



*A Year of
Great Expectation*



A Year of Great Expectation

A year begins with great expectations. It may be a resolution, a hope for better things to come or plans to change. A new year provides the opportunity to look forward and to reflect back on what we have accomplished.

Clearly defined and communicated expectations are the hallmarks of great leaders and successful teams. Sadly expectations can also be among our greatest failings when we expect a lot and sometimes forget to recognise the incremental.

Horses keep us honest in our expectations. When our skill, knowledge and experience lack they immediately let us know. They only ask for realistic and intentional expectations; in turn they aspire to meet them.

"A Year of Great Expectation" captures where I have extended my boundaries and tested and hopefully clarified - my expectations. Feel free to share this ebook: I will be honoured if you do.

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January 2011

***"Ideas that sound simple are often the hardest to apply
because they involve handling ourselves.
The test is in the application."***

*In appreciation:
Many of the images in this book have been captured
by my husband Chris Byron
A special thanks to Chris Jensen for her keen editorial eye*



Why Positive Change is Hard

At one time it was common to refer to breaking a colt. Many believed that you had to break the colt's spirit by trapping, restraining and making them comply with your requests. Fortunately, we have learned there are easier and safer ways to work with horses. Today you are more likely to hear someone refer to starting a colt, words that better illustrate the positive changes in behaviour we wish to create as we develop a relationship.

The saying "*make the right choice comfortable*" is a reflection of our learning. When we apply that concept in working with a colt, we adapt our behaviours to what we know about horses so being with us becomes a good experience and accelerates a horse's learning.

While we share the same fight or flight responses of the horse that are connected to the amygdala part of the brain, the same does not apply in our awareness of subtle changes in our environment. Unfortunately, it is our greater capacity to reason in the higher functions of the brain that gets in our way. Our ability to rationalize tends to clump detail into broad strokes often creating something far greater than it is. Rather than seeing a series of connected events or signals, we jump to the end result while conjuring up endless scenarios in the process, letting the 'what ifs' create a noise that drains our energy and drowns the opportunity for insight and awareness.

*Discover
the power of listening
through
the art of whispering*

Insight is the space required to understand, decide, recall, memorize and inhibit in order to make a change in our behaviour. It is the quiet place where we hear the signal above the noise and see the opportunity in change.

David Rock expands on the concept of why positive change is hardest in his webcast *"The New Science of Change – Connecting Leadership Development and Neuroscience."*¹ Rock defines thinking as energy intensive and suggests our brain's intrinsic goal is to avoid effort. Claiming the reason we so quickly connect to what is wrong with change is so we don't have to think.

Thinking requires effort, effort equates with discomfort, discomfort produces a level of uncertainty; uncertainty reduces our capacity to reason and tends to steer us back toward what is certain. It is this chain of action and reaction that makes it difficult for us to accept change, even when change is for the best.

Rock suggests we can rewire the circuits of our brain if we take just 10 seconds a day to focus on a positive outcome. The same concept we apply in working with a horse – breaking new information down into small repeatable bites - asking for one thing at a time and building on competence until actions become behaviours. It is these small bites of information we introduce when making parallels between horsemanship and leadership, communication or team learning. Because the horse so quickly mirrors our actions and reactions they become the perfect measure of how easily or how difficult we make adapting to change. In working with a horse an individual often discovers that quiet space for insight when they start to become aware of how their actions impact another being - insight that makes room for positive change.

Ray Hunt
"Make the right choice comfortable."



Big & Small - Siricco & Noah





Ray Hunt
**"If a person prepares ahead of time,
then he has lots of time to get the job done.
But if you wait until the last moment sometimes it's too late."**





Is there a Drama Queen on your Team?

E Ever worked with a drama queen? You know the one who has a knack for creating a crisis or constantly seems to be at the epicentre of chaos?

My drama queen? A 16-year-old female, the key difference just might be that my drama queen is a horse. Despite the years of experience, wisdom and leadership skill I have gained, Zoe is very good at sucking me into her emotional vortex. Always ready to teach me something new, Zoe recently pointed out my default to manager when she most needed a confident and clear leader.

