

TRANSFORMING

YOUR

*Life*

VOLUME II

Transforming Your Life II

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With

Co-Authors from around the World

Transforming Your Life II

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Transforming Your Life II

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## Discovering the Engagement Quotient – A Somatic Learning Journey

*(Revised and Updated August 2023)*

*by Lissa Pohl*

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### Dedication and Overview

It is an honor to share my journey of becoming a somatic engagement coach. This chapter describes the determination, persistence, happenstance and the divine intervention required to get where I am today. It speaks to the challenge of making professional inroads, and earning an income with an unconventional *calling*. It also speaks to the blessing and the curse of being ahead of your time in the leadership development industry, and the necessity of reinventing yourself repeatedly. Mostly it is about cultivating patience from others and for yourself until the world catches up with you.

This chapter is dedicated to those who live and play with ideas that lie outside the norm and push the boundaries of common convention when it comes to developing leaders. It is specifically for those who are curious about what happens between two beings in the *space of engagement*, and leveraging somatic intelligence to serve others.

### Getting Started With The Fundamentals

“You came here in a body!”, I exclaim to my clients who are standing before me grappling to learn what the fourth fundamental competency of leadership is. This revelation comes after a short brainstorming session and some prodding about what makes someone an effective leader.

The first three fundamentals are:

1. Having **awareness** – self, social and environmental (EQ)
2. Having the ability to give and receive **feedback**
3. Having the ability to *take effective* **action** that is based on awareness and feedback from the environment

The fourth fundamental competency, the one that integrates the other three, remains elusive for most of my clients. I have to ask many seemingly stupid questions like,

“What brought you to this workshop?”

“A car.”

“What made the car get here?”, I ask.

“Gas”, they reply.

“What are you standing in right now?” I ask.

“Shoes” is the reply.

After a while they give up, and this is when I pat down the front of my body and give the absurdly obvious answer, “You came here in a body.” Once their eyes stop rolling, but before they can make their way to the exit, I jokingly say that they have likely never paid anyone so much money to tell them what they already know- that they have a body, and that their body is what brought them to the workshop to learn about becoming a more effective Being on the planet.

The fact that most people struggle to find this answer is indicative, not only of how disconnected we are from our body, but also of how much we take them for granted. Yet, it’s the body’s intelligence, or somatic intelligence, “the place where sensation [perception], emotion, and cognitive interpretation of events all meet and interact to form one’s moment-to-moment experience of life” (Blake, 2009). It is what allows us to do anything, including learning about leadership and engaging others. The fact that 90% of the people I work with, at first, find this simple realization annoyingly absurd is precisely why I became a somatic engagement coach.

### **Re-mem-bering the Body**

My interest in developing a somatic, or embodied, approach to learning leadership competencies goes back to my early childhood years growing up in Boulder, Colorado. It was the time I discovered that I delighted in dancing. I was so enthused that my dancing embarrassed my little brother to such an extent that he felt compelled to contain my movement so I could not ecstatically move about. I was known at school, at camp, and to my friends as a free spirited, interpretive dancer, a flying rocket ship that didn’t touch the ground. Rarely did I have, nor could find, a dance partner who could go where I went while dancing. I was literally moved by music and found that it could transport me into other realms where imagination and movement became one. I did not care what others thought, because the music and the movement were all I desired and needed.

Though I was athletic, studying dance was never something I pursued. Instead, I chose to ice skate, ride horses, and sing. You see, to get anywhere as a dancer you had to have a more flexible body than I was graced with. In the early years of my life, due to a fall off of a fence, I had developed a mild curvature in my back. This slight curvature left me envying others whose backs were aligned, elegant, and allowed them to stand up straight without effort. Later on, at age 16, I found out about the transformative power of Rolfing™, a form of myofascial-structural integration, or very deep massage, that results in a more balanced and aligned posture via both physical and emotional release. This type of therapy was a bit too “out there” for my parents to agree to pay for. Therefore, upon graduation from high school I went to wait tables for three months at the only Mexican restaurant in Flagstaff, Arizona to earn the \$500 for the required ten sessions.

Through Rolfing I was able to see and feel the connections between my mind, body and emotions. Each session began and ended with before and after pictures of my body. I found this type of feedback to be very powerful, giving me a new sense of pride as I grew an entire inch in height and saw my posture improve dramatically over the four months it took to

complete ten sessions. By manipulating matter (in this case the body), I realized how both physical traumas and emotional patterns can get stuck in the myofascial tissues of the body, and most importantly, that it is possible for them to shift and release. This realization that the potential for change is rooted in the body planted the seed for my interest and later pursuits in the mind-body connection.

