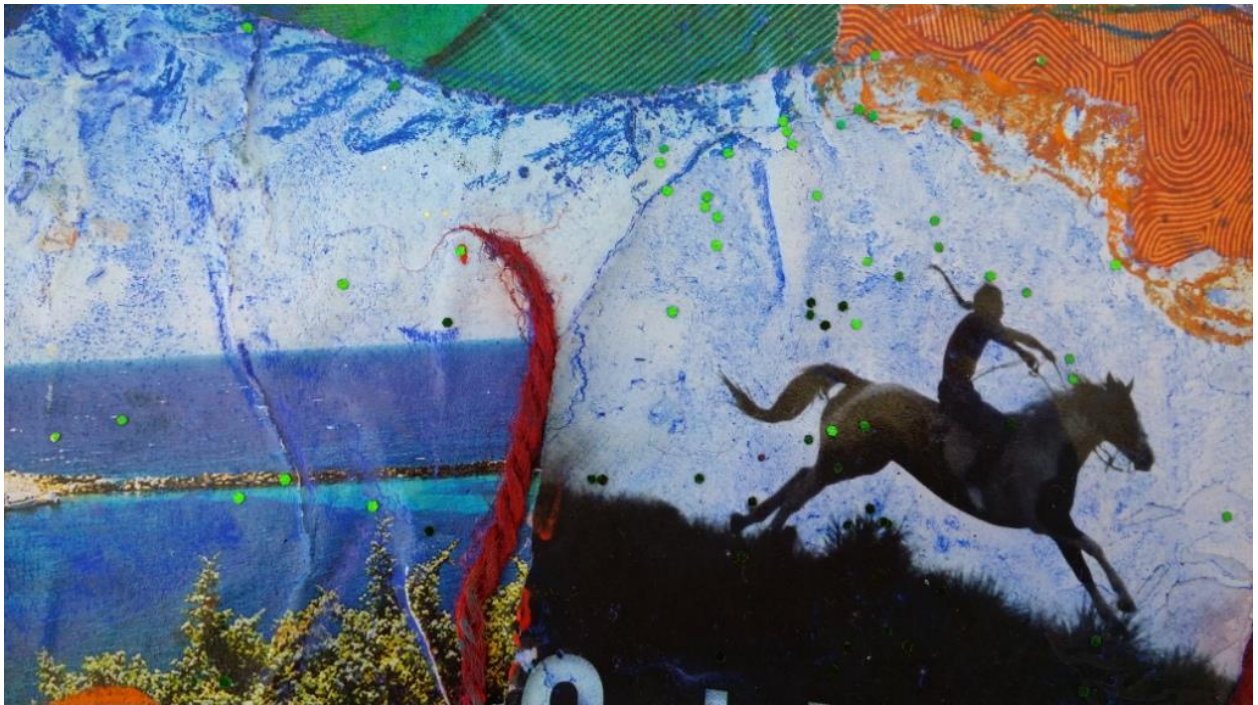
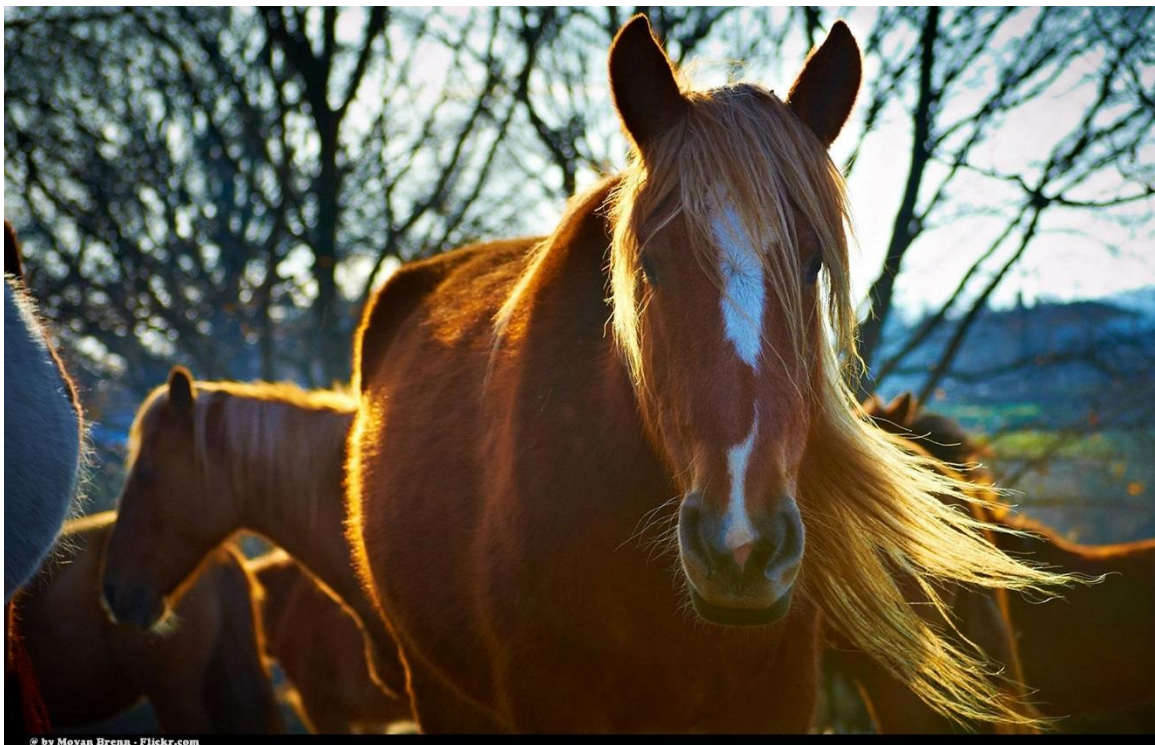


