



Thoughts from Linda:

Horse Sense for People
*Using the Gentle Wisdom of Join-Up to
Enrich Our Relationships at Home and at Work*

Monty Roberts
2001

Per Mary Ann Evans (pen name of George Eliot,) the 19th-century British novelist who coined the phrase, "you can't judge a book by its cover," I really underestimated this book when I bought it in 2005. It was on a special stand at the check-out counter in a Safeway grocery in Dallas, Texas, at a significantly discounted price. I remember this because it was so unusual to see any book presented in a line at a grocery, especially in the 'impulse buy' spot, where they usually housed chocolate. At the time, I thought it would be a good, light read, maybe perfect for the summer.

It was so much more. Little did I realize that the underlying value of dignity of all living things and the approaches Monty Roberts takes with horses would so closely parallel the values and approaches of our firm, DNA Consulting, and of my previous firm, Interaction Associates.

I am happy that I found this book, as it has greatly influenced my life's work and provided such an inspiration for so many as I have come to learn.

Monty Roberts was born in 1935 in Salinas, California, to a horse family, and at the age of four was competing in rodeos and winning trophies. He spent time during his teenage years on a ranch in Nevada, where he studied horses for hours and developed his philosophy and approach. Today he is well-known globally for this non-violent approach to teaching horses, including how to 'tame' wild horses within 30 minutes versus six to eight weeks using traditional, violent methods.

He worked with Queen Elizabeth II, who is today one of his many admirers. He developed a gentle approach using a language he labeled "Equus" and a process called "Join Up," which he explains in the book and has become the standard today for horse trainers worldwide. He has authored two other books: *Shy Boy: The Horse That Came in from the Wild* and *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, on the NYT Bestseller List for 58 weeks.

The sub-title of this book is "Using the Gentle Wisdom of the Join-Up Technique to Enrich Our Relationships at Home and at Work." He wrote the book, as he explains, after hearing so many people ask him to connect his non-violent approach with horses to the human experience. He has worked with over 10,000 horses in his life and has much to say about the efficacy of the approach of "Join-Up."

The book has eight chapters and a moving conclusion. They include Join Up: The Journey, Communication, Against Violence, Trust, Respect, The Good Parent, and Choice and Change. The Concluding chapter consists of Simplicity and The Power of Gentleness.

The first chapter lays out the "Join Up" methodology. Monty Roberts cracked the code of the relationship potential between man and horse, which for the previous 8,000 years had been one of master to slave, where violence was a centerpiece. This accomplishment puts him in the same category as Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey, two amazing women who learned how to communicate with chimpanzees in Goodall's case and mountain gorillas in the wild in the case of Dian Fossey.

Instead of using whips and punishment as the primary tools, he realized the need to understand the psychology of this animal, which he notes has been here on the planet for 75 million or so years longer than our species. He realized that the horse, as a flight animal, was capable of so much more than had previously understood and developed Equus as the bridge for intra-species communication. He describes his underlying beliefs: "Traditional trainers worked on the principle...you do what I tell you or I'll hurt you. As I grew up, I came to the conclusion that it is far more effective to wait for horses to do something right and reward them. I began to experiment with training techniques that disciplined the horse by putting him back to work, never by applying force. I refused to inflict pain of any kind. I believed that horses, these wonderful flight animals with no agenda to cause harm to anyone, could teach us that violence is never the answer."

He learned how to listen to horses and develop a two-way trusting relationship by using body movements and posture to express respect and kindness, forming the foundation of safety and trust between the two. You will learn how he establishes a partnership with the horse through carefully choreographed movements and a step-by-step practice of allowing the horse to make the right choices at critical junctures.

He will take you through the elements of communication and trust-building practices. You'll meet some interesting characters from his many years of experience as he is a terrific storyteller. I found the stories of individual horses very intriguing, and you'll meet

Brownie, Mischief, Dan Tack, Blushing ET, PB, Balet, and even Tina the mule, who was one of my favorites. He contends that mules are of higher intelligence than horses.

As the title indicates, he uses the horse/human relationship as a metaphor for life in general and business specifically. Since the 1980s, he and his team have welcomed all kinds of organizational leaders to their Flag Is Up Farm in California, where he demonstrates the use of Equus and the "Join Up" process, helping leaders to understand the many similarities that exist in good leadership and management by learning from horses. In our DNA Consulting practice, we use a form of "Join Up" to help leaders set up teams for success in their approach to enrolling team members and building a safe, trusting, collaborative team environment. We have found this approach quite successful over the years and even give out this book to our colleagues on many occasions.

I am particularly fond of his closing chapters, where he addresses violence in humans and offers some of his wisdom on the family and child-rearing. He and his wife have three children and have assisted over 55 foster children over the years. He developed a system that provides parents with an objective way of dealing with their children's behavior, called "The Blackboard System," which evolved from his work with one horse, Brownie. As he noted, "Brownie helped me understand that if you can give your student the chance to choose his or her consequences, you will instill a sense of responsibility for his or her actions—taking yourself out of the punishment business." The system is brilliant and thoroughly explained, with great examples in the book's last chapter.

I'll end this review the same way he starts and ends his book, with the following three statements, as they form the core of his identity and teaching to animals and to all who are fortunate enough to meet and get to know Monty Roberts.

Violence is never the answer.

Violence is always for the violator and never for the victim.

No one of us was born with the right to say "you must, or I'll hurt you" to any other creature, animal, or human.

This book is filled with life lessons and much wisdom from his years of experience with these magnificent animals. It is an easy read and is a book that I have turned to on many occasions over the past decade. You can also get to know Monty through his website and numerous videos and mini-courses available on the internet today.