* the horse. The people were creating pressure for the horses and some of the horses were uncomfortable with this. This, in turn, led to a discussion about different personalities and different ways of approaching or working with people.

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Bring your team for a 4 hour communication and team development equine assisted workshop.

You can bring up to 12 people for the low introductory price of \$300.

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Secondly, horses have had a very long and close relationship with human beings and consequently are particularly good at reading our emotions. In one exercise, the group was working as a team to get horses into particular places within the arena. Even though the group was a team, the rules called for one person at a time to try to work the horse. Several things became clear throughout the exercise. Mainly, individuals who knew exactly what they wanted from the horse and came across with clear authority and communication were more likely to get the

particular horse to move. There were extreme differences in success. The horses were “reading” the individuals and their confidence and levels of assertiveness. Over time, several members of the group became more confident and consequently, had more success.

Finally, horse herd dynamics bare a remarkable resemblance to group behavior in human beings. As one participant noted in watching a group of four horses establish their order, “they are in the ‘storming’ phase of group development.” (This refers to Tuckman’s group development model which classifies phases of group development as forming, storming, norming and performing.) Becoming more observant of body language and practicing that observation technique with horses, whose body language is very clear, we can become better at understanding group dynamics. During one exercise, participants were tethered together as one body with different people playing the role of brain (and mouth), left and right hands, etc. In this connected state, the group had to catch, halter, “tie” and then saddle the horse. This exercise often brings out issues of engagement, clear communication and the ease of focusing in on a task and forgetting the big picture, including the feelings and perspective of the horse.



Another participant noted she was taking away “the complexity and depth of [an] experience with horses.” Bring your own team out to experience the fun and insight that can be gleaned from our three to four hour Communication and Team Development Workshop. We have special introductory rates, which are a screaming deal! Contact us for more information.

## Events in December

*Get Out in December!*

### **5th & 6th - Christmas in the Village**

*Spruce Forest Artisan Village - Grantsville*

Casually stroll through their candle-lit colonial village. Log cabin studios open, complimentary refreshments, creative holiday gifts, cookie art and storytelling, musical programs, live Nativity. Free. Contact: 301-895-3332.

### **5th, 11th, 12th, 19th - A Great Small Town Christmas**

*Town of Oakland*

Come to Oakland and experience a small town Christmas. Throughout the month, the town will have a variety of events including the Crowning of the Snowflake Queen and King, Kick-off parade with Santa, Garrett County Humane Society Fundraisers, Horse-drawn sleigh rides, Santa Shack, Workshops and and more! For more info contact 301.334.2691.

### **13th - Caroling to Shut-ins**

*Town of Oakland*

St. Paul's United Methodist Church. Contact: 301-334-2391.

### **13th & 14th - Wisp Resort's 54th Birthday Celebration**

*Wisp Resort*

Help us celebrate 54 years of skiing in Maryland with discounts on lifts tickets, rentals & lessons! \$. [www.wispresort.com](http://www.wispresort.com), 301.387.4911.

### **15th - Dogsledding (from 10:00 am - 12:00 pm)**

*Husky Power Dogsledding at Mountain Maryland Kennels, LLC*

Husky Power Dogsledding Home Kennels -three minutes from the lake in McHenry, 10 am to noon. Enjoy an educational and entertaining dogsledding presentation. Grill the mushers; see equipment; hug Huskies; watch films. No reservations needed this day. \$. [www.HuskyPowerDogsledding.com](http://www.HuskyPowerDogsledding.com), 301.746.7200.

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Natural challenges



that create new perspectiv



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