

upfront

fyi

Andrew Humphreys

A beginner's guide
to the modern world

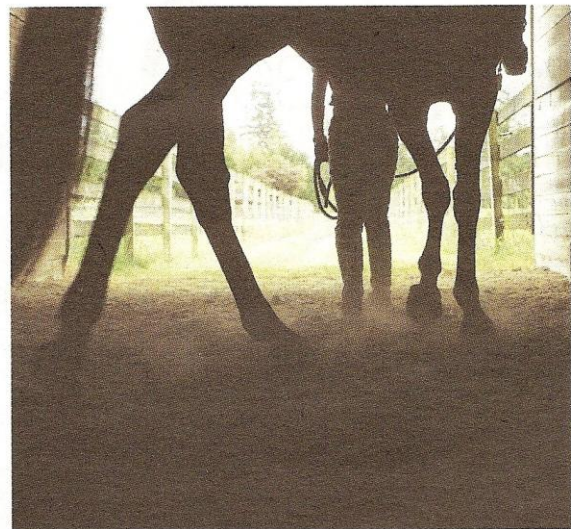
Equine-assisted learning

What is it? Equine-assisted learning (EAL), also known as equine-guided education, involves learning through direct contact and experience with horses. By participating in a series of activities with horses, people learn more about themselves. They also learn about horses.

So the horses are the teachers? Of course, of course. Although EAL workshops are conducted for groups and individuals by trained coaches and handlers, the horses do all the real work.

How do the workshops work? The key for participants is learning how to communicate with the horse, largely through the use of body language. A typical EAL exercise involves guiding a horse through an obstacle course without speaking to or touching the animal in any way. It's a metaphor for navigating personal and professional obstacles, designed to reveal insights into your own non-horse behaviour.

Who does it? Because EAL workshops are good at promoting non-verbal communication skills, they've become very popular across Europe and North America for corporate team-building and leadership exercises. So instead of spending one terrifying



afternoon a year role-playing or experiencing the forced hilarity of theatre sports with fellow employees, you get to frolic with horses in a paddock. Leadership and Horses Australia (www.leadershipandhorses.com.au) launched its own equine-guided leadership development courses in rural NSW in March.

How else can horses help me? In more ways than you might imagine. Aside from equine-assisted learning and professional development, hippotherapy ("hippo" is the Greek word for horse, so it involves horses, not hippos) uses equine movement to provide physical, occupational and speech therapy, while equine-assisted psychotherapy trades the analyst's couch for a saddle:

"Help me, Doctor Seabiscuit – I think I'm a horse."

"It's all right, Mrs Doodlebug – I'm a horse myself. Now, tell me about your mother..." **GW**