



Grant Black, Calgary Herald

Trainer Nancy Lowery, with horses Zoe and Sydney, says equestrian-based education and leadership development help executives and other staff see themselves in a new way.

## HORSE WHISPERING CREATES NATURAL LEADERS

Working with the animals reveals flaws, strengths

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

It's a uniquely western brand of leadership education, but it's a concept that's growing across North America as companies look for innovative ways to train staff in areas such as communication and confidence.

Nancy Lowery says equine-guided education — using horses to teach new skills to employees — strikes many people as a bit strange at first, until they take a session at her ranch just north of Calgary.

"People are really intrigued with how it works," says Lowery, founder of **The Natural Leader** near Balzac.

"There are a number of emotions involved with people when they get into stressful situations and fear is a huge one," says Lowery, "so we talk about different emotions you might be having with the horse and how that translates into your life at home or in work environments."

During a typical one-day seminar, participants do a series of tasks and activities with the horses designed to make people delve into their behaviour affects those around them, in this case, horses.

"I know my horses and

they all have their own unique personalities and characteristics," Lowery says. By the end of the day, most participants develop a clearer understanding of how they present themselves to co-workers and what ramifications that has in the workplace.

They can then start to modify their behaviours to obtain the desired outcomes.

The concept has been growing around Canada and the United States and is being used for other purposes, such as psychotherapy.

Lowery's efforts since starting the sessions in 2004 were so well-received it garnered the attention of University of Calgary professors.

"Fifteen hundred pounds of animal will mirror to you just how effective your style is more than we can do in any other way," says Elizabeth Scott, a program director in continuing education at the U of C.

The faculty recently adopted **The Natural Leader** training into its Emerging Leadership certificate program.

"I know the impact animals have if we pay attention," says Scott, who has studied snow monkeys and has a background in physical anthropology.

She says the entire field of animal-based education and training programs is growing as people seek more innovative, meaningful ways to make an impact at the corporate level.

"You take yourself out of the regular workplace and see what happens when you interact with something else and it becomes about open-

ness and trust," she says. "It's about seeing your own self."

Eric Mohan can attest to the effectiveness of the program. Now a consultant, he took his entire team of employees to the facility when he was working for **ConocoPhillips Co.**

"When I started bumping



**“We talk about different emotions you might be having with the horse and how that translates into your life at home or in work environments”**

NANCY LOWERY

into these equine-guided education programs to teach all kinds of sectors, even disadvantaged children, that's when I thought there might be something to this around building self-esteem and understanding patience," says Mohan.

He was right. His staff agreed it had a big impact around the need to provide a consistent message and establish an understanding of establishing healthy boundaries, while building relation-

ships with staff and external stakeholders.

"If you're not consistent with your message and show the horse — or your people — what your boundaries are, then there will always be miscommunication and difficulties," Mohan says.

Jokes aside — his employees asked him if he was going to start treating them like horses — Mohan says there were "a surprising number of 'Aha' moments."

Lowery conducts the sessions across the gravel road from her ranch at the **Wet Creek Stables** and offers a variety of formats, tailoring programs to the specific goals and objectives of companies.

She typically runs groups of between six to 20 people at a time on the indoor, heated arena floor. A classroom overlooking the arena acts as a starting point for personal assessments to reveal people's level of comfort and experience with horses, as well as their individual objectives.

Lowery didn't set out to launch the program, but rather stumbled upon the concept one day by chance. She brought in a "difficult" horse to her stable one day and, instead of heeding the advice of many trainers, who told her to get rid of it, she worked with it closely and "realized how much I learned along with the horse."

For the skeptics, Lowery says, simply "Give it a chance. It's about that whole understanding about how I perceive myself... and how other people may be presenting themselves," she says.

## True North strong and open for business

Warming may have a silver lining

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Barren and uninhabited, Hans Island is very hard to find on a map.

Yet, these days, the Frisbee-shaped rock in the Arctic is much in demand — so much so that Canada and Denmark have both staked their claim to it with flags and warships.

The reason: an international race for oil, fish, diamonds and shipping routes, accelerated by the impact of global warming on Earth's frozen North.

The latest report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says the ice cap is warming faster than the rest of the planet and ice is receding, partly due to greenhouse gases.

It's a catastrophic scenario for the Arctic ecosystem, for polar bears and other wildlife, and for Inuit populations whose ancient cultures depend on frozen water.

But some see a lucrative silver lining of riches waiting to

be snatched from the deep, and the prospect of time-saving sea lanes that could transform the shipping industry the way the Suez Canal did in the 19th century.

The U.S. Geological Survey estimates the Arctic has as much as 25 per cent of the world's undiscovered oil and gas. Russia reportedly sees the potential of minerals in its slice of the Arctic sector approaching a trillion U.S.

All this has pushed governments and businesses into a scramble for sovereignty over these suddenly priceless seas.

Regardless of climate change, oil and gas exploration in the Arctic is moving full-speed ahead. State-controlled Norwegian oil company **Statoil ASA** plans to start tapping gas from its offshore Snoehvit field in December, the first in the Barents Sea. It uses advanced equipment on the ocean floor, remote-controlled from the Norwegian oil boom town of Hammerfest through a 145-kilometre undersea cable.

Alan Murray, an analyst with the consulting firm **Wood Mackenzie**, said most petroleum companies are now focusing research and exploration on the Far North.

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