



Restoration of the Human Spirit: an Equine Coaching Retreat

BY BETHANY PIZIKS

On a ranch in Colorado over a chilly October weekend, six dental professionals gathered for a unique coaching retreat — working with horses. They were curious to see what a herd of horses could possibly have to offer.

After introductions, we got straight to it: “Take a minute to remember... who were you before you joined this profession?”

The question hung in the air, begging for the inevitable follow up: "And how much of that person still shows up? How much of YOU have you sacrificed to your career or practice?"

I recognized the reactions I saw: mild confusion, a twinge of melancholy, nostalgia, the beginnings of panic. A clinical dentist myself for twenty years, I knew we had touched a nerve. Ours is a demanding profession, one that requires a level of immersion few realize when they start out, and even fewer can maintain without some loss of self. Too often our career becomes our identity as we struggle to balance our vocation with the day-to-day responsibilities of running a dental practice. We trade away more and more of ourselves until all that's left is frustration and overwhelm.

We've all read the articles on 'Stressbusting', 'Beating Burnout', and 'Finding Your Perfect Work/Life Balance' – constant reminders that our profession is not for the faint of heart. Years of study, investing in and building a practice, expanding, keeping up with CEUs, hiring, firing, managing people,

dealing with patients – their fear and loathing, billing issues, their disregard for the importance of oral health – it all adds up. Many of us struggle with anxiety, depression, strained relationships, and physical/emotional imbalances due to the extreme stress. Inevitably, we lose touch with some of the core values that drew us to dentistry in the first place.

Which is why these people found themselves in a barn, with phones off and boots on. They all recognized the need to invest in some serious soul searching and reconnection. Their spirits were sorely in need of some restoration and the horses were ready!

As we moved through the weekend, I was reminded that the practice of dentistry itself isn't where many dental professionals struggle. Instead, many major stressors for dentists stem from what a business coach I once met calls "reluctant entrepreneurship" – the need for a clinician to also be a master at team dynamics, practice leadership, conflict resolution, marketing and

business development, financial management and more. It should not be a surprise, then, that the most successful dental professionals invest in developing these non-clinical skills, as well as their emotional intelligence. They acknowledge the need to deal with their emotional triggers, limiting belief

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systems and habitual reactions. They also understand the value of strategic self-care: of honoring who they are and what they need in order to consciously engage with their business, and to lead with presence and authority.

The horses would drive home these concepts in the most beautiful and supportive ways throughout the retreat.

We started by taking time to understand personality types, and what drives us to interact with the world the way we do. Insights from that work led us into some experiential work





that powerfully demonstrated how we unconsciously recreate familiar scenarios when we haven't taken the time to resolve "unfinished business" from our personal histories. How many of your practices echo – or even amplify — interpersonal dynamics within your families of origin, for example?

A tender interlude was taken to honor a colleague who had lost her daughter, bringing to the foreground for some the need to address family dynamics, deep connection, loss, grief and more. Rhiannon, a ponderously graceful Gypsy Vanner, held space beautifully, sharing support and healing energy.

Themes of leadership and

team work emerged organically as these perfectionists who had never interacted with horses learned to recognize and choose their response to reactions of frustration, fear, lack of clarity, competition and issues of self-worth. Faces brightened and backs straightened as the horses — with humor and compassion — challenged assumptions, tested boundaries, established connections, accepted care and showed what true presence and engagement look like. People tapped into themselves as leaders, team mates and — most importantly — human beings. They connected with each other, gave and received support, shared

laughter and tears... I honestly think many of them were surprised by how much fun they could have with a group of other dental professionals!

The retreat closed with a profound sense of gratitude to the horses and each other. Taking time out to be fully present, in their bodies, and to play, helped people reconnect with their truest selves. Old beliefs were shed, discoveries made and habitual patterns shifted in ways that will drive lasting transformation in their lives and practices. After all, as one participant said, "you never forget what a 1200 pound horse teaches you about yourself."



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Dr. Bethany Piziks is deeply committed to inspiring dentists who long to achieve balance, peace, and prosperity within the chaos of working in a dental practice. A clinical dentist for over 20 years herself, she knows what it's like in the trenches. After hiring a coach and seeing exponential progress in her leadership, practice profitability, and personal growth, she discovered that helping others find the same satisfaction was her true life's calling. Visit www.braveheartequinecoaching.com to learn how Dr. Bethany and her equine partners can help you restore your spirit.