It was a familiar ride down a road we have traveled a thousand times, yet every bush, sound and falling leaf became a serious distraction. I was so busy managing all the “Ya but’s” and “OMGs”, we surely would be in a froth by the time we hit the small stand of aspens a kilometre into the ride.

As the emotion of frustration rose, it dawned on me--Zoe was doing exactly what she ALWAYS did, and I was responding just as I always had. I was so busy managing and worrying about another exhausting ride that I was blind to what I was doing in the moment.

Buck Brannaman
***“Horsemanship is difficult because it requires
that we work on ourselves.”***

Thinking back on all the horsemanship tips and leadership knowledge I have gained, many things came to mind. One thought that rang true was *“the horse will keep you busy if you don’t keep her busy”*. It was my job to get her focused – I had to have a clear vision for both of us. I had to find something more compelling to help her be successful. As I started asking questions, the frantic jig turned into sidepassing, backing and repeating patterns. We stopped, teetered back and rolled over on the haunches each task bringing us ever closer to that terrifying stand of trees. The occasional distraction reappeared, but when her head bobbed up and her neck stiffened I found something new and we started the whole process again.

The ride that began with my feeling like I needed every ounce of my strength was changing. As Zoe started to see a purpose to my requests she engaged with her responsibilities. She started finding the answers to my questions with less and less effort. The ride became less like work and more enjoyable, for both of us. We were beginning to dance to the same tune.

In the midst of that foreboding stand of trees I could feel her look to me for direction. With the lightest go forward request, we moved off. From the road we traveled onto the quarter section stubble field. We circled at a walk, trot and a lope, the open space no longer daunting. She was soft, we backed turned and then the biggest reward of all, we walked home, loose reins swinging in time with her stride.

As a manager she had kept me busy, as a leader I had a vision that gave her a focus and together we accomplished far more. Here’s to recognising the drama queen on your team can actually help you be a better leader!

Cowboy Wisdom
“The art of conversation is knowing when to shut the heck up!”



Me & my Drama Queen - Zoe



Franz Mairinger
***"To sit still, we must develop near perfect body control,
... developed only through a relaxed and supple mind...
Be firm, still, and balanced in order to give consistent aids.
Prepare yourself and be calm in mind and body."***





Ray Hunt

"You can be good around horses, but to be a good horseman, you have to be around good horsemen."



Believable Moments

*E*ver had one of those tangible moments when you actually believe that others believe in you?

Of all the leadership challenges, belief in self often remains our greatest limiting factor. We can spend a lot of time reading and learning but it is in the moment second guessing ourselves that stops us from applying our knowledge to take the risk and make that next step.

That would be the emotional part of our brain sabotaging the rational holding us back from something we have the skill, knowledge and experience to manage. Seth Godin calls that “The Lizard Brain – the prehistoric brainstem that all of us must contend with” referring to it as the part that “doesn’t like being laughed at”.

Rhys, the horse who continually creates memorable moments for me, offered another one today. It was the linchpin¹ in our relationship. I used the word tangible to describe the moment because it left behind a glow, an actual feeling. Well at least that is how it seemed to me.

I was on Rhys in the outdoor ring, checking out where we were both at before heading out on a ride. Zoe, my other best teacher, surely must have decided it was time for my next lesson. She rallied the herd to head to the back field. Heads up, tails flying,

Joe Walter
***“The horse needs to feel like you are draped over her back,
not clothes pinned.”***

bodies rushed past the rails of the corral from two different directions and disappeared over the hill. My first thought was “I should get off.” For those who have experienced the magnetic affect a leaving herd can have on a horse you will understand that thought. My next thought was “I can manage this, I have the knowledge and skill to get through this. Rhys we have been through a lot together this shouldn’t be a problem – let’s work through this.”

Rhys was concerned that the others had left, but as soon as I asked him to get busy he was visibly relieved that I was still there. When a horse blows through their nose it can be a huge physical and mental release for them. That was what he offered me. We spent a few more minutes in the arena to confirm he was connected to me and not the long gone herd, and then headed in the opposite direction to the stubble fields a section of land to the north of us. Our part of the world is currently a construction zone – an old wellsite is being remediated and the County is putting a water line down the road we live on. Not counting the steady stream and rumble of dump trucks there are no less than nine major pieces of equipment and one generator droning away all day, it is noisy and disruptive. It has become a perfect training ground.

