



Bonus Interview: Barb Korosec, Equine Coach

Deb Elbaum: Welcome to *In the Right Direction* podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today, I'm excited to share a bonus interview episode and introduce you to Barb Korosec, a coaching colleague of mine based in New York state. What's really cool about Barb is that she offers equine facilitated coaching, which is a fancy way of saying using horses to coach leaders. When I heard about this work, I had to hear more. In our conversation, Barb shares how horses live in the present moment, how they can help us be more intentional leaders, and what they might say if they could talk. Let's dive in. Hi, Barb.

Barb Korosec: Hi, Deb.

Deb Elbaum: I am so excited to talk with you about equine horse- horses and coaching. How did you get started using horses for coaching?

Barb Korosec: Yeah, well, thanks for the opportunity to- to discuss this, first of all. So, you know, it's interesting, I guess- I guess I would say that I grew up on a back of a horse, right? I'm one of these kids that grew up in a rural town, had a pony and then a horse in my backyard. I mean, truly, you know, that was how I grew up and spent hours and hours with horses, and I'm a stutterer, and I stuttered severely as a child. And human relationships were kind of challenging, right? So- But none of that was a factor with the horse. And, in fact, I never stuttered when I talked to the horse. So, some people refer to leadership among horse herds as having a caring presence, and that's what I experienced with my horses. So fast forward 40 whole years, weave in corporate America, weave that high-paying corporate job and in- in- in a suburb. Moving back into a rural life, I wanted to reconnect with horses. In my coaching practice, I just intuitively knew that they had something to offer us as a partner in coaching. So, I enrolled in a program to teach me more about that and said, "This is it. This is- This is exactly what I'm wanting to do and add to my practice."

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. What do you imagine the horses would say if they could put their feelings into verbal language?

Barb Korosec: Yeah, um, you mean like what they would tell us about? Like, how they would respond to us as humans?

Deb Elbaum: Mhm.

Barb Korosec: Probably the first thing they would say is, "Stop the story already. Just get out of your head. You have a body. Use it." And partly, it's- it's kind of- can I kind of bleed into why horses?

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, why horses?

Barb Korosec: So, horses among- Well, first of all, they're the largest of the domesticated animals of prey. So, they are preyed upon in nature, right? And so, they have extraordinary perceptive abilities and are completely in the present. They live in the present. They don't go in the past, "Oh, she dissed me yesterday, or, you know, he pushed me off the food pile" or whatever. They- they don't live there. They live right in the here and now. They know and experience their world through their bodies. Whereas humans, we tend to be in our head a lot, right? We tend to like the conceptual space, and, quite frankly, society rewards us for that. Our jobs reward us for this land of language and thoughts and ideas and convincing arguments and the like.

But here's why this body thing that horses have, this embodied awareness, really matters. Because you see that the brain is really distributed throughout the body, right? From- It's not just the organ in our skull, but it goes out to our fingertips and our toes and our skin. The same is true with horses, right? It's a sophisticated neural network, and it makes our bodies a complex social and emotional sense organ. So, whatever our weight is, we have this ability to bring a lot more sensing to bear in how we lead our lives, fall into relationships with people, connect with people, are aware of the world around us and ourselves and our impact. That is- But horses now are 1100 to 1200 pounds. So, their relative size, that is a huge sensing opportunity that they have. In fact, you know, in the wild it's that said that their perception and their ability to sense everything from heart rate to blood pressure to movement, the slightest gesture change, allows them to sense if that mountain lion that they see is just heading towards a stream to get a drink or is looking for its next meal. And they can sense in an instance whether they need to flee or they're safe.

So now in partnering with us, what happens is, they bring that incredible sensing to bear. They organize around safety and connection, and one of the ways they assess safety is to look at congruence, is to sense congruence. So, the big word for basically, you know, another word often used around leadership presence is synchrony. I think Amy Cuddy, out of Harvard, likes the word synchrony. It's basically the extent to which our body posture, our facial gestures, our tone, our heart rate, all that is- is in sync. And so, horses can sense congruence in us, right? So, when we're congruent, we feel safe. Congruence really underlies leadership presence. It underlies, yeah, it underlies awareness, right? Are we- Are we off in some way, or are we aligned and congruent? It's kind of like when a client goes into pen with a horse and says, "No, I'm not afraid." And your heart is racing, right? That client's not in congruence.

So basically, when we are fully connected to ourselves, and we're self-aware, and we're congruent, the horse will willingly interact and follow us without being led with a halter or a rope. And when we're not, the horse really doesn't want to be in relationship with us. It's

simple as that. It's clear. It's non-judgmental. There's no story. It is completely, like, are you authentic? Are you real, or are you somehow disconnected from yourself in such a way, (this is a highly technical term now) that you feel ugly, you know, you feel off-putting, right? Is- There's just something that feels off about you. And here's what's really cool, the people we work with, they sense congruence too, and they determine whether we are off in some way, or they can trust us. So, the same safety thing applies in the workplace, and in our- in our- and in our personal relationships about whether or not we are safe and real and in congruence. And so, they're like this little presence and relationship meter, you know? Again, without any judgment, it's just- it's just who they are. So that's a long-winded answer that story, but it's fascinating, isn't it?

