



The Natural Leader

She's the lead people whisperer and founder of The Natural Leader, a successful out-of-the-box business that uses creative and strategic programs, combined with horses, to teach the corporate sector both leadership style and communication skills. The path to financial viability has presented its share of challenges for owner, Nancy Lowrey, but her relentless passion and focus has offered up the reward of her lifetime – spending her days with horses.

Interview by INGRID SCHULZ

Photo by KRISTEN CUMMING

THE FIRST TIME I GOT TO RIDE a horse was when I was six. They saddled up a horse for me and sent me into the corral. As the owner admired my skill, she asked how long I had been taking riding lessons. My mother – a little surprised – offered it was the first time I'd ever been on a horse.

I SUSPECT I WAS RELENTLESS on my parents for a horse since that first ride. I got my first horse when I was in grade five. My dad was running for Liberal Leader in Alberta. He told me if he won, I could get a horse. My first words when he won were, "When do I get my horse?"

“Leadership is about relationships - you don't remember someone because they were good with spreadsheets, you remember them because of how you made them feel.”

I ALWAYS WANTED TO WORK WITH HORSES – it just took me a while to get here. I had a lot to learn before I took on building The Natural Leader as a business; 15 years as a project manager helped me do that.

WHEN IT COMES TO WORKING with horses it doesn't matter who you studied with, or what you know, it is about what you can demonstrate to the horse. I have had the privilege of learning from a number of horses. My horsemanship journey has complemented my leadership learning perfectly, they are mirrors of each other as the only thing I can truly control is how I respond and react.

WHAT CHALLENGED ME in the workplace were the same things that challenged me with my horses. Having a project manager background helped me transition - I could make a plan.

IT ISN'T ABOUT ANYONE ELSE, it's about who you are, how you show up and what you actually do.

I STUDIED DESIGN, but what I now realize it was a degree in critical thinking. A successful design is 10% idea and 90% execution - the 10% can be huge, but if you can't bring it to life it's just an idea.

I HAVE DABBLED WITH the Cowboy Challenge events. As a teen, I was totally into the hunter/jumper scene. To me, working cow horse and dressage both represent the highest form of horsemanship where the horse and rider are working as one.

EVERYTHING ABOUT HORSEMANSHIP and leadership are aligned, both are simple, neither are easy. Both require an awareness of how we influence what we want. Emotions can get in the way and impact either.

THE COOL THING IS the horse always figures out what the human needs to work on.

AS A PREY SPECIES, horses see all the options. Humans tend to focus on the goal. Getting from A to B may require that we try a few options before we arrive at the destination. While the destination may be the goal it is how you get there that determines if you ever want to work with that human again.

FORTUNATELY, I have a husband who has been 100% supportive. It has taken me 10 years to become an "overnight sensation." I have also had the great support of many fabulous people who believed in me, sometimes when I lost that belief.

THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN was very challenging as many prospects turned into no-go's very quickly. No one wanted to consider

"I continue to develop my horses; each horse teaches me something different about myself and what I need to learn. I have a few horses some folks have told me not to waste my time on when there are lots of great horses out there - the difference is for me, it's about what the horse has to teach me."

out-of-the box soft skills training when money was tight.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY Continuing Education department has been awesome; through a couple of years they were my reason to keep going. They believed in what the horses could offer people in their Emerging Leaders Program.

COST CAN BE MEASURED emotionally, financially and physically. The financial can weigh heavily on the other two. We had enough of a career start that we didn't lose the farm so to speak, but there were times when you figure - that roof - well, it will have to wait another year.

WHEN PEOPLE SAY they'd like to work with horses instead of people I often respond, "To be good with horses you have to be great with people." It doesn't matter which discipline you wish to pursue there is a human attached to every horse.

LEADERSHIP is about success through others - just like you can feel amazing when your horse does something simply perfect. You didn't teach him how to do that - you got out of the way and allowed it to happen.

BE PARTICULAR - decide what is it you want to do and focus on that. I've never heard of a dressage trainer who offers cutting lessons yet people who offer learning with horses will say they do it all - personal, therapy, women's programs, coaching, kids programs, corporate work. You simply can't be good at it all, and most importantly you won't enjoy it as much.

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE between certified and qualified - you have to earn it and own it. It has to be your story, knowledge and experience - not what you heard in a program. You have to be able to demonstrate that, and like horsemanship it's all pretty simple. It just doesn't mean it is easy.

I STILL WANT TO DO a TEDtalk - Schwung in the Workplace and maybe a book. I've self-published a number of e-books and try

to complete an article each month for my newsletter. Some months are easier than others.

I LOVE BOOKS THAT GET ME THINKING - I've enjoyed all Malcolm Gladwell's books and wish he'd been the professor in Sociology when I took it and dropped out of it. I read a lot of leadership-related books and have taken to seeking out the old books by the masters of horsemanship and also read books on how we learn and think. *Incognito* by Eagleman is a good one for that.

HAVING MY HORSES in my backyard is one of my greatest life achievements.

Natural Horsemanship with Glenn Stewart

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