



Horses, Heart and Kentucky's Unbridled Spirit:

“United We Stand Divided We Fall” Galloping Toward a Better World

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*And Spirit grasped a handful of southerly wind,
Blew breath over it and created the horse...Virtue bound in the hair of the forelock,
A gaze from the depths of dream,
Given the power of flight without wings*
— Bedouin Tale

What does “**Kentucky Unbridled Spirit**” mean?
“**Kentucky** is a place where spirits are free to soar and big dreams can be fulfilled. We relish competition and cherish our champions for their willingness to push beyond conventional boundaries to reach new heights of success.”
The horse is the central image in the Kentucky brand and is at the very heart of

Kentucky culture and daily life as a symbol of strength, dreams, resiliency, and forward movement.

Change is all around us and for many of us within us, as well. Now, more than ever, we need the ability to be resilient.

What is Resiliency?
“Resiliency is that ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes.” Psychology Today

Resiliency is born in the heart and we all have it. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned, developed, and practiced by anyone. One of the ways we can cultivate and experience our natural internal resiliency is in relationship with our horses and within the

resilient realm of nature.

Masters of resiliency, horses trace their lineage back over 65 million years. Horses have embodied resiliency for generations, thriving inherently through changing life conditions by:

- Being united as they stand steady and galloping forward as one
- Responding with a big heart and brave *sense-ability*
- Being optimistic and present to the moment
- Adapting effectively and efficiently to change
- Seeking safety, belonging, and connecting as a herd

How might we learn from the unbridled spirit of the Kentucky horse (and all our horses) about developing resiliency and come galloping through unprecedented personal and global changes stronger, better, and more resilient?

How might we be inspired by the resiliency of our horses to gallop unbridled beyond conventional boundaries to reach new heights of success?

United We Stand Divided We Fall

Resiliency: Horses are united as they stand steady and gallop forward as one

Horses stand steady, their hooves on the earth, aware of each other and their surroundings, ready to move as one should the need arise. Watching a herd of horses in the field on a peaceful morning it is common to see several horses napping on the ground with one or more horses standing guard over them. We might notice them touching each other in friendship or nipping to get one another moving. One horse discovers sweeter grass or shade on a hot day and the herd moves together to the next best place to be.

If the herd is quietly grazing and one horse senses danger, maybe a coyote slinking through the field or a loud unexpected noise, the message is passed instantly through the herd from one horse to the other and they all move as one. Watching over and out for one another and by moving together, the herd escapes danger and moves safely. The survival of each horse in the herd depends on them uniting into a strong resilient herd and the well-being of the herd depends on the resiliency of each individual horse.

The great state of Kentucky motto, “*United we stand, divided we fall*”, captures this resilient spirit of the horse. The seal of Kentucky depicts two men, one in buckskin, and the other in more formal dress. The men are facing each other and clasping hands. The outer ring of the seal is adorned with the words, “Commonwealth of Kentucky”, and within the inner circle is the state motto, “*United we stand, divided we fall.*”

How might we be better prepared and able to



Photos courtesy of Spirit of Leadership

successfully navigate our challenges if *we* lived more like the resilient Kentucky horse and according to the Kentucky motto?

Resiliency: Horses have a big heart

This is literally true – an average horse heart is about seven times as large as a human heart and weighs (on the average) seven to nine pounds compared to a half pound human heart.

Thoroughbred horses' hearts weigh an average of nine to eleven pounds, while the "wonder horse", Secretariat, had a heart that weighed 22 pounds.

The scientific research of the Heartmath Institute has measured the electromagnetic field from a horse's heart extending out to a range of 40 - 50 feet or more, while the human heart was measured extending out only 8-10 feet.

Heartmath research has demonstrated that a horse's most natural state is one of

"coherence", where the mind and heart are connected, and the intelligence of the heart takes the lead. Horse hearts and human hearts have more neurons than our brains and take in essential information from our senses. However, unlike horses, who listen primarily from the intelligence of their heart, we humans override our heart intelligence in favor of our mind. Horses, in their most natural state, live in heartfelt calm and harmony with themselves, their herd mates and their environment, allowing for resiliency, agility, and adaptability.

