



Conversations with a Horse and a Coach

“Horses & Pathfinders Center for Equine-Guided Education, Coaching & Leadership” reads the business banner on the red barn overlooking a bend in the Mad River. Equine-guided education is a type of horse-as-guide leadership experience with a focus on insight and inspiration for groups and individuals. Easy to say, but what does it mean?

An early autumn visit with Lucinda Newman reveals a wealth of knowledge and experience about people, spirit, and horses that she works with as a path of guidance toward personal and corporate leadership solutions.

“I’ve been doing this since early 2005. “I love the work I do with people, seeing the transformations they go through and the light in their eyes when they are in communication with the horse,” says Newman. “It’s quite satisfying to help people find what works for them as an individual to break through barriers and move forward whether in a team, a partnership or as an individual. The awareness,

connections and transformations just naturally unfold.”

Equine-guided education is an on-the-ground process of learning about oneself, what motivates, inspires, and allures us. It’s also about exploring the obstacles we face in old belief systems then finding the deeper layers of truths and options for free choice of paths that we carry with us.

“Horses intuit the truths of the individuals they work with,” Lucinda says. “Our emotions, intentions, character and thoughts carry energy and quality of presence, and horses have evolved over thousands of years of interactions with humans to tune in to that energy and presence and respond to it. Because they are animals, they are completely grounded in the present moment – they don’t drag old stories into their lives because those old stories don’t serve them in the present. That gives them a knack for helping us to engage in the present, as well.”

A horse is very aware of its spatial relationship to other creatures around

it and can place a hoof, a muzzle, or a tail with precision. “Equine-guided education is a process of learning about oneself, namely what has heart and meaning, and it’s a process of practicing to be a better self-leader for the sake of one’s self, partner, community and the world.

Lucinda starts the session in the barn talking about the stages of growth and inquiry an individual might go through to address the needs he came to examine. It’s a deepening descent process involving curiosity, questioning, exploring possibilities, offering solutions, evaluating, and questioning again. Each individual who comes brings a different concern or need, and in many cases he comes with an underlying need that is more genuine and less examined than the one he thought he came with.

“I’m not a therapist, and I’m not the expert on their issue,” says Lucinda. “I’m the facilitator and coach; I’m here to help them through the process of finding their deeper truths to their questions. The horse is the guide, able to provide honest feedback and responses; they really know it when someone is saying something that isn’t entirely true – even if the individual mostly doesn’t consciously realize it. They respond in some pretty interesting ways.” For example, when someone isn’t being truthful or goes into an old story that doesn’t serve well anymore, the horse may give a graphic response, turning their back to deposit a pile of manure on the ground directly in front of the client.



While we talked about how the process works and looked over the notes on the flipchart Lucinda uses as she talks with her clients about the process upon which they have embarked, the back door of the barn was open to overlook the slope and river.

"A horse needs to be in a continual, 360 degree awareness of the natural surroundings: the edge of the woods, the ground leading there, the interior of the woods. This is where they spend most of their time, and they don't take it for granted. They know their fears and know how to deal with the unknown. As for humans, well, we could all use more of that awareness and presence in our lives. Horses are a great model for it. And just being more attuned with nature has a way of healing our spirits and recycling our spent energy and emotions."

We headed outside to the pen. It overlooks a valley with fields leading down to the merging of the Mad and Winooski rivers, and on both sides the slopes are bordered by trees. Beyond the confluent rivers the mountains rise, layer upon layer, wooded and serene. It's here that Lucinda asks her clients to talk through their purpose for being here, and gently begins the process to delve under the surface of that stated purpose to find the answers they are seeking.

The search for answers is rarely easy; sometimes people get emotional, sometimes they want to stop at a critical moment. But Lucinda compassionately coaches them on as though it is now or never. The feeling, she says, is sometimes like coming through the eye of a needle. While the horse and the client are in the pen together, Lucinda observes the horse's behavior, watching for the interaction the horse chooses to make with the human. Everything the horse does carries meaning, whether it's a nuzzle, a soft glance, releasing tension through a yawn or turning his back on a client. They are honest reflectors and constant communicators. Our own body language and energy are clear to them.



Lucinda Newman's satisfaction comes from seeing a client's self-transformation that accompanies her horsemanship programs.

Photos courtesy of Lucinda Newman

If a horse senses that a human is being less than forthcoming, it may turn around and make it graphically obvious that it feels the client is full of it. Other times, such as when a horse bolts around a ring for no apparent reason, it is less clear and Lucinda may work with a client to get to the root of the horse's uneasy response to some internal incongruity. The nonverbal communication the horse uses leaves behind the traditional conversational aspects of introspection and life coaching and brings an immediacy and integrity to the questions the client is there to answer.

It's an exhausting session for both horses and humans, yet it's also exhilarating, and worth the time spent. The client leaves with new practices, insights to reflect upon, and renewed curiosity, inspiration and goals.

Horses & Pathfinders is an equine-guided education and coaching center in Central Vermont offering a leading edge, transformational experience based on self-mastery principles and practices. Horses and coach work with individuals and groups who: are eager to move to a higher level of functioning; seek focus, strategy and motivation; ask "how to" questions; and are interested in designing their future, learning new skills and seeking more balance in their lives.

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