EMOTIONAL AGILITY - AN APPROACH INSPIRED BY HORSES



Dr. Lorraine Tilbury
Liedit Garget, 37230 Pernay, France



What is Emotional Agility?

Emotions are an important, unavoidable element of human interaction - they're often cited as the factor that can make or break a sales strategy, and high "emotional intelligence" is now well established as a critical element in successful leadership. It's nearly impossible to completely hide one's emotions from a fellow human being, because our bodies express our emotions physiologically, through changes in our heartbeat, breathing, blood pressure, etc...

These signals from our body are picked up by the human beings (and animals) around us. This is an ancient reflex that was essential to survival of the human species millions of years ago.

Why Horses?

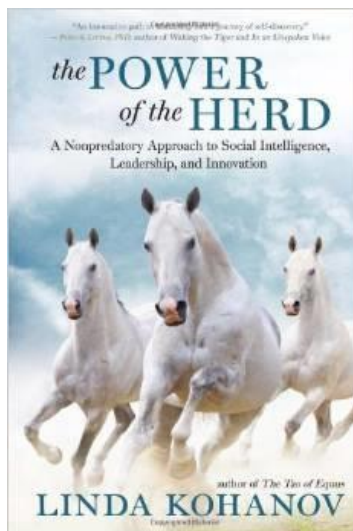
Emotional agility is a key survival mechanism for wild horses.



In horses, this “emotional contagion” is still very present; horses can immediately detect the emotional state of a fellow horse (or human for that matter) in their vicinity. The horse’s main form of defense in the wild is the speed at which it can distance itself from danger. Consequently, horses have the reflex to act immediately in response to the information conveyed by the emotion. Nowadays, most people have learned to suppress their emotions in society, sometimes to the point of no longer being sure themselves how they really feel in a given situation. Contrary to typical human behaviors, horses focus on the present moment. They don’t wonder why the lions tried to eat them, and they don’t worry about when could be the next time a lion might decide to stalk them.

Nowadays, most people have learned to suppress their emotions in society, sometimes to the point of no longer being sure themselves how they really feel in a given situation. Contrary to typical human behaviors, horses focus on the present moment. They don’t wonder why the lions tried to eat them, and they don’t worry about when could be the next time a lion might decide to stalk them.

Linda Kohanov, the author of “The Power of the Herd”, uses the term “**emotional agility**” to describe this capacity of the horse to identify an emotion very quickly, act on it, and then “go back to grazing”; they don’t take the time to verify if there really WAS a lion moving in the grass or if it was just a rabbit. They take action, immediately distancing themselves from the potential threat.



Afterwards, they return to their usual quiet occupation; they “go back to grazing”. People can learn a similar approach that will help them build their own “emotional agility” in their daily lives.

Linda Kohanov, “The Power of the Herd”

“By becoming more horselike in your responses to emotion, you can successfully align thought, feeling, and action for optimal performance... Horses (...) are models of emotional agility.”

How do horses practice it?

