

LIVE

# Communication Skills 101: Conversations With A Horse Whisperer



Andrew Froggatt, aka “The Horse Whisperer”, has a quiet confidence that can only come from years of experience dealing with troubled horses. From teaching racehorses who fear the starting gates how to break out, to training a child’s pet how to handle a rider, Andrew has a presence about him that allows him to cut through barriers. However, horse whispering is more than just “fixing” problem horses. Andrew and his team have been using horses for leadership training in New Zealand for a few years with startling success. Now, partnering with Sarah Schubert from New Voice, a Singapore based leadership training company, their talents are going to be put to use in Singapore for the first time.

We met up with Andrew, Sam and Daughter, Tilly at The Singapore Polo Club along with Leadership Coach, Sarah Schubert to talk about their upcoming joint program Walk The Talk leadership training workshop. I was particularly keen to discover more about this workshop because, like a lot of people, I have a healthy

respect and admiration for horses. Growing up riding and caring for my family's own horses in the UK, I have also experienced my fair share of falls along the way and was intrigued to learn of how these beautiful creatures could help facilitate a leadership training.

Andrew and Sam operate Lead The Way in Queenstown, New Zealand. With the help of horses, they facilitate training aimed at teaching communication, relationship management and leadership skills. For the last 20 years, Andrew has worked with a wide range of clients from the SPCA Troubled Horses and Teens program to Steven Hanson, the All Blacks Rugby Coach. One particular heart-warming outcome was with a 16-year-old autistic boy who had never spoken before. After working with Andrew and the horses, he started talking for the first time.

Sam's passion for horses began as a small child. She joined the UK Pony Club and also being a talented athlete, competed at district level for Eventing and Tetrathlon (Riding, running, swimming and shooting). During a year out before University Sam had the opportunity for more hands-on-training and handling at an Olympic level event yard. Since then Sam has developed training and experience in leadership, teamwork, commitment and management skills, first with the British Army's Officer Training Corps and then took it a step further by completing the 6-week-basic-training course at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst with flying colours. Together they formed Lead The Way.

Lead The Way's reputation has grown such that the leadership courses are now being run within corporate frameworks all over New Zealand, producing great results. It was on one of her visits to New Zealand that Sarah from New Voice, who has been coaching and facilitating for close to 20 years, with 10 of those years in Singapore, met Andrew and recognized that this form of training would be unique to South East Asia.



If you've ever attended or witnessed any transformational coaching workshops, you'll probably agree that when it comes to self-discovery and improvement for anyone (especially managers and experienced employees) it is not uncommon to be met with an air of "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" or indifference.

This is why Walk the Talk was such a refreshing approach to leadership training to me. I feel like it is safe to say that there's always room for self-reflection, whatever stage you're at with your career or 'evolution'. This is mostly because, in life, we regularly meet people who, perhaps, are not exactly like us. They may have different views and need a different pair of listening ears to be understood.

If you're open to considering this, then it's easy to see that our communication styles need to be adapted depending on who we have in front of us. In practice, though, our ability to morph and respond depending on who we are talking to can be a challenge. Personalities get in the way and we stop hearing what the other person is actually saying. Let's be honest, unless someone regularly holds a mirror up to our behavior and we are open to viewing that reflection, we won't always have the well-honed skills necessary to view ourselves with complete objectivity and use that in how we deal with other people.

One of the amusingly positive reasons why working with horses provides such on-the-spot clarity is that, unlike humans, horses have little reason to hide how they really feel about you. No matter how hard you try to win them over with your charming (or so you thought) powers of persuasion and dazzling personality, it won't work if they don't respect you, and respect is a funny thing. With horses, as it is with humans, it often needs to be with mutual respect for a positive relationship to flourish.



As Andrew explained, “anything less than authentic, unaggressive confidence and good nature will most likely be met with a snort, a whinny and a trot in the other direction.” As a participator in the Walk the Talk workshops, you are taught ways to read the subtle signs of submission, acceptance and compliance in the horse. Self-propulsion, however, virtuous and well intended will get you nowhere without your listening ears.

Another reason why this type of training appeals to me is because the results are immediate. It’s not a theoretical course in a classroom that leaves you with a head full of knowledge but no real experience. The Walk The Talk leadership training program provides hands-on-experience and starts to pathe the way for new thinking take shape, and overtime, new behaviours.

Once you have begun to unravel the skills for effective communication in this type of setting (and with non-biased or judgmental horses), the theory is that you can use these skills in pretty much all areas of your life. If you take these skills away from the workshop and actively practice them, you may develop an even greater awareness by forcing yourself to pause between thought, emotion and reaction. Added to this is the sense of achievement and confidence you achieve from gaining the respect of such an elegant creature. Something not to be sniffed at!

Walk the Talk’s next session will be held on the 25 & 26 July 2016 at the exclusive Singapore Polo Club.

**For more information on course details:**

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