After high school, I set off for college to be a marine biologist and took myself to the Pacific Northwest and the amazingly beautiful city of Bellingham, Washington. After a couple of years doing hard science, which I loved, I figured out that life as a marine biologist looked more like bobbing up and down on the cold, rough Alaskan seas counting stinky dead salmon on a fishing boat inhabited by Japanese fishermen, rather than playing with dolphins in the warm, sandy lagoons of Hawaii or the Galapagos Islands.

After this rather defeating realization I decided to follow my boyfriend across the mountains to Spokane and switched my major to begin studying sign-language interpreting for people who are deaf, and deaf and blind. Why the about face in disciplines? It was because my boyfriend had a nephew who was deaf and when I interacted with him I found it frustrating that I could not communicate effectively. This two-year-old boy was just starting to learn language and here I was not even able to understand that he wanted milk to drink or that he loved red cars. I found that learning sign language felt very comfortable, and I innately used my hands to talk, so why not make my natural inclination to gesticulate actually mean something to somebody else?

There was a program at the community college in Spokane where you could get an AS Degree in sign language. After graduation, I got accepted into the Interpreter Training Program in Seattle. Here I spent a year experiencing the human capacity to communicate nonverbally. American Sign Language (ASL) is a beautiful, spatial, nonlinear language that most deaf Americans use to communicate amongst themselves. Once again, I was struck with the important role the body plays in communicating with others. ASL did more than allow me to communicate or “talk” to deaf and deaf/blind individuals. It challenged me to use and better integrate all the physical senses and to develop my ability to focus my awareness outward while staying fully aware of what I was doing with my body. Learning this spatial way of communicating assisted me in developing acute perceptual awareness and empathy.

In this program I discovered that I could combine my passion for dance and sign language to interpret music/songs for the deaf. This idea was soon crushed by the director of the ASL interpreter training program, and so I decided to go back to school to get an undergraduate degree in Nutrition from Western Washington University. Right at this time I had also met my husband-to-be and he was in music school at WWU. Back up to Bellingham and the hard sciences I went to study nutrition, the body’s structure, and nature’s biological and organic processes. This degree deepened my understanding and love for the workings of the body. Little did I know at the time how much this background and experience would influence my approach to studying human potential development.

After completing this BS degree and getting married, I ended up applying my knowledge of nutrition as a diet consultant, wellness coach, and natural foods educator for Puget Consumers Coop (PCC) in Seattle. What I came to understand, in no uncertain terms, was

that optimal health has many ingredients. These ingredients include a healthy environment – clean water, air and food, balanced nutrition, adequate exercise, and emotional wellbeing. Even though I felt that I could assist others with many of these ingredients, I saw that being able to address someone’s emotional wellbeing was very nebulous, and that a person’s relationship to food and unhealthy behaviors were incredibly resistant to change. People could take the best, purest, and most expensive vitamins, eat organic foods, and live in the most health-supportive environments and their vitality still suffered. After much frustration, I came to realize that optimal health and happiness were an ‘inside job’. The question remained, “How does a person access this optimal state of being?” Fortunately, I didn’t have to wait too long before I stumbled into a coaching methodology that would assist me in finding, and literally seeing, the answer to this question.

### **Camera, Lights, Action – Seeing The Full Spectrum**

In 1996 I experienced the Sage Learning Method, an innovative and transforming coaching technique originally developed by learning theorist Martin Sage of Austin, Texas. At a workshop called “What To Do With The Rest Of Your Life” I had the opportunity to watch individuals, including myself, visually transform over the course of three days. The workshop began with everyone getting their faces filmed on a video camera and then continued with two full days of intensive somatic feedback, experiential learning, and coaching. It ended with getting re-filmed and comparing the before and after pictures. I literally watched 30 people walk into the workshop looking one way and walk out looking very different, with most looking 10 to 15 years younger, healthier, and more vital.

What was happening here? How is it possible for someone’s appearance to change over such a short period of time? What was different about the environment people found themselves in at the time of the workshop? Was it the type of coaching feedback (very body based and as purely objective as possible) that allowed people to shift their thinking and Being so radically that their cells came along for the ride? Or that we were actively being pushed into revealing our purpose and passion?

During those three days I also experienced a dimensional shift in the way I perceived and moved through the world. Colors were brighter, and my children were extra sharp, clear and were more connected to me. It was as if I had had cataract surgery of the Spirit. I seemed to be flying feet first through the streets of Seattle instead of walking! I was fascinated, to say the least. This was not some sort of shamanic, drug-induced phenomenon, but a profound shift in my own perceptual abilities and consciousness.

Later that year, I attended Martin’s three-day *Self Actualization* workshop that took all of this to another level and dimension. Martin, as it turns out, had mastered his energy to such an extent that he was able to manifest physical sensations in others (i.e. heating someone’s side up when standing near them, or making them feel as if they were floating above the ground). After the workshop Martin came up to me and gave me a hug and very intentionally held the part of my back where that curvature was. That night when I got home I experienced a physical downloading of energy out of my back and through my arms that lasted about 45 minutes. I was literally energetically pinned down to my bed. After it stopped, I could stand up straight without

trying! This raised more questions for me as to what was going on in this type of coaching. No deep tissue manipulation had occurred, so how was it that I was more aligned in my body than I had been before I messed my back up in childhood or after 10 sessions of Rolfing?

