

# Why talk to a guru...

## ...when you can whisper to a horse?

Caitlin Collins meets leadership coach Paul Hunting and a mare called Maddie

I'm not here to make you happy. Nor am I remotely interested in whether or not you like me,' says the fierce old man, scowling down like a thundercloud from his exalted position on a high throne. Sitting in the front row, I am terrified! I can't imagine anyone not caring whether people liked them or not. The lama pauses, surveying the quaking rabbits in front of him; then continues more gently: 'I'm here to help you to realise your own true nature. That's what's important.'

This episode took place in a Buddhist temple some 20 years ago. I was reminded of it recently, meeting big black Maddie in a session of horse-assisted transformational coaching with Paul Hunting.

### Sensitivity

Expressing our true nature requires us to step outside the conventional barter system of trying to please and wanting to be liked, the learned hypocrisy that prevents our truly honouring either ourselves or another person. Horses are extremely sensitive to human incongruence or hypocrisy; they don't like it and they will tell us so. They have an extraordinary capacity to respond purely to others' intentions. Maybe this comes from the fact that as prey animals, their survival depends on their ability to perceive the intentions of a predator. Wild equines such as zebras will continue grazing calmly as a lion strolls by within a few yards; they know the lion is just out for a walk. The same zebras will bolt instantly from a lion they perceive to be hunting. And, as social animals, all equines greatly value the qualities of herd-leaders who can help them to stay safe.

The world of personal development coaching has begun to recognise the significance to humans of the equine response to others' intentions and leadership qualities, and a number of horse-assisted coaching systems have come into being. Paul Hunting has been developing the system he calls Horse Assisted Transformation (HAT) for fifteen years: he believes it is 'the biggest development in personal development since NLP – it's applying the essence of NLP, accelerating, enhancing, and bringing it alive on many levels.'

### Leadership

Horse-assisted coaching does indeed take us into a different dimension, out of our familiar repertoire of resources and reactions. You can't be anything but fully present when in a small space with a very large animal with hair-trigger reactions! You'll

*“ Horses don't care about your income, your beauty, your achievements, your cleverness or your ancestry; they are interested in your trustworthiness right here and now ”*

be highly motivated to find whatever it takes to stay safe and be effective; and that means finding the leadership qualities within you that will enable the horse to relax and be confident in your ability to direct him or her properly. It's fast, it's effective, and it's exhilarating. It's also egalitarian: horses don't care about your income, your beauty, your achievements, your cleverness or your ancestry; they are interested in your trustworthiness right here and now.

### Resources For Change

As with any interaction, there are outer and inner aspects to a horse-assisted coaching session. On the outside, the client is learning how to handle a horse effectively on the ground and how to be present with the horse in such a way that both can enjoy each other's company. On the inside, he or she is learning to find the resources that allow for such effective interaction: qualities such as awareness, trustworthiness, positive intention, empathy, warmth, patience, confidence, respect, emotional stability, authenticity, and flexibility.

### Maddie And Me

All this brings me to the present experience of standing in a field in the Cotswolds with Paul and Maddie one bright Spring morning. I've arrived somewhat distracted: I'm in the process of trying to sell a house. I've found another house I want to buy; however my purchasers are delaying exchanging contracts and not only do I risk losing the house I want but I also feel responsible for letting down my vendors; I feel out of control of the situation and my stress levels are rocketing.

Paul Hunting usually works in the corporate sphere, helping people to discover and develop the leadership skills they need for effective management. I'm lucky to have him all to myself for the day. An engaging, humorous chap with a knack of extracting the essence, Paul has already helped me identify the specific issue I want to work on today. It's one that's probably common to many self-employed people: I put a lot of effort into my business, for too little return; I also let the admin pile up and get in the way of creative, productive stuff (we are talking about, um, two years of un-filing!).



I want to find a way to unlock blocked energy in my work and elsewhere in my life.

