

Seattle Times

By Sonia Krishnan

“Horse whisperer” advises managers

OK, managers, here’s a thought for you: Imagine your employees as horses, herd animals whose survival depends on a leader who knows what they need.

So, enough with the power trips or micromanaging. That works about as well on people as it does on horses, says equine expert Greg Eliel.

Instead, think about things like trust, rewards and freedom.

Eliel, a nationally renowned “horse whisperer,” has moved his equine expertise into a new ring — management consulting. Like the character in the 1998 Robert Redford film “The Horse Whisperer,” Eliel relies on his strong sense of intuition to understand the emotional landscape of horses.

The laws of leadership are universal, he says, and his seminar teaches managers that everything they need to know about leadership can be learned inside a horse ring.

This week, the Montana cowboy took his techniques to the Gold Creek Equestrian Center in Woodinville, where 16 supervisors from Philips Medical Systems of Bothell gathered in a barn for an “equine leadership session.”

The lesson: Whether you’re managing people or horses, it’s all about establishing trust and mutual respect and giving as much empowerment as you can.

A horse’s behavior reflects the person who leads him, he said. A bad trainer can lead to an unruly horse. Diagnosing a horse’s behavior is “almost like looking through a microscope into the soul of a person” who has guided him, he said.

Eliel would know. He grew up on a ranch in Montana and was riding horses as soon as he could walk, he said. A former resident of Preston, Eliel taught students on the Eastside before moving to Ellensburg in 2000. He’s considered one of the top experts on natural horsemanship, which emphasizes working, training and riding with horses in a manner that meshes with the horse’s instincts, rather than imposing your will on the animal.

Originally published January 13, 2007 at 12:00 am | Updated January 12, 2007 at 10:19 pm