So intrigued was I with this work that in 1997 I decided to do some coaching with Cathy Hawk, a graduate of Martin Sage's coach training program, who lived north of where I was in Seattle. She had further developed and systematized this unique coaching process into what is now called the Lights On Learning Method™. After dragging all of my girlfriends, my husband and kids to various Lights on Learning workshops I decided to go through Cathy's year-long coach training program. My own transformation was striking. The photos below were taken during a workshop called Powerful Partnering where, for the first time in our marriage, my husband and I were able to explore and get feedback on how we could live a "Lights On" life together.



Photos taken 2 hours apart

I completed coach certification, but was less interested in doing life coaching than I was in seeing how this method could be taken to organizations and leaders. I was committed to bringing this transformational technique to the leaders of the world and to keep their lights on! If their lights were going out how would we find our way forward and to make the world a better place for everyone?

It's hard to believe that it has been over 25 years since I became a Lights On Learning™ coach and that I am still working to bring this method to leaders and organizations. Though it never feels like it, 'patience **IS** a virtue', and continues to be a mandatory requirement in my professional journey.

### **Dirty Laundry**

I started my coaching business SHift in 1998 and was getting great results with my Seattle clients and their referrals were starting to come through the door. In 1999, we moved our family to Lexington, Kentucky so that my husband Clive could partner with his brother in their own architecture firm, as well as to be closer to his side of the family. Seattle had become crowded, fast paced, and massive traffic jams were the norm. Our family of four was outgrowing our small Los Angeles-style stucco house, and real estate had become insanely expensive with the

explosion of the dot com boom. Even if we sold our house for three times what we paid for it we could not move to a larger house in a similar area. So, off we went to Kentucky.

For years before we actually moved, I had been very reluctant to consider Kentucky as a place to live. It ranked near the bottom in the US for educational attainment and was known for having the highest rates for obesity and poverty. It was in the bible belt, a place cloaked in southern tradition and values, and where, contrary to what they taught us in high school history classes, the civil war was still alive and well just under the surface of the heavy clay soil.

However, truth be told, I was reluctant mostly because I was a child of the progressive, free-spirited West. I had grown up in the sixties and seventies in Boulder where one could study and practice any alternative healing or spiritual modality you could think of. Boulder was the home of Ida Rolf, marathon runner Frank Shorter, Mo Siegel of Celestial Seasonings Tea, and where the Buddhist leaders of the world descended to teach at The Naropa Institute. Seattle was similarly spirited - a place where the mountains kiss the sea, the great outdoors called you out to play, and a pioneering and entrepreneurial energy permeated the art filled neighborhoods. What in heaven's name would I do with myself in Lexington? How would I make a living?

Yet, I had found what I really wanted to do with the rest of my life and after having become a certified Lights On coach, I arrived in Lexington excited and ready to start my own coaching business. SHift was bound to be a success because it leveraged my talents and incorporated my interests in connecting the dots between the mind, body, emotions and Spirit.

Then, reality set in. It turned out that in Lexington, the word coaching was more synonymous with basketball or children's sports, than with life or leadership coaching. I set out to meet everyone in town who could give me support and assist me in creating the networks it would take to build my business. I also needed to find others to lend a much-needed ear to listen to my professional and entrepreneurial woes. There were a couple of pioneers in town doing life and executive coaching and they commiserated with me, but since coaching was such a new concept, it was slim pickings for finding clients locally. Additionally, having young elementary school kids who were also adjusting to the culture change, I could not see myself traveling very far to do this work.

There was something else that made it very challenging to do this cutting edge coaching work in Lexington. It evaded me for quite some time, but then one day while driving down the road it became plainly clear to me why my words and enthusiasm were seemingly falling on deaf ears. It was the simple fact that what I had to offer was so far ahead of its time that it was very difficult for most people to understand, much less to move towards. Mark Twain summed it up nicely. He allegedly said, "When the end of the world comes I want to be in Kentucky, because everything happens 20 years later there." And indeed, Lexington was seemingly 30 years behind Seattle in the adoption of coaching. On top of that, the Lights On Leadership™ (LOL) coaching technique was probably 10 to 15 years ahead of the times even in progressive places like Seattle or Boulder. Therefore, if I were to add up how far ahead of the times LOL was in Seattle (15 years) with how far behind Lexington was (30 years), I came up with it being 45 years ahead of its time for



Lexingtonians. I was only 40 years old when I came to Lexington, which meant, in terms of the work that I was trained and ready to do, I wasn't even born yet! I found myself in a time warp. This work was not even a blip on the radar screen of human potential development. It was the right fit for me but an epic failure for the market I found myself in.