Now Paul assigns me a task that is to act as a metaphor for my issue. I am to lead Maddie away from the other horses and into the round pen. But something strange starts happening as we are talking: the three horses are moving around and forming patterns; at first Maddie comes forward, then she withdraws behind the others. I feel oddly out of control of the situation. Maddie is not wearing a halter, so I can't just 'lead' her in the obvious way, with a rope. What to do? I start trying to entice her, making the sort of chirrupy noises that a horse might like to hear, trying to get her to like me; but she just flattens her ears at me. I switch tactics and try chivvying her, getting behind her and flapping my arms; she simply walks behind her friends so I can't get at her. Looking about for inspiration, I spot a stick with a string attached to it; I put the string around her neck and pull. Maddie braces against me, but I drag her along regardless and oblige her to accompany me to the round pen. Whew! We're there at last. Now for the feedback. There's no getting around the uncomfortable observation that first I tried to entice, then I tried to bully, and finally I forced Maddie to do what I wanted. This leads to the equally uncomfortable question: Is this how I normally treat other people?

We move on to the next step: I am somehow to lead Maddie into moving around me in the round pen. I fiddle about a bit, getting increasingly hot and bothered, while the mare ignores my efforts. Eventually I ask Paul to demonstrate. He and Maddie engage in the most delightful dance, in perfect rapport, with Maddie walking, trotting, cantering round, changing direction, changing canter-lead, happy and confident, responding to subtle shifts in Paul's energy and body-language. It can be done! I try again. But Maddie is moving reluctantly, as little as possible, while I'm running about a lot! I seem to be working very hard, for small results. Paul reminds me that the task is not important – what's important is my learning – and I start to relax: my energy comes down from the head, down into the hara or belly-centre; I stop running around and take up a strong, steady stance; I open up physically and emotionally, allowing and inviting Maddie to move around me. And suddenly she is moving and we are dancing, and I am enjoying being here in the sunshine in harmony with this marvellous mare. Later, Paul asks me to close my eyes and identify the moment of change: it was when I stopped doing and

began being. He elicits from me the description of what's going on: 'I'm standing strong, allowing, inviting, and enjoying!' and we anchor that state with posture and words. Other words are also coming up: trust, love, rapport, connection, spaciousness, stillness, openness. We are straying into the realm of the spiritual here; this is like the sort of meditative experience a yogi might strive for years to attain. Wow!

### Results Happen

Well, the wow continues. Changes have happened on outer and inner levels. A couple of days after our session, the apparently immovable house-chain shifted; I'm now sitting in the office of my new home on Exmoor as I type this article. More work has been coming in; however I'm still managing to find time to explore the moor as well as enjoying sorting out the house. I've also noticed that I'm becoming more alert to my old habits of trying to get people to like me and placating and pressuring others to get what I want. And the filing? That's been done; it was easy! In fact it's amazing how much can be achieved by simply 'standing strong, allowing, and inviting'!

The Horse Assisted Transformation system uses the model of the true self and the conditioned self. The conditioned self lives by the duality expressed in such concepts as right and wrong, praise and blame, attachment and aversion; it's a limited level of being that masks the deeper truth. Horse Assisted Transformation can help us in a direct, powerful way to discern the falsehood that has been masquerading as truth, transcend it, and step into the truth we can live by: our true nature. And, importantly, the benefits would seem to be reciprocal, for it is only when we stop seeing a horse as an inferior 'other' to exploit, and start genuinely connecting with deeper, shared levels of being that the magic happens; and surely the horse can appreciate and benefit from that communion just as we can.

Paul Hunting has recently brought out a book entitled 'Why talk to a Guru? When you can whisper to a Horse', in which he presents his ideas, describes his coaching methods, and explores the power of traditional spiritual metaphors that point towards the 'Holy Grail' of the authentic leadership that we can learn to find and express with the help of horses. See the Book Review section in this issue for more details! ●

**For more information visit Paul Hunting's website: [www.horsejoy.com](http://www.horsejoy.com)**