

# **Synergy Medical Students Developing Emotional Intelligence Leadership Competencies through Equine Assisted Learning**

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## **Leadership**

Effective leadership and developing effective leaders, as that relates to organizational success, is becoming more important than ever before. Increasingly, leadership is defined not as what the leader does but rather as a process that engenders and is the result of relationships. Emerging new perspectives on the nature of leadership may profoundly affect our thinking about leadership development. (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Increasingly, leadership and leadership development are seen as inherently collaborative, social, and relational processes (Day, 2001). Similarly, Vicere (2002) has noted the advent of the “networked economy” where “*partnerships*, strategic and tactical, customer and supplier, personal and organizational, are essential to competitive effectiveness.”

Leadership development based on this paradigm is more difficult to design and implement than those that have been popular for the last several decades in which the focus was to train individual leaders. Taking this next step will require a deeper understanding of the role of organizational systems and culture in leadership development (VanVelsor & McCauley, 2004). According to the Center for Creative Leadership’s 2001 report, emotional intelligence (EQ) is associated with better performance in the areas of: putting people at ease, decisiveness, change management, doing whatever it takes, confronting problem employees, self-awareness, participative management, balance between personal life & work, straightforwardness & composure, and building & mending relationships. The development of EQ requires more than simply reading, attending a lecture, watching a video, or even participating in an EQ workshop. Traditional training methods fall short because increasing EQ requires developing new awareness, letting go of old habits, and behaving in a new way – easy to say, harder to do. Successful development of emotional competencies takes a combination of experiential learning, tools and techniques, and consistent support over time (EQ At Work, 2004).

## **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a convenient phrase with which to focus attention on human talent. Even though it simple as a phrase, it incorporates the complexity of a person's capability. Integrating the work of Goleman (1995 and 1998) and Boyatzis (1982), we are using the following descriptive definition: emotional intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 1999). According to Goleman and Boyatzis (Primal Leadership), how people feel about working at a company or organization can account for 20-30 percent of business performance.

Developing emotionally intelligent medical professionals makes sense not only for patients, but the whole health system. As health care has evolved, we find patients cross multiple lines, needing to be seen in several different areas of medical care delivery. Teaching leadership principals improves patient safety and employee satisfaction. "Patient safety is all about communication, at the very lowest levels to the very highest," says Darrell Campbell, MD, chief of staff at the U-M Health explains. "What we're trying to do as leaders is point out the value and the importance of communication from the front line to the top, and know where the potential mistakes are," he adds (Lichter, A. 2003)

## **Experiential Learning**

'Experiential learning' can apply to *any* kind of learning through experience. 'Experiential learning' is often used by providers of training or education to refer to a structured learning sequence which is guided by a cyclical model of experiential learning. Less contrived forms of experiential learning (including accidental or unintentional learning) are usually described in more everyday language such as 'learning from experience' or 'learning through experience'.

An 'experiential learning cycle' is a means of representing sequences in experiential learning. It is often assumed that the stages of a 'learning cycle' are managed by a facilitator, but they can also be self-managed or even 'unmanaged' in the sense that learning from experience is a normal everyday process for most people. From a trainer's perspective, an experiential learning cycle is a 2, 3, 4 or 5 stage learning sequence which encourages continuity from one experience to another. It is sometimes referred to as a '*training*'

cycle', which can be misleading, especially if the theory underpinning it is about *learners* and *learning* (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Juch, 1983.) Learning takes place when the rules are suspended, such as during a crisis or a new experience (Weber, 2002; Koestenbaum & Block, 2001). The patterns that govern behavior and perception come into consciousness only when there is a deviation from the plan. This explains why the paradigms and rules governing people's behavior function below the level of their conscious awareness and are not generally available for analysis (Weber, 2002; Hall, 1989; Powers, 1973).

### **Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)**

EAL builds upon the foundation of an experiential learning modality. Research shows that experiential learning is an excellent tool for developing leadership competencies, including those relating to emotional intelligence. But why partner with horses? Through our understanding of their instinctual behavior, horses offer humans powerful insights into concepts such as leadership, credibility & integrity, effectively working together, and non-verbal communication. Horses, even domesticated ones, instinctually live in a family system that has rules or "non-negotiables" that can help people learn about human beliefs and behaviors. Horses are herbivores and thus are prey to other animals, relating to people who lack power or perceive they have no power. A hierarchy or "pecking order" exists within all horse herds. This is not stagnant, but rather is fluid and can be a changing process as individual horses challenge the horse above them in the order. The position in the herd is important, determining many things including who eats first or who eats at all if there are limited resources. Thus, two keys to horse survival are effective communication and **developing relationships** with other members of the herd. In the wild, death can be the price paid for a prey animal that does not communicate well or misunderstands the herd's message.