I chalked up this revelation I had in my car as another one of God's cosmic jokes. It made me laugh out loud. It also brought me some comfort and relief, because it meant that I did not have to continue to bang my head against the wall, to continue to push boulders up nonexistent hills, and perhaps most importantly, allow me to stop judging myself, others, and the place I lived.

I was experiencing an existential defeat and facing the need to start all over from scratch. My professional heart and dreams were broken. Here I was, I had just found my true calling, my life's passion, the thing that got me up in the morning with a feeling of purpose, and now I was muted by the circumstances I found myself in. After struggling for years to build a business utilizing this innovative and transformational coaching and learning technique, and spending many thousands of dollars, I had to give it up. Lights On became a "lights out" proposition and my nemesis. A nemesis in the sense that it made no rational or financial sense to pursue. I cursed the day I ever laid eyes on it. And yet, deep down, I knew it was my calling and it would come back and nag at me, taunting and daring my Spirit to bring it into the world. As a result, I found myself in a heap of dirty laundry in my basement, crying and bewildered as to what I was going to do.

### **Phoenix Rising – Waiting for the World to Catch Up**

During this very trying and depressing time, I told my husband that I thought I would be better off living in India because, "at least in India I would know that I am not speaking the same language." I thought I was using the same language, but was continually missing the mark. So what do you do when you find yourself in a foreign land where you don't speak the native tongue or understand the culture, and you really need to earn some income and maintain your self-worth?

In my case, I did five things. First, I reverted to what I knew I was skilled at. This was painting interiors, fixing walls, and becoming the wallpaper peeling princess of Lexington. I started my own little business call Painting Pizazz, which allowed me to make some inroads into the community and the neighborhood, along with a very small income. I garnered respect from the paint supply experts, and it kept me away from the dirty laundry.

Second, I called an astrologer to find out how long Jupiter was going to be in retrograde, or was it Mercury? Or both? Only to find out that my sign Scorpio, is ruled by Pluto the destroyer, and my chart had more Pluto in it than he had ever seen before. "What does this mean?", I asked. He said that I needed to become comfortable being the phoenix who spontaneously combusts then rises from the ashes - 'waking up and dying' - and to get used to doing this on a daily basis. Basically it meant not getting attached to what I am needing to do or become. I had to learn to let go of my ego identity and learn to love the drawing board. Or... move to a more astrologically conducive and supportive place on the planet.

Even though this horoscope reading was quite accurate in reflecting what I was experiencing in my life at that time, I am not one to wholeheartedly place my spiritual wellbeing and future actions in astrology or any type of divination. However, there was an intriguing synchronicity that came from my session with the astrologer, and honestly it was a bit chilling. What I found out after I did some research on Pluto and his destructive tendencies, was that the symbol for Pluto, which looks like a capital **L** with the top part of a capital **P** placed on the top part of that **L**, is exactly how I had been initialing my name, Lissa Pohl, for the past 18 years. Oh dear... I am Pluto!



Symbol of Pluto and my initials

Third, you get yourself involved in creative and out-of-the box initiatives and events that allow you to find your tribe, stay intellectually engaged and keep yourself amused with your 'lights on'. I joined the inaugural Idea Festival planning committee. The Idea Festival was Lexington's attempt to attract innovative shakers and movers and their startup companies to set up shop here. I was instrumental, pun intended, in bringing the world's largest harp to downtown Lexington for the festival. The Earth Harp, invented by William Close, is a unique musical installation that turns any architectural or natural space into a stringed instrument. Here in Lexington we made a harp out of a nine-story parking garage and adjacent park. The public would then come up and play the building with a very large bow.

Fourth, get a local and seasoned corporate consultant to feel sorry for you and take you under his wings by spontaneously bursting into tears the second you see his amazingly creative and playful training space called the Innovation Station. This fine gentleman did not quite know what to do with me, but he recognized that I was without a tribe and so he invited me to assist him with marketing the University of Dayton Ohio's executive leadership development programming in Kentucky. I was able to attend many of the programs for executives in Dayton and found that doing corporate organizational leadership development still resonated with me. My new-found colleague and mentor recognized my talent for facilitating the soft skills of leadership and team development and he kept me busy honing my skills, as well as laughing and learning until the next big transformation took place. To him, I will be eternally grateful.

Fifth, continue to educate yourself in the field you are interested in working in. I will delve into this a bit later in this chapter.