I couldn’t have imagined taking Rhys past a backhoe even a few months ago, but today I believed we could. It was the best ride we have ever had. I believe Rhys is a completely different horse. What has changed however is me.

1- The linchpin – a locking pin that holds the wheel to the axel or the name of Seth Godin’s new book.

Tom Dorrance
“You are trying to help the horse...use his own mind.

...present something and then let him figure out how to get there.”



Noah, Monster & Gabriel





Chris & Jack

Nuno Oliveria

***"There are two things in riding, technique and soul.
The soul part is what we have nearly lost today and must put back"***



Lindsey & Zoe - Horse Sense to Teen Smarts



Nice vs Effective

My work is focused on being effective. Whether I am starting a colt, coaching a student of horsemanship or facilitating a corporate retreat I try to be effective with my communication so I see a demonstrated change in a behaviour. Being effective ranges from saying something in a different way to saying nothing at all. I hope throughout the experience the horse, the human or the team also see me as someone they wouldn't mind spending time with.

The single greatest challenge I have encountered with people who are working to improve either their horsemanship or leadership capacity is helping them develop a clear understanding of the difference between natural and effective, nice versus respected and assertive instead of aggressive. All basically the same thing from three different perspectives.

Many adherents to natural horsemanship have difficulty discerning between nice and effective methods of applying that philosophy. Natural, for some reason, has been translated into nice, soft and quiet and their horse literally loves them to death. When the human begins to recognize what they are doing doesn't appear to be working they continue to think in the same way so seek out a natural, gentle, gimmick, of which there are thousands. The end result: yet another way to not be clear on what you are asking nor getting the respect required.

***"The difference between wishing, hoping and doing
is effective communication."***



In horsemanship an intention has to translate through our body language for a single clear result. Sometimes we just need to speak, non-verbally, a little louder in order for our cues to be perfectly clear and then we can go back to a whisper. While we may talk about partnerships with our horse in reality we are looking at a benevolent dictatorship at best – we want the horse to want to excel and want to be with us, but sometimes our leadership style requires that we stand firm until we see the intended result.

Which is why for me there is such a direct correlation between the qualities required for both a good horseman and a good leader. There are few, if any, shortcuts to the ideal image of you and your horse or you and your team. I've listened to so many people talk about how well they get along with everyone at work, in one breath and then express complete exhaustion in the next. Sometimes being plain nice isn't enough, it requires that you be effective.

For leadership to be effective it may mean changing how you approach a situation, employing a different leadership style. Being nice about a difficult conversation is rarely effective as chances are you won't say what needs to be said. What I continue to marvel at is as a person realizes the horse's behaviour will adapt to what they present, as they become more effective, they begin to see they are the source of the solution. To use a well-worn phrase, they feel empowered to make a change in their own leadership style in order to be more effective in what they do. There are many great reference tools out there books, programs, coaches. Find what helps get you unstuck so you can see a change in your habits and the behaviours of others – so you don't feel that people, too, are loving you to death.



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Meeting Expectations

The Natural Leader has transformed my definition of work. Doing work I love has transformed my life. I often hear “*you are lucky to be doing what you love*” and while I admit that is true, I have never worked so hard at being lucky.

There is no way to truly define expectations when you start your own business. I have met many, fallen short of others and continually redefine what it is I will be able to achieve. Facilitating, coaching, riding, writing and simply being all require that I am realistic about the expectations I define for myself and others. The promise I have made to myself is to finish what I start and live up to what I can deliver.

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Along with the corporate programs she delivers. Nancy started four 3-year-old colts; produced a monthly newsletter & (almost) weekly inspiration; began sketching again; launched Creating Exceptional Leaders through Learning with Horses a facilitators guide to delivering The Leadership Challenge©; delivered two conference presentations; ran the first Yoga for You & Your horse program; hosted a series of youth from the Rotary Stay-in-School program; co-facilitated three programs through The University of Calgary; added four new corporate clients and two new horses to the herd; on top of the day-to-day of feeding, trimming & working with seventeen horses.