This concept was developed by Linda Kohanov, and further detailed in her recently published book “The Power of the Herd”. Emotional agility can be defined as a process in 4 steps, inspired by what is observed in horse’s behavior.

EMOTIONAL AGILITY: THE 4-STEP PROCESS

1. Feel the emotion in its purest form.
2. Identify the information conveyed by the emotion.
3. Do something to change the situation at hand.
4. “Go back to grazing” - return to initial state



Horses typically will do this in 7 seconds; it’s a key survival mechanism for them in the wild.

The 4-Step Process of Emotional Agility



Step 1. Identify your emotion

Learning to listen to your body with the Body Scan

An emotion expresses itself via a body sensation - thus those familiar expressions such as “breaking into a cold sweat”, “a gut feeling”, “butterflies in my stomach”, “getting cold feet”...that are used to express anxiety, fear, intuition...our body is an excellent indicator of what we are really feeling in a given situation; a much better indicator, in fact, than anything expressed only in words or in thought.



[Click image to download a Body Scan audioguide](#)

the Body Scan

One can learn to “listen” to the sensations in one’s body by entering into a slightly relaxed state and “scanning” each region of the body to identify any sensations. Sit or stand in a comfortable position, and slowly “scan” each area of your body, noticing the sensations in each region, without trying to change them or relax them. Then, after scanning the entire body, note the sensation that seems the most prominent. Breathe into that sensation, and “ask” it for the information it wants to convey to your mind. The information can be a color, a snatch of song, an image, a word, a phrase...the meaning isn’t always 100% clear when you receive it. When your mind has indeed received the information your body wants to convey, the body sensation will diminish or even disappear altogether.

Step 2.. understand the information conveyed by the emotion.

Your emotions are your body trying to tell you something.

Emotions occur when your body is trying to communicate information to your mind. When the mind perceives the information behind the emotion, and takes action accordingly, then the emotion dissipates. If, however, the emotion is ignored, covered up, or denied any expression, it will intensify – just like a person who raises their tone of voice when talking to someone who appears to be deaf. Like pressure rising in a steam cooker, it will eventually explode if there is no outlet – the expression “exploding into a rage” comes to mind.



When the emotional agility approach is applied, the information conveyed by an emotion is identified, and an action can be taken to change something about the situation. Consequently the emotion will decrease in intensity or disappear altogether, thus defusing the potentially volatile situation before any intensification or “explosion” takes place.

In her recently published book [“The Power of the Herd. A Nonpredatory Approach to Social Intelligence, Leadership, and Innovation”](#), Linda Kohanov developed a list of emotions and the information that they can convey, with questions to ask oneself to help identify the information pertinent to a particular situation. Linda calls it “The Emotional Message Chart”, an excerpt is on this page, and the [complete chart](#) can be downloaded from her [website](#). Some emotions, especially when they intensify, can feel similar, yet convey different information.



This [slideshow](#) describes the information behind some of the more common emotions that can feel similar when they intensify, with questions to ask oneself that can help understand the information conveyed, and also help clarify the emotion at hand.

Asking oneself the questions listed for a particular emotion can help understand what emotion is prominent in a given situation, and what action needs to be considered in order to alleviate the sensation associated with the emotion.

Excerpt of Linda Kohanov's [Emotional Message Chart](#) ([link](#) to complete chart)

Emotion	Information	Questions
Fear	Intuitive, focused awareness of a threat to your well being (external threat)	What is the threat? What action must I take to move to a position of safety?
Vulnerability	Something significant is about to change or be revealed; (internal threat to self image, beliefs, comfortable habits)	What belief, behavior or perception is being challenged? How might my life change if I accept this new insight?
Anger	A physical or emotional boundary has been crossed (sometimes unconsciously, sometimes by a person who's trying to bend you to his/her will)	What must be protected? What boundary must be established or restored?
Agitation/Anxiety (often mistaken for anger)	The person interacting with you is incongruent (Remember: Such people aren't necessarily dishonest, but may be dealing with personal issues that are none of your business.)	What is the emotion behind the mask? Is it directed toward me?
Some emotions feel similar; asking yourself the questions helps differentiate emotions that have similar sensations and intensifications.		