### **A Horse of a Different Color – Equine-Assisted Learning**

I started riding ponies and horses when I was five. I did some showing, training, breeding and foaling, and generally hung out with them until I sold my last horse to go off to college. So it was likely that one of my children would also have the horse gene. Before we left Seattle I leased

one and taught my oldest daughter, then eight years old, how to ride. Shortly after we arrived in Lexington she and her sister started riding lessons. She kept lobbying for a horse of her own and when she was 12 we bought one together. It had been 22 years since I had been around horses and I was ready to get back into the saddle. Mirkos was a tall, dark and handsome Chilean thoroughbred. He was at a racing farm where I was taking the girls to learn more about horses. He had slightly injured one of his tendons while breezing at Churchill Downs racetrack, so the owners decided to retire him at the young age of five. To this day, 23 years later, I consider it a privilege to have such an amazing teacher and kind spirit in my life.

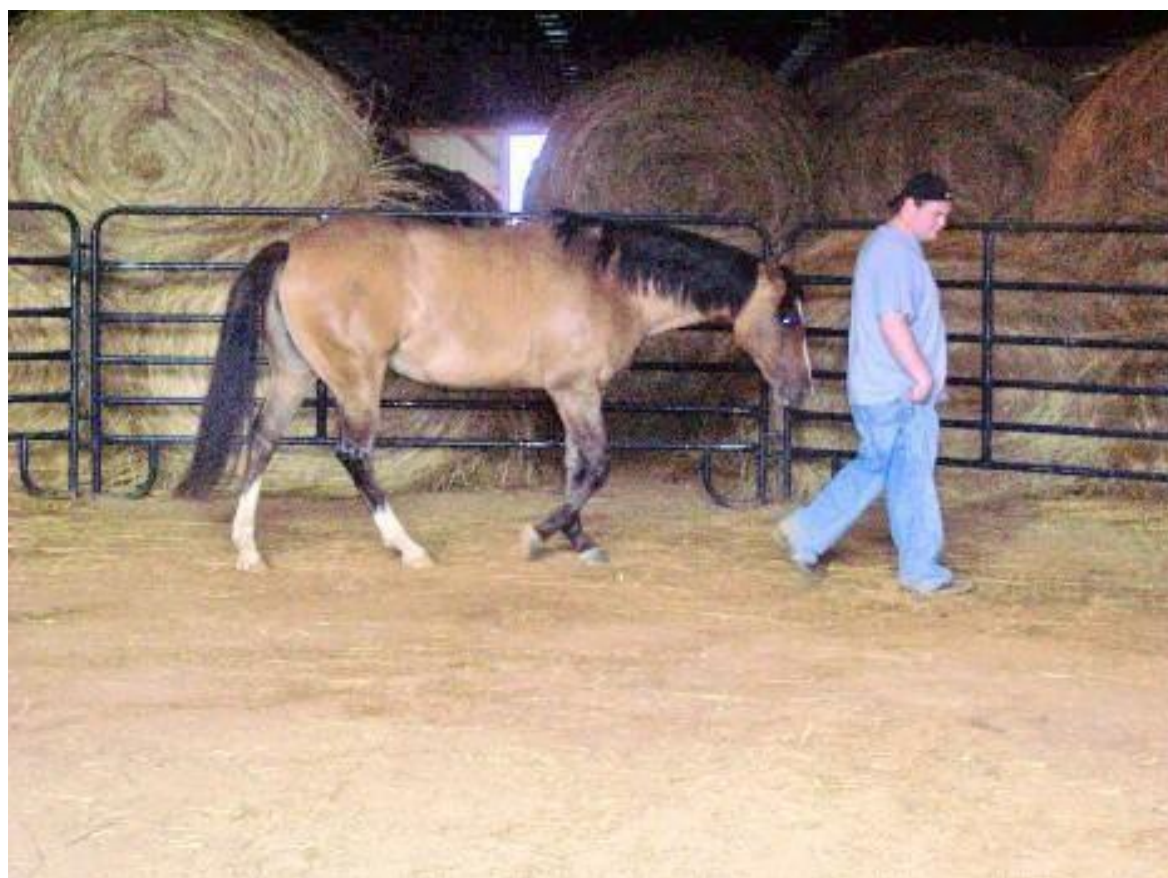
At the turn of the millennium, the field of Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) was just starting to develop. EAL is a facilitated experiential learning modality wherein people collaborate with horses to achieve goals via various ground activities and utilizing relational problem solving. My interest was in seeing how horses could assist humans in embodying leadership competencies, develop high performance teams and to somatically engage another being.

Why horses? Horses are *sense-able* beings that can assist us in developing our ability to communicate somatically, or to use all of our intelligences – our intellect (IQ), our emotions (EQ), our physical intelligence (PQ), and our Spiritual Intelligence (SQ). Being non-predatory animals, horses have a completely different perspective and instinctual orientation that determines their behavior toward their environment. For instance, with eyes on the sides of their head a horse employs an almost 360-degree visual awareness and are thus highly attuned to perceive and immediately react to things that enter their environment. They sleep no more than two to four hours per day. This hyper-vigilance is what keeps the horse safe in a predatory world. Horses communicate almost exclusively through body language and because they are social, herd animals they create leadership relationships that preserves the herd. Therefore, developing a successful leadership role with horses requires us to ‘show up’ as a leader. It requires that we develop an understanding of, and a proficiency with body language as opposed to our habitual reliance on words as the primary mode of communication.