Equine Assisted Learning and Psychotherapist practitioners are finding that horses act as very large mirrors that promote consciousness by reacting to human behaviors. By physically interacting with horses, humans must learn to congruently communicate with the horse, who may weigh somewhere between 800 and 2,000 pounds. Participants in an EAL program cannot depend solely on verbal language, which necessitates an authentic awareness and sharing of body awareness and intention (Vidrine, Owen-Smit, Faulkner, 2002; McCormick & McCormick, 1997). Additionally, EAL facilitators often use metaphor to help increase participant understanding. According to

pundits of split-brain research, metaphor is “the language of the right brain,” which implies that metaphor (such as experiential learning) allows direct communication with the imagistic, implicative, contextual, and id side of the brain; the half that processes information in a “simultaneous, holistic, and implicative fashion (Vidrine, Owen-Smit, Faulkner, 2002; Mills & Crowley).

Kaleidoscope Learning Circle, llc (KLC) a company that provides EAL programs, was created because we believe that horse-human experiential learning can positively affect people, potentially challenging and changing the way we think, feel, and behave. Kaleidoscope founder, Dr. Tracy Weber is the Synergy Leadership Program’s lead facilitator. Weber earned a Ph.D. in Leadership at Andrews University, a Service Management Master’s at Rochester Institute of Technology and a Bachelor’s in Advertising at Michigan State University. Before founding Kaleidoscope Learning Circle, llc, ([www.myklc.com](http://www.myklc.com)) her career included experience in marketing and leadership positions in for-profit, non-profit, and governmental sectors. Her areas of expertise include organizational behavior and change, personal growth and professional development, developing competency based initiatives, women’s issues, and an emphasis on understanding systems, group dynamics, and leadership.

### **Synergy Medical EQ Leadership Program**

Working collaboratively with Dr. Christine Rohr, Dr. Weber created the Synergy Medical EQ Equine Assisted Learning Leadership Program. Built on a foundation of successful learning by adult, the program includes the following foundations: it is learner-centered, driven by each individual’s personal goals; offered in a trustful and safe learning environment, enabling participants to explore ideas and seek greater awareness, the group is small in order to promote dialogue; and participants are allowed to learn over time, a means of seeking greater understanding and connecting the theoretical to the practical. Participants and support faculty come together for eight, three-hour, sessions over the course of nine months, July 2005 – March 2006. The focus of the initial session was to introduce the EAL program and its’ goals. The final session will bring all the pieces of the program together and invite each individual to define their leadership competencies and styles. Subsequent sessions each focus on Daniel Goleman’s emotional intelligence competencies and the six different leadership styles that he identifies: Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetting and Commanding.

Each session begins with an introduction of a leadership style and dialogue relating to the application of that style – where is it most likely to be successful and where it may not be as effective. Following the discussion, an experiential EAL exercise designed to explore the leadership style will take place. Two facilitators, Dr. Weber and a horse specialist, watch and listen to the behavior, choices, and interactions of the horses and the participants. EAL exercises do not have a specific outcome or “right answer”, instead our focus is on the “process” – learning about the learning. Following the exercise, the group re-gathers to discuss and explore the experience, building greater understanding and awareness by sharing their insights and seeking to bridge general information to their own lives, the medical industry, and health care systems. The Synergy Medical Leadership Program is designed to:

- Increase understanding of EQ & Goleman’s leadership styles
- Increase awareness of the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of styles
- Identify methods of working with others and their styles
- Have fun & build relationships with others in the group
- Increase self-awareness of personal leadership style
- Identify areas for further understanding

Over the course of this program, participants have also been asked to reflect and capture the essences of leadership experiences in their daily lives. Journaling is a powerful tool for greater understanding, enabling people to capture some of the unconscious self and find deeper meaning to their choices. The journals are personal and will not be used assessed, thus allowing each participant to fully explore their own beliefs and values without judgment or fear.

In order to assess the Synergy Medical Leadership Program and further help students increase their awareness, we are implementing Dr. Daniel Feldman’s 1999 Emotionally Intelligent Leadership assessment form. This fifty question survey tool is being implemented at both the beginning of the program and at the end for comparison. The assessment tool measures a participants understanding of the core EQ skills of: knowing yourself, maintaining control, reading others, perceiving accurately, communicating with flexibility. It also measures the higher order EQ skills of: taking responsibility, generating choices, embracing a vision, having courage, and demonstrating resolve.

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