For example, it's late at night and you're about to enter a deserted-looking indoor parking lot to go to your car. You feel a tightening in your belly; it could be that you're feeling [fear](#) – an emotion felt when there is an immediate physical threat perceived. Humans can sense, just as horses would, an aggressive presence without actually visually noting anything out of the ordinary. The question to ask oneself in this case would be: “is there the possibility of a threat to my safety?” and a possible action to change the situation could be to find someone to accompany you to your car, instead of entering the parking lot alone. Ignoring your sensation of fear could lead to it intensifying to a state of panic.

Another emotion, that Linda Kohanov has termed “[vulnerability](#)”, can feel very much like fear, but in this situation there is no real potential for physical harm; it's a situation instead where one is operating out of one's comfort zone, or there are beliefs and assumptions being challenged by the particular situation. For example, speaking in public can cause physical sensations very similar to fear: butterflies in the stomach, “cold sweat”, etc. When one asks the question, however, “is there a physical threat?”, in the vast majority of cases the answer would be “No”. In this case, the sensations stem more from operating outside of one's comfort zone. Identifying how far one is venturing outside of one's comfort zone, and verifying the reasons for the undertaking – for example, the decision to give a public speech could be to gain public recognition and further one's career – can help alleviate the sensation and avoid it intensifying into panic.

[Anger](#) is an emotion whose early signs can seem similar to the sensations of unease associated with fear or vulnerability. Anger results from the trespass of a physical or emotional personal boundary. The question to ask in this case is: “What boundary has been exceeded? What do I need to do to re-establish that boundary?” An example could be that you have an individual office with your own files, and a colleague searches through your files in your office one day when you are absent, without asking for your permission to do so. You feel your stomach and your solar plexus tighten, yet you know that your company considers everything in the building to be “company property”. Did you clearly state your boundaries beforehand, for example by telling your colleague that she's welcome to search your files in your absence if needed, but

you want her to let you know in advance that this is something she would consider doing if necessary.

Another example that is useful to keep in mind is the sensation associated with [anxiety or agitation](#). This is the result of “emotional contagion” when you’re interacting with someone who is trying to hide how they’re really feeling - the person is acting “incongruent”. This attitude is not necessarily malevolent. It can be, for example, that they had an argument with their companion just before arriving at work, or that they learned that their ageing parent is seriously ill. They don’t want to share this personal information with you but they are affected by it. Your body detects this incongruency and your mind will (usually) assume that it is directed towards you; ignoring the sensation can cause it to escalate to rage (thus possibly confusing this sensation with that of anger). Acknowledging how one is feeling before the intensification occurs will immediately alleviate the tension that arises from this type of emotion. For example, you can “clear the air” by stating “Sorry but I’m a bit out of sorts this morning, I’ve had a difficult time at home recently - I don’t want to talk about it with you but I just wanted to let you know how I’m feeling and that it is not directed at you.” If you’re feeling this sensation in the presence of another person, the question to ask yourself is “what is the true emotion of this person behind their mask, and is it directed at me?”

Step 3. Take Action

Do something to change the situation from which arose the emotion.



Once you've identified the emotion that's arisen and the information that's associated with it, take action to change the situation that gave rise to the emotion. The action can be anything from removing yourself from the person or area where the emotion arose (in response to an emotion of fear), or acknowledging (to yourself, or to others if they're supportive) the challenge of what you're doing and why you're doing it, breathing deeply and deciding to continue (in response to an emotion of vulnerability), or stating much more explicitly the boundary that you want respected (in response to an emotion of anger), etc. While simple to conceive, taking appropriate, constructive action is not always easy to carry out! Future ebooks are forthcoming to explore in more depth how to do this.

Step 4. "Go back to grazing".

Let go of the emotion and return to a state of calm.



Learn to let go of the emotion after its information has been received and the action taken to address it. Concrete, constructive action in response to the information received will usually lead to the dissipation, or complete disappearance of the emotion.

Practice Emotional Agility



In conclusion, “emotional agility” is learning to apply the 4-step process that horses use in their interactions with others:

1. Perceive the sensations that arise from a particular emotion at an early stage,
2. “Listen” to the information conveyed by that emotion, and then
3. Take action to change something in the situation where that emotion has arisen.
4. The emotion dissipates once the information it conveys is acknowledged and acted upon - you can “go back to grazing” like the horses do, in other words, you can return to a state of calm and carry on with what you were doing.

This approach can be extremely helpful in “defusing” situations that can become explosive if the emotions, and the information that they are trying to convey to you, are ignored or suppressed. Visit my HorsePower International website to sign up for workshops where you can practice emotional agility “live” with horses and with people!