Most of us can remember a time hanging out with our horse in the pasture, riding comfortably along a trail, or sitting curled up in the stall with them while they munched hay. Magically, any stress and worry melted away, our negative thoughts and anxiety disappeared.

In the presence of the horse, and the coherence and



harmony of their big hearts, we can feel the compassion of our heart towards ourselves and others, and a sense of inner calm and well-being.

How might our human relationships and relationships with our horses be more satisfying - if we lived like our horse buddies with their compassionate big hearts - not judging or criticizing, but simply accepting ourselves and others as we are? Can we create, in our human and horse herds, resilient heartfelt relationships of respect, trust, and maybe even love?

Resiliency: Horses live in the present moment rather than the past or future

Horses' natural state is always in the present moment, not looking over their shoulder with regret to the past, or out beyond the present to fears of the future, but optimistic that there is always a way out of a difficult situation. Being present-centered and aware of the world around them prepares them to be resilient; their choices and actions relevant to the moment, and

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prepared for challenge, change, and opportunity.

In the presence of the horse we can slow up, calm down, and come to our senses - being present to our inner resources and what really matters to us. There are many things horses can teach us about living in the truth and honesty of the present moment. In this way, being fully present with the horse, we can feel deeply connected and tuned in to our horse and we can also tune into what is happening within ourselves as well.

Margo, a well-respected attorney and executive vice president of a successful global company, was in love with horses as a girl. She spent long hours playing, talking, and hanging out with her pony. She intuitively knew her most precious secrets were safe with her pony, Lucky, as his were with her.

Margo came to our ranch for executive coaching and to think through some important professional life choices. She came seeking my guidance as a coach, but knew that she was most clear thinking and feeling around horses, and so chose Tess, our Shetland pony, as her coach to support her through her dilemma.

Margo, like Tess, the pony, is small in height but big in

her authentic presence and her influence in the herds of her life.

In the good company of Tess and the open space of the pasture, Margo was able to think more clearly, listen to her heart, and tap into her intuition - all ingredients found in resilience. Margo reflected to me:

“Surprisingly, in the presence of Tess, the questions that emerged from within me were not the ones I came with. Initially, my questions to Tess were, *how can I be more effective in my work, have less stress, and how can I be a more effective and smarter boss in my law department?*”

But looking into Tess’s compassionate eyes and stroking her soft body, I found myself asking deeper and more personal questions, *What do I want my life to be about, what makes me happy, and how can I best use my talents for good?*

Tess seemed to know when I was being ‘authentically me’ even before I did...

I sometimes forget who I am - moving too fast, losing myself in the future, or moving too slow - dragging my feet in the past.

Tess, in her *horse sense* way, reminded me to stay present **now**, listen with more patience and empathy, and move slowly and balanced in complex and sensitive situations.”

Human relationship with horses, like Margo’s

relationship with her pony, Lucky, and her “pony coach”, Tess, can be traced back to ancient drawings captured on cave walls 25,000 years ago in France, and to the legends and stories of ancient tribal cultures throughout the world. Today, in our hearts, the horse still prances and our love affair with horses continues. Horses inspire our dreams and creativity, carry us farther and faster than we can travel alone, and bring us closer to our instinctual and authentic nature.

Horses carry us over the rough terrain of life and enable us to explore and move beyond our previous limitations. They operate from an authentic, inherent, and collective intelligence, and they can guide us to that place of wisdom within ourselves.

Resiliency, adapting effectively and efficiently to expected and unexpected change, is more than bouncing back - it is galloping forward to the next best place to be.

Like resilient horses in their herds we can tap into our resiliency, moving beyond our current reality, creating the conditions for our best possible future to emerge, and then be there to greet it.

Resiliency: Seeking safety, belonging, and connection as a herd

Seeking safety

We share with our horses

three basic needs: the need for safety, the need to belong, and the need for connection. Resiliency ensures that horses and humans have the capacity to meet these basic needs, especially in times of challenge and change.

Horses ensure their safety by paying attention and being aware of what is happening around them, moment to moment. Calm, relaxed, and alert - they are ready and prepared to take appropriate action as needed. My heart is warmed watching our herd when one or two of the horses “stand guard” over the other horses out napping or relaxing in the field on a sunny day.