At a very simplistic and instinctual level, the horse’s present-moment awareness results in their ability to quickly process information and feedback from the environment to take action which ensures their own safety and that of the herd. The intention behind EAL is to give humans an experience that allows them to become more effective through leveraging sensory information from stimuli in the environment and to act on it in the present moment, much like a horse does.

Insights people have while working with horses often have direct parallels at work or in their personal lives. When skillfully facilitated, an EAL program can give us direct feedback about organizational system pressure, communication breakdowns, and inauthentic intentions, because the horse directly reflects the moment in which they show up. On the other hand, (and just as plainly), congruency of thought, feeling and action, a clear vision and intention, patience, and connection are mirrored back to the two-legged participants by the four-legged teachers. When this happens, it is called ‘join up’ (Roberts, 2002). Join up is the moment when the horse decides to put their trust in you and willingly follows you anywhere you go

without a halter or rope attached. (See photo below). You and the horse are somatically engaged. Knowing what engagement feels like in our body gets us one step closer in being able to increase it in the workplace.



Join Up with Horses

### **Transforming Feedback**

According to research, feedback is seen as “ the single most significant **non**-instructional solution to human performance problems” (Rothwell, Kazanas 1998). It is so important that “any approach that can improve the clarity and timeliness of feedback was perceived by trainers in one study to be among the most significant approaches to solving human performance problems” (1998). If this is so, then why wouldn’t a leadership development professional or leader in the trenches want to make feedback an instructional solution to the challenges we face, including engagement?

After playing around with EAL for a few years I was able to see a very direct connection between the type of feedback the horses were giving my clients and the type of feedback I used as a Lights On Coach. Both reveal and make conscious the somatic nature of relationship by heightening one’s perceptual awareness through utilizing present moment, body-based feedback- the first between horse and human and the latter human to human. Both methods utilize non-judgmental and objective forms of feedback that people tend to assimilate more readily.

An example of feedback a horse might give is moving their heads away when you go to pet its head, or completely disengaging by walking away from incongruent people who are trying to get them to do something. Horses do not care if you are the queen of England or the Sheik of Dubai. They just want to know if you are someone who they can trust, are safe to follow, and have what it takes to lead them. Lights On Coaching utilizes before and after digital images of one's face to indicate when a person's system is in alignment to their purpose and passion. It is a very objective form of feedback, and much like a horse, the camera does not lie.

Feedback in a LOL session is in the form of simple, objective statements about what is actually happening in the body of the person getting coached. Transforming feedback is not a judgement or an interpretation of what is being seen. Nor is it story or advice. It's the process of noticing when balance and vitality enters the system of another person in response to standard coaching questions. It is much like how a horse watches our bodies to see when our words, body and actions align. A skilled somatic coach can see when another person's system moves towards balance, integrity and congruence.

Examples of transforming, 'lights on' feedback include:

- "The right side of your mouth turns down when you talk about your work."
- "Your left eye is brighter, larger and clearer than the right eye when you talk about your new job opportunity."
- "Your nose turns to the left, and the right ear is lower than the left ear."
- "The left side of the face is narrower than the right side."

When applying this methodology to employee engagement I have found that a person's level of engagement is directly proportionate to the quality of the feedback they are getting, how it is delivered, and the intentions behind the feedback. It is the very subtle and mostly unconscious micro-messages (Young, 2007) we broadcast that impacts engagement. It is clear that criticism, or unwelcome advice, can have the effect of shutting the recipient down or cause a *lights out* response in the body. You can only imagine my delight when I came across neuroscience research conducted by emotional intelligence expert Richard Boyatzis and Associates at Case Western Reserve University which confirmed what I had been seeing happen in my clients during LOL coaching sessions.

Their research identified subtle changes in the brain patterns of students who undergo fMRIs while watching a video of themselves responding to questions that generate positive emotional attractors vs. those that generate negative emotional attractors. "The positive emotional attractor (PEA) triggers constructive cognitive and physiological responses that enhance an individual's motivation, effort, optimism, flexibility, creative thinking, resilience and other adaptive behaviors. The negative emotional attractor (NEA) triggers another process by calling attention to current social and environmental stressors that may compromise an individual's effectiveness. While both emotional attractors play an important role in intentional change, it is critically important to leverage the beneficial effects of PEA arousal" (Boyatzis, Cesaro, Khawaja, Passerelli, 2010). This research represents a huge leap forward in identifying the types of feedback that produce more expansive/engaged, or *lights on* responses, verses

contractive/disengaged thinking and behavior patterns, or *lights out* responses. Fortunately, one does not need an MRI machine to determine how best to engage others. All we need to know is that the body shows us what is going on in the brain, and to follow the body's intelligence towards what brings it vitality, balance and light.