Deb Elbaum: It's fascinating because it brings up such important concepts. This idea of one- of being in the present, and you're right that because life is so busy these days, and we are thinkers and in our heads so much of the time, we- we miss the opportunity to be in the present. We miss the opportunity to check in with our bodies and to notice, "Is my heart really racing fast? How do I feel? Do I feel relaxed?" So, what I hear you saying is the horse holds up a mirror. They- Maybe? Those are my words, to- or reflects some or responds to- How- So in a session-

Barb Korosec: Yeah, it's a little bit more of an impact mirror, is the way I might frame that, not so much of someone telling us how they see us, or- but we see our impact on- on that animal, and this is where my partnership and my training with the horses comes in because I have to help sometimes interpret that for clients, right? So- So can I give you an example?

Deb Elbaum: Oh, I'd love an example.

Barb Korosec: Yeah, so- and this is pretty typical. I mean, whether it's a one-off or a workshop, like any experiential learning, it's all based around, you know, what's the goal going in? Or what's the intention or goal for an activity going into it? And then- and then, you know, kind of the "What" the "So What" and "Now what" now- so what's, what's the activity? So, what does this have to do with your life? Now, what do you want to do differently, right? That's really experiential learning in a nutshell. And so, here's an example.

So, this is a client who came to spend a weekend to work with me on some things, and- in a VIP kind of a situation, to go in-depth, which is one of the things I offer. Anyhow, given her- her goal, I asked her to go into the arena, you know, this is an indoor arena. And among the objects that were in there, that arena, barrels, rails, jump stands to put a rail across that the horse might jump over, noodles, all kinds of things. I asked her to construct- to construct three elements: one representing something to- that she had to go through to achieve what she wants to achieve, something she has to get over, and something she has to get- get around.

Okay, so, sure enough, she constructed. She did her thing. She did these three things, but there was one really different thing that I had never seen before. And it goes through most clients, and she's no exception, we'll get two barrels that kind of form an opening between

them as a gate, but in her case, she puts those pretty close together, and then she put a big 40-inch round play ball in the middle of these two barrels. Now, her next objective was, without having a rope or a halter, just through her body and her movement, move the horse through these three elements, all right? Yeah. So, a lot of things come up when this happens. And in her case, you know, the horse, a very willing horse, you know, she was pushing the horse from behind. The horse gets up to this gate, and this thing to go through, which represented transitioning her mom to assisted living, and I'll call her Sue, this client.

And so, Sue was getting really frustrated because the horse would go only so far, and she had to push the ball out of the way to even get through the gate. And so, here's what I'm noticing. I'm noticing the horse's feet are really moving quickly and agitated. And I see her head come up and her eyes get big and her- and I see the horse stiffen. So, you know, I stopped the motion, right? That's- that's a coaching moment. That's a coachable moment. How's this working for you? How- Where- Where else does this show up in your life? What are you noticing about this? Would you like to see what I'm noticing, right? And it all really had to do with push energy, being very push directive and, you know, wondering why her mom isn't, like, being willing to move, you know? Push, push, push, right?

So then, she began to see that the horse was really trying. She wasn't a bad horse. Sue began to say, "Ugh, this horse isn't doing what I want it to do, right? My mother isn't doing what I want her to do." And so- so basically, I introduced her to the concept of a try, that Lucy would take a tentative step or lean her nose in to smell the ball. That's a try. It's an effort. So, what Sue had to do is become more- much more aware of the other, much more aware of the horse, much more aware of the subtleties, drop her energy for a second, let the horse process, *Oh, this is what she wants*. Then bring her energy back up again. Huge learning. Huge learning for her life around all the places in her life that she used push energy without really awareness that she was dropping the relationship in the process, she was- completely lost the relationship.

Deb Elbaum: Right, and how amazing that she could get that feedback in the moment, like you said, with that experiential learning, really different than- I'm imagining in a- in a corporate environment, you're just not going to get that same-

Barb Korosec: No. And quite- quite honestly, this is where it's like traditional coaching on steroids, right, because for me to have uncovered that in the space of our normal telephonic or video coaching call, you know, if I got there, that'd be great, and for her to now have this visceral experience of it. She saw Lucy. She saw her impact. She saw the try. She- You know, that is huge. So, a lot of the ahas, people get, then, right, are really around how they're relating, how they're connecting, how they're holding both the task and the relationship. Are they- Are they overdoing the task at the expense of the relationship? Are they aware of themselves? Are they aware of the horse? Did they even know there's a horse? No, I'm just kidding.