In our herd, no horse is left behind. One of the herd members (usually our zebra) waits for the slower horse to join the herd, or safely accompanies a horse returning to the trough for water.

Horses are gifted with innate emotional wisdom, and listen to language beyond words. The language of the horse is “body”, and free from a rational thought process - they can directly perceive reality and respond honestly.

The herd responds to the messages carried by the scents in the wind and also vibrations of movement from the earth - through their hooves and jaw bones. They read the subtle and not-so-subtle body language of each other and the other creatures that come

into their world, including humans. Horses are affected by our moods and emotions, our stress, nervousness, anger, or calm - as well as our peacefulness and joyfulness. Horses have an amazing ability to resonate with our true emotions and reflect to us our authentic self. This transparent, honest, and unbiased response and feedback offers us the

uneasy and often will walk away from us. When we remove the mask of incongruity - when we are who we say we are, and do what we say we will do - the horse visibly calms, relaxes, and often moves toward us. In this way, horses mirror our authentic selves and provide in-the-moment feedback about our thoughts, body language, and actions.

challenges us - in relationships and in organizational life - is beyond words and rational thought. Embodied language and the space of silence are key factors when engaging in a direct meeting with horses and with people.

In silent encounters with our horses, the quiet frees us from the chatter of inner and

behaviorally in a variety of ways that allows them to survive and thrive. Our modern form of humanity has evolved for about 200,000 years and we have had relationships with horses going back a mere 6,000 years.

Adaption is an evolutionary process, in our horses and in us, to be able to live successfully within our



opportunity to experience ourselves with more clarity, and adjust our thoughts, feelings, and behavior to be better horse and human partners.

Horses register incongruence; it is one of the skills they use to stay safe. When we are not congruent (not authentic) with ourselves or with them, they become

Emotion is information which registers through their entire bodies. A horse maintains its integrity - using only as much force and energy as necessary in the moment. When there is conflict within the herd it is appropriate to the time, place, and situation - and when it is over, it is over.

As humans, much of what

outer voices, the sounds of computers, and telephones. As we enter silent dialogue with horses, we also enter quiet dialogue with ourselves.

Resiliency: Adapting effectively and efficiently to change

Horses have evolved over more than 65 million years and have adapted physically and

changing environment. The process of adapting occurs over many generations - and the better the horse and the human adapts - the better the chance for survival. Adaption might be physical or behavioral traits learned from experience, instinct, or inherited from past generations.

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Research has shown that horses have adapted to climate change by getting smaller. During extreme periods of global warming, it appears that some horses decreased in size by about 44 percent, but gained back approximately 76 percent of their size after the end of the global warming era.

In addition to size, the horse has adapted by changing physically in many ways:

- elongating its legs to run from predators
- altering its molars to live on scrub grass
- hair length that changes according to season
- large eyes on the side of their head to see a wide perspective
- ears to hear everything around it
- a long neck to raise its head high to be aware of what is coming
- nostrils to smell danger
- developing hooves that can dig for water
- the ability to sleep standing up

All of these physical adaptations allow horses to identify danger and run from it, rather than confront and fight.

Instinct and intuition are essential for the horse's survival. They have a direct perception of reality in the present moment, independent of rational process. Horses are invaluable because they help us develop and trust our intuition, an internal resource that can guide us in adapting effectively and efficiently within a changing social and physical environment.

Many of the behavioral problems we attribute to our horses are behaviors that have helped them survive for millions of years.

Some of the behaviors of horses which cause concern in their relationship with us - like quick reactions and running first and thinking later, are simply the horses' adapting over generations to its natural environment - even though our horses may not live in the environment.

Maybe, we too, like our horses, are doing our best to adapt, survive, and thrive in the

uncertain and unpredictable changing conditions of our personal lives and world.

Belonging

A sense of belonging is the feeling of being connected and accepted within one's family, community, and one's herd. Belonging asks us to accept ourselves just as we are - and others as they are.

Horses are social animals with a strong instinct to bond and "herd" together.

In a herd everyone belongs, everyone is essential, and everyone matters. Being left out of the herd is a core survival issue.

