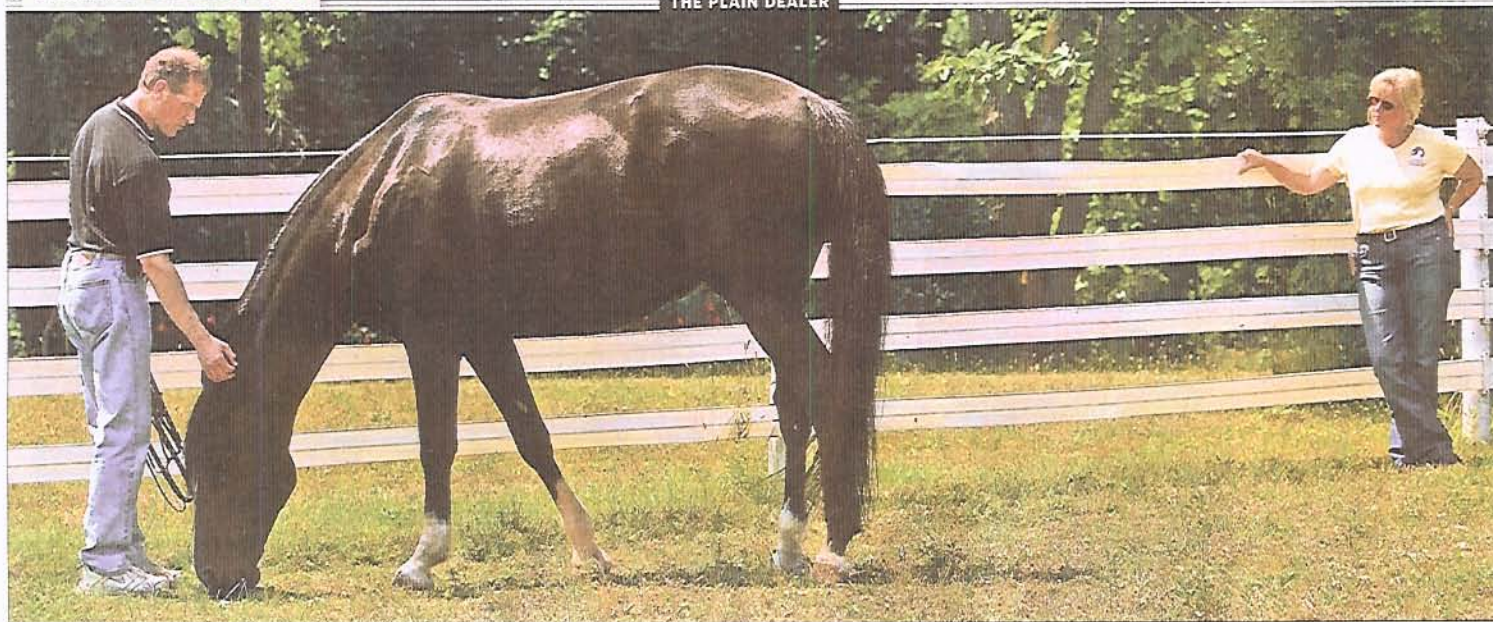


CLEVELAND.COM BREAKING NEWS

THE PLAIN DEALER



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS STEPHENS | THE PLAIN DEALER

Cleveland executive David Chrien gets acquainted with Flash during a horse-assisted coaching session at Et-Cet-Era Farm outside Mantua. Sue Thomas, human coach, says her equine partners can show business leaders how they affect others.

plain, old Horse sense

Equines teach executives a few things that people can't

ALISON GRANT
Plain Dealer Reporter

David Chrien fielded a string of business calls driving to the Portage County farm for his three-on-one equine coaching session.

As in, three horses and one very busy executive of a Cleveland oil services company.

Chrien was so stressed by the time he got to the farm outside Mantua that the Tennessee Walkers got stirred up as soon as he walked in the barn.

There they were — Flash, Jazz and Boss — chomping their teeth and straining their necks over the stall doors, Chrien's co-facilitators in learning how to be a better manager.

The president of Service Station Equipment Co. on East 55th Street was at Sue Thomas' farm to work with horses to improve his on-the-job "soft" skills.

Chrien's wholesale distribution company is the kind of place where clients often phone with a mini-crisis. A nozzle and hose torn from a gasoline pump. A car frozen in the air on a jammed lift.

But some of the toughest calls for Chrien, 54 — who spent decades honing athletic talent as a nationally ranked ice dancer — come in the form of employees.

"As a competitor, you have a certain drive, a certain persistence and diligence," Chrien explained. "But not everybody is built as you are."

Besides individual consultations like the one with Chrien, Thomas has weekend workshops at Et-Cet-Era Farm (www.mapotential.com) for corporate groups. Per-person costs range from \$1,200 to \$3,250 depending on the number of sessions involved.

She offers horse-based training to sales workers as well as executives, Thomas said, because horses respond to the body language and tone of voice that can make or break a pitch. She counts among her clients Keithley Instruments, Progressive Insurance and Omnova Solutions.

SEE HORSE | E5



Chrien, president of Service Station Equipment Co., gets a basic lesson from a horse that can't read the nameplate on the boss' door: It can take a measure of trust and clear communication to get a horse to do your bidding.

How horses teach leadership

Why is it that horses can show us something about leadership and teamwork?

Jackie Lowe Stevenson, who runs an equine-coaching business at Pebble Lodge Ranch in Geauga County, said it stems from their instincts as herd animals.

■ Belonging to the herd is essential for survival.

■ Horses do not blindly follow, yet need strong herd leaders to make good decisions for the group.

■ They vary in traits and have a keen sense of herd dynamics.

■ As long as each horse is doing its best, the herd thrives.

Stevenson, past clinical center director of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, said it's the experience of dealing with horses that hits home.

