

*THE PLAIN TRUTH*

By Karla Boyd



*When humans compete with each other, it's very adversarial. One wins, the other loses. One gets a massive ego boost; the other is crushed, pinned beneath the alpha wolf or the sharper businessman. Horses compete, too—that's what is happening in the corral of the round pen—but they don't seek to vanquish their opponent.*

*They compete to find their proper niche, to find out how they're all going to live together in the herd. Horses have worked out how to compete without causing the fear, pain, and distrust that we go through because in the herd, the horse that loses is not regarded as a victim.*

*They compete in a way that makes that possible for them—a way that offers us a model of how we can earn our own rightful places in society while strengthening its fabric instead of tearing at it.*

*Horse Don't Lie: What Horses Teach Us About Our Own Natural Capacity For Awareness, Confidence, Courage and Truth by Chris Irwin*

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The plain truth is that we as humans, despite polite speech, social activist values, or dedicated education, still have ingrained in us these bad habits that came from our upbringing. You throw in struggles of power everywhere in our civilization among mixed cultures, races, classes, gender...and humans conquering the environment and other species that got laid down in our ancestral gene pool and you begin to realize that we all have some work to do to restore our communication and partnership practices at all levels into better balance, equanimity and healthy team play. Because this stuff of competing in all the bad ways lives in our embodied actions and in our unconscious speaking, it is time we listen to the wisdom of the herd and pay close attention to this culture of beings who can show us a better way. Chris Irwin lets us know our lessons are ongoing. Let's listen in:

The lessons don't end there. You may be strong enough to establish leadership, but you also have to be consistent enough to keep it. Horses don't think in terms of seventy percent or eighty percent. That sends an ambiguous message, and horses don't understand ambiguity. Either you are the leader or you're not.

This ambiguity is why most people have trouble with their horses. One day, we're really sharp as a hawk and not missing anything. The next day we're letting things slide. You have to monitor body language one hundred percent of the time. Every single moment. There is no cruise control. You must retain awareness, for the horse has got nothing better to do than to remain aware and wait for your mind to wander.

In meditation practice, people are trained to constantly bring their attention back to the breath or the passage prayer they had memorized. Having one-pointed attention is regarded as of a lesser value in business these days. Multi-tasking is seen as a good norm. But more accidents come from inattention than with it and that impacts not only the bottom line but also our credibility in relationships. Clearly, drinking while driving is considered poor form, but so is listening to someone while texting or looking a few tables at the cafe over to see if someone else is more interesting.

Real leadership comes when our attention is fully given to the task at hand or to the team who is seeking our guidance and our confidence placed in them. If we are scattered, reading email or answering our cell phones on a whim while engaged in conference meetings or even while focusing on projects that are time sensitive, we have lost our capacity to be at our best in creating best outcomes for our projects, organizations and for the future we want to create.

Because horses demand our attention one hundred percent of the time in awareness and sensitivity to the relationship at hand, they help us come back to the leadership standards that get honest organizations and engaged leadership a good name. It is what builds healthy relationships. Healthy relationships are how best futures and best practices are born. Besides, it is what every horse thrives on. And, it is just plain good manners.

