

HOW TO SPEND YOUR TRAINING BUDGET

BY JULIA FELTON

"...It's a really profound way for both individuals and teams to engage in experimental "full body" learning"

The recent economic climate has left business owners with dysfunctional teams as the spate of downsizing and cost cutting measures, has led to business owners having team members in roles that some they are ill-equipped to fulfil. Julia Felton believes we need to invest in innovative programmes that deliver measurable change, as it is a cost effective alternative to traditional classroom learning.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them"
- Einstein

No-one would doubt that we are living in some of the toughest economic conditions of this century. For many companies, the result has been downsizing, a reallocation of resources, and in several cases training budgets being slashed. Yet the most progressive companies appreciate the need to continue to invest in their team members during these challenging times because at the end of the day "people are the lifeblood of any organisation". Without motivated and engaged team members, the opportunity for success of any company can be seriously affected, as at the end of the day people buy from people and if your team members are not affable and trustworthy they will not instill any desire in customers to buy from you.

So how in these challenging times do we ensure that our training budgets are being spent optimally, in order to get the best return for both the team member and the organisation? I strongly believe that the best returns are gained when we invest in innovative accelerated learning programmes; Programmes which require our team members to actively participate in and try out new things, rather than just sitting in a classroom and being told what to do. Research in 1999 by Smolowe, Butler and Murray, estimates that we remember only 20% of what we hear and 50% of what we see, but retain fully 80% of what we do. This is why activity-based or accelerated learning experiences have greater sticking power and result in more systemic change in individuals than traditional style training, where team members sit and

receive information in a lecture-style format.

Horse Assisted Coaching is a new field of accelerated learning in which individuals develop their own style of leadership through a variety of interactive exercises with horses. Absolutely no horsemanship skills are required to engage in a Horse Assisted Coaching session and all the work is conducted on the ground – there is no need to ride – which is why this coaching appeals to all types of people and their organisations. Participating in a Horse Assisted Coaching session brings untold benefits to any organisation, as team members leave more focused and committed having had, in many cases, true insights into what is happening both in their personal and professional life. These AHA! (Accelerated Horse Awareness™) moments cause a quantum shift in people, allowing them to see things with a new perspective. Often a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by co-workers is observed, resulting in a more collaborative environment when team members return to work.

Trust is one of the major new commodities of the environment we live in and horses are great at helping individuals develop this essential life skill. Let's face it, if we don't trust the people we work with, then we won't achieve much and all our energy will be taken up focusing on negative things and protecting our position. How much more effective can an organisation be when everyone trusts each other?

So, how do team members learn these desirable characteristics? One way is to provide the team member with a mirror of their behaviour because they may not be aware of the traps they are falling into.

They also need to know how they respond under pressure. Traditional ways of creating this mirror are through coaching programmes or 360 degree feedback. The challenge with these practices is that they can lack objectivity because human intervention is required which could cloud the mirror.

Horses mirror the essential qualities of leadership – trust, authenticity, honesty, intuition, listening, a willingness of spirit and perseverance. They have no agenda with us. They simply reflect our strength of character, our heart, our internal incongruence and our self-limiting perceptions.

Horses help us understand that leadership begins with who we are being. Horses help us close the gap between how we actually present ourselves to others and how we think we are being. Horse Assisted Coaching provides a cost-effective means of getting that feedback as the horse mirrors exactly how you are feeling. Horses provide us with immediate, 100% non-judgmental, observable feedback, mirroring our internal reality. Living in the 93% of the non-verbal world of communication, they are not impressed by position, status or power. They cannot tell who is the CEO, or who is the janitor. They just respond to what is presented to them.

So if you are looking for an innovative way to bring a different perspective to your leadership and team building trainings, then please consider Horse Assisted Coaching. It's really effective, fun and the return on investment (ROI) is significant as personal breakthroughs can be achieved in minutes compared to months (or even years) of traditional coaching.

Horse Assisted Coaching might not yet be in the mainstream of learning and development but it should be, because in my experience most of the current offerings are not delivering on their promises and as Einstein stated, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." So come on, try it and see what benefits you and your organisation can receive; I'm sure you will be pleasantly surprised because, as Plato noted, "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than a year of conversation."

Julia Felton is the author of Unbridled Success – How the Secret Lives of Horses Can Impact Your Leadership, Teamwork and Communication Skills.