### **Tying Rocks to Clouds – Grounding the Work**

Once I saw people being excited, open and receptive to receiving somatic feedback from horses, I began to think about how to connect the EAL and the LOL work for my clients. The horses would open their eyes and minds to the importance of leveraging their somatic intelligence to lead and engage others. Then the LOL method would then give them the skills to be able to somatically engage others at work without horses.

However, in 2004, the concept of developing and leveraging somatic intelligence in the workplace was not yet in the cannon of organizational development. There were few practitioners doing EAL corporate work, and even fewer doing the LOL work with executives and organizations. In essence, I needed to, as one of my favorited authors Bill Elliot (1993) put it, find a way to “Tie Rocks to Clouds”. So, at age 43, I enrolled in graduate school and spent the next two years working part-time, mothering full-time, and in the evenings from 7–10pm, working in local coffee shops to acquire a Master of Arts Degree in Transformational Leadership Development. It's amazing how focused and motivated one can become when your soul feels trapped.

Writing my thesis *Embodying Leadership: An Integrated Methodology* (2006) proved to be a profoundly transforming experience. I can honestly say that it is the best thing I have ever done personally and professionally. It allowed me to formulate my own ideas about somatic leadership and to find my voice, both verbal and written. It gave me the confidence to be a pioneer in the emerging field of somatic intelligence and to be able to approach some of the amazing thinkers and practitioners such as Ken Wilbur, William Torbert, Suzanne Cook-Greuter, and Otto Scharmer with ideas about somatic intelligence and engagement. It has given me the courage and grounded knowledge to present at international conferences on leadership development and connected me to a much bigger world in which to do this work, including going to the Middle East to do EAL work with leaders in the Qatar Foundation. It has given me a place at the table with others who have similar passions about advancing human potential on the planet. Most of all it has allowed me to befriend the Lights On Learning Method™ once again and to understand the connection it has with Equine Assisted Learning, thus allowing me to identify the leadership development niche it best supports, which is embodying leadership competencies and tackling the challenge of disengaged workers.

### **One Way Ticket To Here**

Since all the jobs that I was looking at in the leadership development field were located outside of Lexington I viewed my degree as a one-way ticket to get our family out of here. In 2006, as I was finishing up my degree, starting my job search, and planning my exit strategy from Lexington, cosmic joke number two happened. What happened was that I was referred by a

friend to the third largest Applebee's restaurant franchiser in the US. It just happened to be based in downtown Lexington. The CEO was an adventuresome entrepreneur and thought that leadership with horses sounded interesting. I invited him to come out to my barn and I put him in the round pen with a couple of horses. He immediately saw the power of EAL to teach people leadership and asked me if I could design a program for his managers. As my mom would say, "Never look a gift horse in the mouth". The next thing I know is that I was gainfully employed doing exactly what I had just been studying in my Master's. I had the privilege of creating *Hands On Leadership*, a three-day leadership program for store managers that incorporated a half day with the horses along with other customer service modules focused on working more effectively, and in an embodied, way with their staff and customers.

Even though this 22 month long stint as the corporate "horse whisperer" closely resembled one very long episode of the then popular TV sitcom "The Office", it confirmed my hypothesis that both EAL and LOL could be adapted to a corporate setting and provided me with a much needed corporate experience. It also meant that we did not have to relocate once again. You can probably imagine and hear my husband's huge sigh of relief!

By 2008, casual dining had had its heyday. With the recession looming ahead, leadership development with the managers was no longer a priority, and instead, creating operational training to figure out how we could sell more cold beer to our dwindling customer base became the focus of training and development. The writing was on the wall, and I began to search for my next opportunity. All the networking I did in the years I was struggling to build my own business now paid off. I was in the right place at the right time to make the leap out of the corporate world and into academia. The Department of Community & Leadership Development at the University of Kentucky hired me to be the Assistant Director of the Center for Leadership Development. The Director was interested in being the first in the nation to create an Equine Guided Leadership Education program. However, after seven years of attempting this, the internal support we needed from the College of Agriculture, where our department was located, never materialized. Yet, in the 13 years I was at the university I had many great opportunities. This included doing some pioneering research around *The Effectiveness of Equine Guided Leadership Education to Teach Emotional Intelligence to Expert Nurses*. It also involved presenting at international conferences and mentoring several students who were equally intrigued with these notions of somatic leadership and EAL.

