What is leadership? The Collins Concise dictionary defines the verb ‘lead’ as ‘to show the way (to an individual or a group) by going with or ahead’ – and ‘to cause to act, feel, think, or behave in a certain way; induce, influence’. In the last century, corporate leadership was largely about ‘command and control’, but the development of a knowledge economy, in which most physical processes can be automated, calls for a different style of leadership - transformational rather than transactional; inspirational rather than instructional.

In his bestseller ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (1995), Daniel Goleman offered proof of the importance of emotional and social factors in business success (explaining why it is that people with IQs of 160 end up working for people with IQs of 100 – people who happen to be more emotionally intelligent). In the book ‘Primal Leadership’ (2002) by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, the authors argue that the primal job of leadership is emotional. Great leaders ignite passion and inspire the best in their followers by working through the emotions.

Clearly, leaders need appropriate technical, professional and intellectual ability. In addition, good leaders also display emotionally intelligent behaviours, which have been summarised as:

- **Self-awareness** - knowing your own emotions; recognising feelings as they happen
- **Self-management** - managing your emotions; handling feelings in an appropriate way
- **Social-awareness** - recognising emotions in others; empathy, organisational awareness
- **Relationship management** - managing emotions in others; influence

Emotional intelligence is an area where the ‘knowing-doing’ gap can be painfully evident. We know the theory, and are aware of how we should behave – but can be hi-jacked in the moment by inappropriate emotional responses, which we may later come to regret.

How can emotionally intelligent leadership be learned? What experiences are available to those who want to develop their ‘EQ’ in order to lead more effectively? How can we hold up a mirror to the emotional energy which is constantly being expressed through our behaviour and body language?

This is an area in which ‘equine-facilitated’ or ‘equine-assisted’ programmes excel. Horses are extremely aware of, and responsive to emotional energy. Horses don’t lie; they don’t separate how they feel from how they act. The expression ‘what you see is what you get’ describes them perfectly. Whatever they feel – scared, confused, submissive, bold, relaxed, confident – they communicate through their actions, and as mirrors of emotional energy, they react to what they see and sense in us.

When people and horses interact, the horses sense - through the subtlest of signals – how the approaching humans are, both emotionally and physically. Our posture (body language) and tone of voice send signals to which the horses respond, either by inviting us into their space, or using cues to communicate their unease. Because horses are truly ‘in the moment’, the instant our behaviour changes (e.g. as a consequence of changing a thought, an image, a belief or an emotion), the horses’ responses also change. Horses are forgiving of mistakes and help us to learn. Responding to their feedback we can become more focused and aware, calmer and more confident, assertive without being threatening.
LeadChange has been running experiential programmes with horses since 2002, working with corporate executives and teams to develop their leadership, communication and team-working abilities. The following examples illustrate how this work relates to various aspects of EI and emotionally intelligent leadership (as described by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee). In all cases, names have been changed to maintain client confidentiality.

**Self-awareness**
Leaders with high self-awareness tune in to their inner signals, recognising how their feelings affect them and their work performance. They are congruent and authentic, tend not to take themselves too seriously, and are open to feedback about where and how they can improve. Accurate awareness of their abilities enables such leaders to be confident and play to their strengths; they often exhibit ‘presence’ – a level of self-assurance which makes them stand out in a group.

**Examples**
Peter requested coaching on his approach when meeting new clients. We set up an interaction in which Molly, a friendly mare, would represent (as a kind of living metaphor) one of Peter's potential clients. As Peter approached her, she took a few steps towards him – hesitated, stopped, then turned and walked away. I asked Peter what was going on for him that might have discouraged her from coming right up to greet him. He revealed that when he approached potential clients, he lacked confidence and had low self-belief (he was actually thinking 'they will see me as a fraud'). Molly's response made him aware of the negative energy he communicated through his thoughts and beliefs - and how this energy affected his client meetings. Through coaching, Peter let go of the negative patterns and connected with a sense of his identity as a capable, resourceful and trustworthy human being. Silencing the voice of his ‘inner critic’, and trusting in himself, he was able to make a strong connection with Molly – who then followed him happily around the arena.

Bernadette, a project leader, wanted help with a project which was not working for her. Her equine partner, Vince, represented the project; a successful outcome would be to have him follow her at liberty around the arena in a figure-of-eight pattern. Bernadette made a number of 'false starts' – taking steps towards her goal, but without Vince following. Coaching questions revealed that, both with Vince and this particular project, she was visualising failure instead of success. This was leading to a lack confidence and a low level of belief in her ability to achieve the result. When she visualised successful outcomes - seeing the project working, and seeing Vince walking with her – he immediately followed as she completed the figure-of-eight. The learning was simple: visualising a successful outcome builds confidence and belief to levels which makes achievement possible. Many of us accept this as a theoretical concept; working with Vince, Bernadette was given moment-by-moment feedback on the powerful energy she was able to create through visualisation.

