

Date: Oct 3, 2010; Section: Sage; Page: 10

**INSPIRED BY JOY** By Joy Silha ♦ Illustration by Cathryn Cunningham

# EQUINE *energy*

Horses are attuned to surrounding vibes, can be partners in self-discovery

**H**orses don't lie. It's that simple. And that's why they make great teachers.

If you want to know what you're really communicating or how you're feeling deep inside, hang around horses. They'll tell you. In fact, they'll mirror your inner essence so strongly, you'll get in touch with your deepest desires.

I learned this when I started riding in my 30s. I approached riding fearfully, trying to pull and control the horse. When that didn't work, I tried loving horses to death, coaxing them into submission.

After some spills and wild rides, I finally met people who approached this differently, trying to understand a horse's point of view. Horses acutely tune into the energy around them.

Some called this "horse whispering." To me, these people weren't whispering. They were listening, with their eyes, heart, energy, bodies and soul.

It resulted in great horses. More important, the people learned to be true leaders and found calm authority. In gaining the horse's trust, they learned to trust themselves. I always thought I could be a good horsewoman, but I never thought horses could help me be a better woman. I was

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hooked.

I sometimes use horses in my work as a life coach. This isn't riding, but

experiential learning where clients interact with horses and relate it to their lives. The horses reflect who the people really are and become a partner in their self-discovery.

And what a journey it is. Among other lessons, women learn to be assertive, let go of perfectionism and spend more time in the present. They learn to take the reins of life in their hands ... without holding on too tight.

One client couldn't set boundaries with her family. She worked full time, plus struggled to handle all the cleaning, shopping and cooking. She couldn't say "no" and was afraid to say, "This is where I begin and here is my ending point." She tiptoed around her family,

taking up the slack and never asking for help.

Her pattern was playing "nicey-nicey," but then she'd gnaw on a bone, angry that she'd compromised herself. I see this often in clients, and I wonder if it originates in adolescence from peer pressure. Or, in childhood, competing with siblings for Mama's love. Is there an age-old fear that we're inherently unlovable or will be abandoned?

Whatever it is, it muddies our path. We get all wrapped up in everyone else's business and sacrifice our dreams.

## Say 'no'

One day at a coaching session, a horse moved

uncomfortably close to my client. Uneasy, she scurried to the side, frantically putting more distance between herself and the horse. When I asked why she didn't move the horse with the lead rope (as I'd taught her), she thought about it for a minute. Rather sheepishly, she murmured, "I thought he might not like me ... then he might get angry." She allowed the horse to take over her space rather than set a boundary and say, "no." Sound familiar?

This metaphor was a great "Aha!" As we worked with the horse, my client became more assertive. Not aggressive. Not angry. Just firm. She began to move the horse, protect her space and stand up for herself. The horse responded. Shifting her energy and finding courage with this 1,000-pound animal made it easier to do in life.

She told her family she would no longer be a doormat. Surprisingly, they also responded, and she got the help she needed. She said "no," and wasn't abandoned.

## Do it every day

Granted, this doesn't come quickly and takes practice. We can't set one big boundary and then we're done. Not with horses. And not with people. We need to do it every day — with our time, spouse, boss and kids. You might be able to rationalize when you don't set a boundary with a friend or relative. But you can't ignore it when a horse steps into your space.

Coaching with horses is transformational. As horses mirror who we are, we must rise to be our best. They are magnificent animals that give us immediate and honest feedback, telling us like it is. This I know for sure ... after all, my horse told me so.

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