### **Seeing How To Serve – Engaging the Disengaged**

The cost of disengagement in the workplace is huge. Research finds that 71% of employees in the US and 87% worldwide are not engaged at work (Mann, Harter, 2017). In the US alone, it is estimated that disengagement at work costs between \$450 and \$550 billion each year in lost productivity (Blacksmith & Harter, 2011). This is more than the national defense budget! So what part of the engagement equation is missing?

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz see leaders as "the stewards of organizational energy".

“Energy has four dimensions: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It is necessary to draw energy from each domain and to manage it in all four” (2003). If leaders have a direct effect on how their followers engage themselves at work, then they are also directly connected to the productivity and efficiency ratings those workers produce. Dealing with apathy, or active disengagement, is a huge leadership challenge. It is one of the most difficult because it is a symptom of the great disconnect that most people have to their innermost dreams and their highest potential. Therefore, there is a need for methods that can better equip leaders to be able to get to the heart of purpose and meaning and create inspired and engaged followers.

Perhaps, just like the clients I mentioned at the very start of this chapter, the missing component of the engagement equation is closer to us than we might realize. As we have seen, clues to our passion and purpose can be found by simply observing the information that is exchanged between two living beings, whether it be horses or humans. Leveraging our physical intelligence (PQ) supports and enables the other three realms: the intellectual (IQ), the emotional (EQ) and the spiritual (SQ). Ignoring it is more than an oversight, it is a profound missed opportunity for developing human potential and leadership competency, and effectively tackling the challenge of worker engagement. The statistics mentioned above make it well worth the time and effort for each one of us to take a closer look, literally and figuratively, at ways in which we can leverage this forgotten intelligence to embody leadership and rewrite the engagement equation so that  $IQ + EQ + PQ = \text{Engagement (EnQ)}$ .

I suspect that one reason PQ is so often overlooked is that as humans have evolved, the primal role of the body (securing safety, food, shelter) has been increasingly usurped by intellectual, emotional and spiritual pursuits. These days, the body’s vast intelligence has been reduced to a vehicle of convenience transporting those other pursuits around. The result is not unlike having a car firing on just three cylinders instead of four. You can get around with three firing, however, the ride is not as smooth and it takes more time and effort to get where you are going. Being able, as leaders, to access and utilize all of our senses and perceptual abilities, (i.e., firing on all four cylinders), makes the experience more efficient and pleasurable. What if the physical realm of experience were to, once again, take a front seat with the intellect and emotional intelligence and, therefore, a much larger role in how we educate, communicate, and evolve? What sort of dynamic might unfold? To me this is where life gets exciting!

### **Living an Engaged Life**

Alan Combs, author of *The Radiance of Being: Understanding the Grand Integral Vision: Living the Integral Life*, talks about intelligence this way, “One thing of value learned along the way is that spontaneous, natural, intelligence shines effortlessly, like the morning light bursting through an open window when the mind is made clean and clear of the incrustations that life deposits upon it” (2002). In my case, the incrustations appeared in the form of self-doubt, judgments of others, and the difficulties and loneliness of being a pioneer in the emerging field of somatic leadership and engagement.



Had you told me in my 20s that I would become an expert in the field of Equine-Assisted Learning and doing somatic engagement work with leaders all over the world, I would never have believed you. Looking back on my professional journey, I see how each experience, challenge and transformation that has occurred along the way makes perfect sense. My successes came to me when I was ready for them, not just because I thought I deserved it. It taught me that even when we find ourselves in a place that is neither emotionally or physically conducive to letting our light shine, we have to find that inner cord that weaves together all the clues about who we are and what we are passionate about, and to hang on to it for dear life. At the same time, we need to knit it into a safety net that not only saves ourselves, but offers other sojourners, a safe place to gain perspective, support, and to garner the courage to explore and manifest their own potential.

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Lissa Pohl, Chief Engagement Officer at [The Engagement Quotient](#), is a global expert in somatic intelligence and engagement. Her unique work embraces a number of innovative learning modalities including Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL), Light On Leadership™, and the The Leadership Circle 360 Profile, to provide senior leaders and executive coaches the heightened perceptual awareness and feedback they need to understand how to fully engage, inspire, and lead others.

Lissa holds a Master's degree in Transformational Leadership Development and is a Master Trainer for the Equine Experiential Education Association (E3A), an international non-profit organization that certifies people to facilitate Equine-Assisted Learning for corporate clients and personal development. At the University of Kentucky, she conducted pioneering research into the effectiveness of Equine Guided Leadership Education to increase Emotional Intelligence in healthcare professionals and has presented on these subjects at leadership conferences worldwide. Her clients include the Qatar Foundation, HEC Paris Executive MBA and Leadership Development, Johnson & Johnson, University of Kentucky Healthcare, Applebee's, Panera Bread Company, and The Kentucky Veterinary Medical Association

Visit [www.EnQcoaching.com](http://www.EnQcoaching.com) to get FREE access to papers on Somatic Engagement, Perception, Equine-Assisted Learning and more.

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