




And I'm not trying to lie to Allie. I'm just a lousy communicator. Which is *alarming*, because I'm a professional communicator. Did I mention that Allie's a HORSE?

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Now that Allie sees me as a leader, will she want to rejoin my herd? I watch for the four signs of "join-up" in the "language of equus." Here comes the first sign: As she's galloping like fury around me in the pen, Allie's inside ear locks on me. Translation: "I'm giving you attention and respect." And now the second sign: Allie begins a tighter orbit around me.

[illegible]

too fast back with his hands. "Your horse doesn't feel safe if you're holding the reins so firmly. John assumes more confident body language, and soon he and Rhonda are as one. As each of us completes join-up and sits back on the horse, John says, "I'm glad you're all here. We spend the afternoon with Simpson and his coach Martha Beck deconstructing our experiences. It's astonishing how closely our new equine soul mates have held up mirror images of our own behavior. We've seen the same connections and advice to us. John's been told no assertive moves or threats. He's been told to be gentle and to use words with some clients. 'This is all about stepping into your own power and taking control of your own life. It's about how you took charge of your horse.' He was relieved."

She then tells me, "You need to be more assertive, less worried about how you'll look. Your desire to be perfect gets in the way of your ability to be effective. You have to let the needs to understand ground with humans as well as horses. 'Placating or being aggressive just creates more aggression. Can you disengage from that, become just assertive?'"

John says, "I've been told to be gentle and to be a good human join-up." Lack of honesty and inability to be vulnerable are deal-breakers, we decide. "People are afraid to tell us what they're afraid of, so we're going to be the first to tell them."

"We're going to dominate when someone says what we think leadership is. But it doesn't come close to what true leadership is. We're looking for calm, calm, assertive leadership."

people or facilitate them through things, but be aware that you have tools: your energy, your body, your physical senses. Listen to those and be willing to give them weight."

Back home, I replay over and over the deliciousness of Allie's soft breath on my shoulder during join-up. I scheme about opportunities to "speak horse" again. But I also start seeing leadership—mine within my family on the job, on various committees—in a new way. Every relationship has to be based on vulnerability. I can't lead if I don't let myself not get hurt by my vulnerability. I can "send" the message from my herd. And through it all, I listen, really listen, to my breath, my body, and will myself to be the calm, serene Matrichial Mare. And that's the real Gift of Equus.

Freelance writer and Sky country Editor Elizabeth Rapoport eagerly awaits her next invitation for Join-Up with Kiehl. She lives from her home in White Plains, New York. In the meantime, she's developed a passion for cats.