"You can have lots of data and not change one thing," she said. "This is about a learned experience [that] happens within."

Among the horses Stevenson uses for business coaching is a 2,000-pound Clydesdale.

If you try to bully or trick her, it will not work. The only effective approach is to be clear and honest.

It's a powerful message for CEOs, Stevenson said, who may think they need to lead by force, seduction or manipulation instead of trust and mutual regard.

The ranch's Web site (www.spirit-of-leadership.com) quotes Albert Einstein: "The significant problems of today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them."

— Alison Grant

"It's not authority that will make the horse behave the way you want it to. Rather, it's persuasion and influence and your character."

Diana Bilimoria,
professor of organizational behavior at Case Western Reserve University



CHRIS STEPHENS | THE PLAIN DEALER

Executive David Chrien leads the less-than-enthusiastic Flash during an equine-coaching session at a Portage County farm. The red roan Jazz munches grass beside them.

HORSE

FROM E1

Plain, old horse sense

Main Street Gourmet, a Cuyahoga Falls wholesale bakery that supplies Caribou Coffee and Cracker Barrel, sent five managers for training.

Human Resources Director Kelly Loebick-Frascella recalled directing a blindfolded team member who was putting a bridle on a 1,200-pound gelding. It was unnerving to try to still the horse's head while instructing her partner.

The roles reversed and Loebick-Frascella was blindfolded: "It was scary," she said. "These creatures are huge and you have to trust this person that they're leading you in the right direction."

Diana Bilimoria, professor of organizational behavior at Case Western Reserve University, said putting business leaders in an environment outside the office can stir up their thinking and highlight flaws and assets. Some

companies take top managers to Gettysburg to taste what generals face in the moment of battle — who goes in the flank, who leads the charge, what artillery to use — all as you put lives on the line.

Bilimoria said equine coaching is intriguing as another way to shake up the status quo. After all, horses can't read the nameplate on the boss' office.

"It's not authority that will make the horse behave the way you want it to. Rather, it's persuasion and influence and your character," she said. "These of course are very essential for leadership."

The use of executive coaches has become an established part of Corporate America. Pfizer executive Henry McKinnell and Meg Whitman, CEO of eBay, are among hundreds who have tapped outside consultants to sharpen their people know-how. The Hay Group, a human resources consultancy, estimates that 25 to 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies use executive coaches.

But it's fairly novel to use horses as workplace advisers, although the idea is catching on.

Horse-coaching proponents

say the animals are wizards at sensing psychological mood and can help teach emotional intelligence — the social skills said to be a strong predictor of success in work and life.

They are acutely aware of their own environment and those near them, Thomas said. With skittish or compliant behavior, a wary eye or affectionate nuzzle, they relay information in ways that people are able to accept and absorb.

If people walk up to a horse and are afraid or angry, even if they aren't aware of the emotion themselves, Thomas said, the horse will pick up on it. And with horses, the feedback is objective and immediate.

"The goal is to increase awareness so that they can present themselves more professionally, more calmly, more assertively, more confidently," Thomas said.

Those were inspiring qualities to keep in mind on a stifling July afternoon as Chrien led the recalcitrant Flash around a parched pasture.

Unlike therapeutic riding in programs to help troubled teens or those with disabilities, Thomas' clients interact with the

horses only from the ground. Clients gain self-awareness from completing tasks with the horses and getting feedback from both the animals and Thomas.

By Chrien's second session at Et-Cet-Era he was feeling more affinity with his charge.

"I have more of a relationship than I had before," he told Thomas, who was standing off to one side and staying "neutral and grounded" so the horse focused on Chrien.

"He's following me," Chrien said as he gave a slight tug to a rope around the horse's neck.

"Following you?" Thomas said. "Well, he's walking with me," Chrien said with less certainty.

"What do you think would happen if you took that rope off him?" Thomas said.

"He would do his own thing," her client conceded.

Chrien said later that he was trying to figure out what worked and what didn't with his equine tutor.

"That sort of applies," he said, "to people as well."

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WORKPLACE

Dress like s to be taken get that pro

SAMANTHA THOMPSON
SMITH
McClatchy Newspapers

All those late nights at the office. All those times you volunteered to lead committees, work weekends, go to conferences.

They might help you snag that big promotion.

But those jingle-jangle earrings? The Fu Manchu mustache? Your hairstyle from the late '90s?

They could be hurting your chances of getting that corner office.

"You definitely have to put forward your best image," said Cynthia Nellis, a style expert at the About.com women's fashion Web site. "Even if you're allowed to wear jeans and T-shirts to the office, it's not going to project an image to get you promoted. You need to take it a notch above the company policy."

Just look around the office on a Monday morning. You can easily spot the office slob, with his coffee-stained tie and wrinkled shirts, or the workplace flasher, the woman who thinks it's OK to show ample cleavage or plenty of leg. They are the obvious rule breakers who will have trouble getting ahead.

It's getting worse now that summer is peaking, and workers are shedding clothes — and breaking more rules — to stay cool, wearing anything from flip-flops to sleeveless shirts to the office.

But it's not just the bad dressers who are judged — and often overlooked — at promotion time. It's the woman who wears too much makeup — or too little. Or the guy who wears flip-flops and short-sleeve button-down shirts, thinking he's meeting the casual dress code.

"Our image can tell others that we are creative or dependable or conservative or all of those and more," said image consultant Carolyn Gustafson, owner of Image Strategy for Men & Women in Cary, N.C. "We make quick decisions about people based on their appearance. Whether or not that's right, that's the reality of it. We can't wear our resume around our neck."

How someone is dressed was the third most important attribute in getting a new job, according to a study by Syracuse University and Total Executive Inc. of 300 executive recruiters, chief executives and directors of personnel. That's