



## **ITS TOUGH AT THE TOP**

Individual Coaching

*"I was exposed to my strengths and weaknesses in a very pure and beautiful way." Director of Marketing*

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### **Context**

As Director of Marketing James was already a high achiever with a formidable track record in his field. He had been in the post for several years and his initial objectives for the coaching programme included development of emotional intelligence, becoming a more effective and inspirational leader, improving peer and upward relationships, to strengthen confidence in thought leadership, to identify and establish a performance "edge" in this role and to leverage personal strengths in growing his potential in the future.

### **What happened**

It became apparent early in the coaching process that in addition to the pre-identified development needs James was also prone to experiencing sudden and sometimes debilitating loss of self-belief and confidence. These emotional swings would be accompanied by a dramatic drop in energy levels, physical symptoms such as migraine and a need to withdraw from those around him. He described how he could appear aloof and uncooperative at these times. This emerged as a fundamental cause of many of the other performance issues arising.

Working with a small herd of three horses, James discovered a strong need to affiliate and that his default way of connecting and winning trust with the horses was to reduce his energetic impact. Concerns for personal safety also began to get in the way of him connecting with the horses and achieving tasks and a previously unidentified aversion to risk emerged. A need to conform to "rules" or "expectations" also emerged and James was able to explore how this stopped him really taking a lead in his job and breaking new ground. Most significantly, James discovered a deep seated reluctance to show leadership to the horse in order to ask it to complete a task. He feared that "imposing his will" would lead to destruction of the positive relationship he had been able to build during the session. In processing the session it was apparent that for James all these patterns which had become visible and externalised in the work with the horses were also preventing him from fulfilling his true potential as a leader.

## **The results**

With the horses James learned that by being a strong leader, with vision and direction and with integrity of emotion, those around him could feel safer and more comfortable around him, rather than less comfortable. That giving direction is not the same as being dictatorial or autocratic. He was also able to own and share his vulnerabilities in a way which helped him build strong relationships, instead of being defensive and isolating himself as a way of dealing with them. Most importantly he was able to experience that if he released the full vitality and energy at his core this would attract, not distance, others. The net effect of all this was a liberation of energy, ideas and spirit, when leading his organisation and a significant increase in self-belief. He was also able to let go of control and set those who worked with him free to use their own energy and ideas in working towards their vision.

## **What the client said**

“My mind has always been open to new experiences and to learning, but the prospect of leadership development facilitated by working with horses was unusual even for me. What also surprised me when I said I wanted to do it was the sceptical reaction of some peers and my organisation. So I funded it myself and set off for the event quite uncertain about what it would entail or reveal. Over the course of the work I was exposed to my strengths and weaknesses in a very pure and beautiful way. What happens is about you, it’s not about other people, or about home life, or distractions or emails. Working with the horses dramatically illustrates how one’s fears can hold you back and it also exposes your perceptions of leadership and how these can strangely limit one’s effectiveness.

With no distractions around me the exercise still managed to illustrate how one sometimes misses the big opportunities by becoming task focussed. With just me out there with the horses it also meant I could accept more readily and powerfully how actually everything is in my control after all. It revealed to me the importance of awareness – awareness of how I feel and the energy I project, awareness of how other beings react to my presence. Finally I was shown how my absolute intent to achieve something can become the most powerful energy I have to help me achieve it.

However the most beautiful thing was how content and comforted the horse was when I gave the strong leadership he needed and completed the task – and how exhilarated I felt.

Please try the same experience, but come with an open mind and be honest to yourself about what you discover.”