Share with Lorraine your experiences of practicing emotional agility - post a comment on her blog at <http://www.lorrainetilbury.com/blog> or send a note to [lorrainetilbury\(at\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:lorrainetilbury(at)gmail(dot)com).

THE INFORMATION CONVEYED BY EMOTIONS

Fear

- Information
 - Intuitive, focused awareness of an external threat to your well-being
- Questions to ask
 - What is the threat?
 - What action must I take to move to safety?
- Intensification
 - Worry, anxiety
 - Confusion, panic
 - Terror, dissociation
 - Dulling of the senses



Vulnerability

- Information
 - Something significant is about to be changed or be revealed. (Internal threat, self-image, beliefs, comfortable habits)
- Questions to ask
 - What belief, behavior, perception is being challenged?
 - How might my life change if I accept this new insight?
- Intensification
 - Panic
 - Rage

Anger

- Information
 - A physical or emotional boundary has been crossed
- Questions to ask
 - What must be protected?
 - What boundary must be established or restored?
- Intensification
 - Rage, fury, deflected rage (exploding at an innocent bystander),
 - Boredom, apathy (masks anger that can't be dealt with; a nonviolent coping strategy)



Frustration

- Information
 - The action you're taking is not effective.
- Questions to ask
 - Where is the block?
 - What can I do differently?
 - Who can I ask for ideas or assistance?
- Intensification
 - Rage,
 - powerlessness

Anxiety / Agitation

(This is not chronic, long-term anxiety but anxiety experienced in the presence of a specific person.)

- Information
 - The person interacting with you is incongruent. (Remember: Such people aren't necessarily dishonest but may be dealing with personal issues that are none of your business.)
- Questions to ask
 - What is the true emotion behind the other person's mask of control, friendliness, or well-being, and is it directed at me?
- Intensification
 - Rage, mistrust



Disappointment

- Information
 - The outcome (contrary to what you desired or envisioned) did not live up to your expectations.
- Questions to ask
 - What was I hoping for or expecting to happen? Was this realistic?
 - If so, how can I better communicate my vision to those capable of carrying it out?
 - If not, how can I modify my vision and better train, prepare, and support the people involved?
- Intensification
 - Anger, frustration, mistrust, powerlessness, apathy

Guilt

- Information
 - A critique of a destructive, neglectful, or abusive behavior. (This can be an internal critique or a transgression that others are bringing to your attention.)
- Questions to ask
 - What questionable behavior or action did I engage in?
 - What was my motivation?
 - How can I get my needs met in a more productive way?
 - Who can help me change this hurtful habit?
- Intensification
 - Denial, blame, shame, projection



Shame

- Information
 - A possible indication that you are being scapegoated. Or a personal critique of a "defective" state of consciousness or being.
- Questions to ask
 - Am I being shamed by others? If so, am I being objectified or used as a scapegoat?
 - How can I set boundaries with these people — without shaming them?
 - Or am I feeling shame for an old way of being or perceiving the world?
 - If so, what destructive behaviors must I change to fully enter this new, more conscious, compassionate, and responsible phase of life?
- Intensification
 - Despair, blame, projection, suicidal urge, bullying

Sadness

(You choose when and how to let go.)

- Information
 - Loss is imminent and in your best interest.
- Questions to ask
 - What must be released? What must be rejuvenated?
- Intensification
 - Despair, despondence



Grief

(No choice in letting go. Grief often includes anger. Having something you value taken away, even by impersonal life circumstances, is experienced emotionally as a boundary violation.)

- Information
 - A significant loss or death has occurred, usually due to circumstances beyond your control.
- Questions to ask
 - What must be mourned? What must be memorialized, appreciated, or celebrated?
- Intensification
 - Depression

Depression

(This message refers to situational depression, not clinical depression, which may involve a neurochemical imbalance.)

- Information
 - "Ingenious stagnation"
 - "stop sign of the soul"
- Questions to ask
 - What activities or relationships drain my energy? What new direction gives me energy?
- Intensification
 - Loss of self, loss of life's purpose, suicidal urges, physical illness



Suicidal Urge

(This message is not related to wanting to end long-term physical pain from illness.)

- Information
 - Some aspect of the life you're leading (not your physical existence) must end.
- Questions to ask
 - What must end now?
 - What must be culled?
- Intensification
 - Becoming like a "soulless automaton"
 - physical death