Deb Elbaum: Is it all about them? Right, and it's really all about how we - excuse me - how we show up? This idea of how we show up and-

Barb Korosec: Right, right.

Deb Elbaum: What a unique situation for people to have, like, how we show up with this creature that's sensing, like you said, and giving us feedback in the moment, and we get to say, "Do- Is this who we want to be? Do we want to keep pushing, pushing, pushing, or do we want to try to do things a little bit differently in all our relationships?"

Barb Korosec: Right, and you know, Deb, I'm all about the inner work of leadership. I'm all about, you know, the underlying patterns of thought and beliefs and ways of being and assumptions we make that underpin who we- who we- how- how we show up, right, and the behaviors that other people see. And so, I find that this work with horses kind of reveals those patterns, those adaptive patterns, and ways of being faster than traditional coaching.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Reveal, right? It reveals. Reveals who we are, our patterns, and who we want to be.

Barb Korosec: Yeah, yeah.

Deb Elbaum: What's been your personal biggest aha about you?

Barb Korosec: Um, I think for me, you know, the biggest one is that I- I've been guilty of living in my head, you know, for years, and I've also been- felt and so- so for me a big aha around connecting with my body, right, you know, connecting with the horse with my body. And I'm playing a lot with this notion of presence, you know? We can sense when somebody's with us and when somebody's not right? And the other big reveal that is true for a lot of my clients as well is, "Wow I became super uber-focused on the other and so empathetic that I gave up myself in the process." So- So often we- we don't pay attention to our boundaries, right? We are very fluid in our boundaries, and then we wonder what the heck happened, right?

And so, horses are really great at boundaries and boundary work. As a matter of fact, there's a couple of activities I do with clients around boundaries and horses. They're- They're big, and they want- they want to be in connection with us, and they're used to moving each other with their bodies in a herd. And so, it's amazing how often, and this is true for life, in the- in the- in a desire to be in connection with this horse (I mean, this beautiful horse. I just want to pet the horse. I just want to love on it.) and to be in connection with the horse, they completely drop their boundaries. The next thing I know, the horse is stepping right into their space, you know? So, I've had to learn my own boundaries with horses and setting those boundaries in the same way that horses push each other around in a herd.

Deb Elbaum: Setting boundaries is such a big theme in coaching.

Barb Korosec: I know, isn't it?

Deb Elbaum: It's such a big theme, "What's okay for us? What's not okay for us?" and giving ourselves permission. Do we even give ourselves permission to set our boundaries, to claim our boundaries?

Barb Korosec: Yes, which goes back to, you know, before we started to tape, we were talking about posture, right? And our whole, again, our- our- our way of being and how horses read posture, you know? You know, posture makes it easier for- When- When we- When we really stand into our natural spine, right, we don't necessarily make ourselves taller, but we really feel our true natural spine. It becomes easier to take a stand.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah.

Barb Korosec: It becomes easier to take a stand in what we believe in, you know, so- Gosh, there are- there are just so many things that horses reveal without saying a word.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, and I'm just struck by how fun it must be for you.

Barb Korosec: Oh, yeah.

Deb Elbaum: I feel like it's fun and exciting and intriguing and purposeful.

Barb Korosec: It is fun. I would like to do more of it, yeah, and I- I do live in the middle of nowhere, in central New York, right? And so, most of my clients are usually in a metropolitan area, and so most of the times the way a client is going to work with me is as part of a coaching engagement. We decide to tag on that kind of a VIP weekend, or something like that. We contract for that separately, or, you know, someone seeks me out for that kind of an engagement. The other thing I do that involves horses-

So I'm- Again, I'm really into this whole area of- of the inner work of leaders and presence, right, awareness of self and others, and the impact we have on- on others and our world. And so, I do do a conventional teleclass around presence starting in January. It usually goes over 12 weeks. And then- and then in September, I do a three-day workshop at an incredible estate in southern New Jersey with a couple of wonderful partners: a cowboy named Brad and- and a wonderful guide in forest therapy. And we integrate horses and nature into an experience of presence. And it's a- it's a really fabulous workshop.

Deb Elbaum: Wow.

Barb Korosec: And fun. It lights me up.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, I could tell. You- You sound- absolutely sound it. How can people find you online?

Barb Korosec: Yeah, thanks for asking. So, the name of my company is Full Span Leadership, so fullspanleadership.com. One word.

Deb Elbaum: Wonderful. Barb, thank you so much. This was so interesting, and I feel like I could have asked more and more questions. So, thanks for sharing a little bit of this insight into what you do.

Barb Korosec: You're most welcome. Thanks- Thanks for allowing me to share my work.