**Self-management**
Emotionally intelligent leaders manage and channel their 'negative' emotions, maintaining focus and energy in the face of multiple priorities and conflicting demands. They are comfortable with the ambiguities of life in complex organisations, and demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in their responses to constant change. Leaders with high self-management have a positive outlook, take initiative to create opportunities and remain calm in stressful situations.

**Example**
Horses have been described as 'half-a-ton of emotional flight animal'; the ability to manage one's emotions around them is a definite advantage! Felicity, a horse owner, and executive in a global I.T. company, came on one of the very first LeadChange
events. She recognised her behaviour at work as tending to be ‘passive-aggressive’, and wanted to learn how to be ‘quietly assertive’. She went into a round pen with George, a highly sensitive Arab horse, and was asked to get him to trot. To help with the task, she was given a three-foot length of thin rope to wave behind the horse (without touching him). She started to swing the rope, at first gently, and then with increasing energy, until it was whirling around as fast as she could make it. George just ignored her - relaxing to the point of almost falling asleep, as if he knew that ‘she didn’t mean it’. I asked Felicity to step away from the horse, and coached her to a place where she could access what it means (and how it feels) to be quietly assertive; a place of ‘meaning it’, but without aggression. She approached George again, this time with the intention that he would trot, quietly swung the rope through 90 degrees (from hanging vertically to a horizontal position) – at which he immediately trotted smartly around the pen. She had discovered the power of managing her emotions in a way that made her powerful and effective without the need for aggression.

Social awareness
Socially-aware leaders tune in to a wide range of emotional signals, sensing the unspoken emotions of individuals and groups. Empathy enables them to see other perspectives, and feel what others are feeling. Such leaders detect social networks and read power relationships in teams and organisations.

Example
Our corporate team workshops combine team exercises and individual coaching. On a recent workshop, we asked a team of managers to lead three horses at liberty around the arena and between two upright poles. The team had a quick task-focused discussion on how to get the job done (this tends to be the typical approach taken by corporate teams in the UK), and proceeded to approach the horses. We paused the exercise and asked how everyone was feeling about what was happening. One team member confessed to being nervous at the idea of being close to the horses; this was creating a degree of anxiety which was evident to us (and the horses!), but was completely missed by the other, task-focused team members. A facilitated discussion followed on ‘task’ and ‘relationship’, and how the two need to be balanced in order to create high performing teams. This new awareness allowed the team to create appropriate roles (not everyone had to get close to the horses in order to achieve the goal), and to provide support for the team member who was less than comfortable. By the end of the day, she had, with the help of her colleagues, overcome her nervousness, and was enthusiastically interacting with the horses.

Relationship management
Inspirational leaders have compelling vision; they create resonance and a sense of common purpose; they are persuasive and influential change catalysts who recognise the need for change, and maintain good relationships whilst they challenge the status quo. Leaders with these skills manage conflict well, surfacing disagreements and redirecting energy towards common goals. They are both team leaders and team players, working in harmony with others for the good of the organisation.

Example
Nigel, A highly successful business coach came with his PA (who was also his wife) and support coach, for an experience with the horses. I asked if they operated as a team, and whether they would like a team exercise; the answer in both cases was ‘yes’. In the arena, I introduced them to Café, an imposing black horse, and asked them as a team to lead him at liberty around the arena. I had hardly finished this request, and Nigel was 20 metres away in the corner of the arena, with Café at his shoulder. His PA and support coach, still stood next to
me, turned to each other and said (in harmony) ‘He does this all the time!’ I invited Nigel back to the group for a discussion on the meaning of team. His initial response was ‘I need a team who can keep up with me!’ We explored the meaning and implication of the fact that he appeared to have a team that was not keeping up with him. He admitted that it ‘was a little lonely’ out there on his own and, thanks to Café, they were able to have an open and honest discussion about the relationship management skills they all needed to develop in order to become the kind of team they wanted to be.

For each area of emotional intelligence and emotionally intelligent leadership, we have many more examples of the power of learning experientially through interactions with horses. In the words of delegates on recent LeadChange programmes:

“\textit{The course has been a real eye opener for me and I’m sure collectively for the group as well. The ability to test the theory with immediate and true feedback is fantastic and sets you apart from every other development and coaching session I have attended.}"

“\textit{Approach with caution - there is nowhere to hide. It’s life changing!}"

Horse sense is, in a very literal way, a truly (emotionally) intelligent way to approach leadership development.

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