Most often, people bring horses into the human world. Entering the world of "horse and herd" as their guests is a unique opportunity to experience a culture of shared leadership, relational responsibility, and more than verbal communication. We can then reflect on the human cultures we create with more awareness and intention.

Margaret Mead approached visiting a culture as a respectful guest.

She would go to the edge of the culture and wait for an invitation from a member of the culture to enter. She would set up camp and patiently wait for the invitation, that might take weeks or months, and when it came they would be invited into the heart of the culture and there would be an exchange of gifts of value.

Generally, with horses the process unfolds in the moment, if the engagement is with *sense-ability*, respect, and a genuine and willing curiosity to engage.

Lisa attended a workshop on horses and teambuilding at our Ranch. After spending time with the horses in the herd at natural liberty, all choosing when to engage and with whom to engage, Lisa said it was one of the few times she felt she belonged, and the first time she felt that she belonged on her team.

The teambuilding activity that Lisa did with the horse and her human herd we call, *Finding Your Place of Belonging in the Herd*.

We ask people to explore

the question,

Where are your places of belonging?

We invited people to explore a variety of places of belonging - or not belonging - within the now "human and horse herd" wandering around the field.

The suggestion was to:

Wander around in the field of the horse herd and human herd

Pause where you sense or feel you belong or your place of belonging.

Get the feel of where you are. What do you notice about the external landscape and internal landscape?

Make a change, wander around in the field of the horses, and pause. Get the feel of where you are.

What do you notice about the external landscape and internal landscape?

Make a third change, wandering around in the field of the horses, and pause.

Get the feel of where you are. What do you notice about the external landscape and internal landscape?

Where did you feel most at home, comfortable, and authentically you? What place was a "stretch" and why?

What can you take with you from this experience to your home and work field?

You might want to try this with your horses and herd. Where do **you** feel most like you belong?

Relationship is primary in the herd; a non-adversarial, harmonious relationship based on shared trust, communication, understanding, and a complete acceptance of the importance of each member's place in the herd. There is care, compassion, and respect for all, and everyone is valued for their unique abilities. The survival of each herd member is dependent on the well-being of the herd, and the survival of the herd is dependent on the well-being of each of its members.

They live in groupings, and

move toward relationship.

Being left out of the herd is a core survival issue.

As members of the herd they do not blindly follow, but manifest their unique positions and individuality and fulfill their special position in the herd. When a horse knows its position and is supported by the herd in maintaining its place, anxiety in the individual horse and in the herd is low or nonexistent, while uncertainty of position creates high anxiety. There is generally one lead mare that has been entrusted with leadership by the herd, who will follow her absolutely, and challenge her continually.

Horse personality is usually friendly and generous, so they make a lot of both horse and human friends.

Horses do not care what kind of car we drive, how much money we make, or how many university degrees we hold. They want only to know how you will be with them. Are you fair and just? Kind and compassionate? Are you lively and fun, clear, purposeful, honest, and trustworthy? Will you listen to their needs and forgive their honest mistakes?

What does it take to belong in your horse's life or in your horse herd

Just ask your horse.

Engaging with horses challenges us to learn *how* to think rather than *what* to think. The awesome beauty and inherent power of horses influences people in incredible ways. Horses have maintained much of their wild nature. They are large and powerful, so their presence creates a natural opportunity to face challenge and develop confidence. In relationship with horses, we learn to summon our own moment-to-moment calm, strength, focus, respect, and trust. We can explore and move beyond our previous limitations into freedom of choice. This experience is directly transferable to our family and

work relationships.

In the good company of our horses we can find our hooves, as united we stand with courage, opening our hearts with compassion - and finding our place of belonging.

For generations horses have carried us farther and faster than we could travel alone. Today, horses can guide us to find our way through the challenging terrain of our lives.

Horses, Heart and the Resilience of Kentucky Unbridled Spirit: "United We Stand Divided We Fall" Galloping Toward a Better World

Horse hoof prints and human footprints--- together we gallop forward. In the awesome presence of these majestic beings, we meet ourselves in an expanded sense of freedom and awe. In relationship with horses we can discover our legacy and experience the grace of being human. ♦

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