Using the Johari Window

The goal in the process of personal growth is to enlarge Cell 1, the quadrant that is public, and to shrink the other 3 cells. This allows individuals to see their blind spots, make the unconscious conscious and stop "hiding" by keeping unnecessary secrets.

Cell 2, the **Blind Self**, is the cell that is most examined in group work. Participants can learn from group members, and in our case from the horses' reactions and responses, how they are seen and viewed by others – what, in fact, they aren't seeing in themselves. The horses shine the light on these behaviors and patterns without judgment. Through this process participants can discover how the behaviors and patterns of the past are affecting their communication and relationships.

Cell 3, the **Secret Self**, is what a person knows but doesn't want others to know or to see. Secrecy is fundamentally different from privacy, which is a conscious choice to not disclose for carefully considered reasons, while secrecy is motivated by fear and is often accompanied by shame, which can be crippling and keep people from reaching their full potential. Naturally, the goal in life is to decrease the need for secrets and to allow for full and self-confident disclosure. It is important for us as facilitators to keep the container safe and to be aware of the need to uncover gently and slowly the secrets that have been so safely tucked away. The horses, however, do not always know this!

Cell 4, **The Unconscious**, is the wonderful area where the horses really help the participants and the facilitators, and yet the process also can be extremely challenging. Horses are the experts at picking up the cues and feelings we and the participants may not be conscious of and unable to see. By making the unconscious conscious, the horses promote access to the client's underlying anxieties and issues and thus can provide the opportunity for healing to occur at a deeper level. And this also can lead to *too much too soon*. Sometimes the revealing of secrets and unconscious memories happens before the individual is ready and feeling safe. This is why it is important for the facilitator to be fully engaged and present. It is also why, in a group setting, it is important for there to be more than one facilitator so one of them is available to provide the container of safety when a participant needs *one-on-one* assistance from the other. When this happens, you will need to have a plan for how the session will be directed safely while also providing a secure and contained place for the participant to be with the feelings and memories as they emerge. For instance, a participant often needs the time to be with the experience individually before they are ready to expose themselves to the group. Or the participant may regress, act out defensively, retreat (either by physically leaving or dissociating) and/or by shutting down completely. As a facilitator you will need to be clear and conscious and available to help participants to ground themselves and their process and return to present reality as quickly and safely as possible. Your job is not to "push" the process but to help the participant embrace, contain and learn from it.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility to be able to identify when an individual is ready to be challenged in the group setting. This will all depend on the ego strength of the participant. Ego strength is the ability to effectively mediate between the internal pressures and feelings that are

present and may emerge, and the external realities present in the moment. A person who has poor ego strength will react with defensiveness and regressive behaviors to the stress of a highly charged emotional experience. You will see cognitive and emotional confusion and an increased rigidity of thought and affect. Even individuals who may be able to be fully functional in many areas of life still can have an area that is vulnerable to disclosure, so your being alert to the sensitivity of the present emotional experience is critical. Remember that defenses and the fight, flight or freeze modes have served people in the past and kept them protected and safe. Having the blanket of safety pulled off too quickly can result in more damage and re-injury. Repetition of simple tasks, then, can help the individual to settle, ground in the body and in the present and create new neural pathways with positive outcomes that heal some of the cracks in their individual ego strength. This is why simple tasks like grooming and haltering a horse can either be healing, boring or anxiety provoking. Each individual will respond differently based on his or her earlier experiences, successes, failures and consequent ego strength.

Cell 1, the **Public Self**, is the area, which will expand with repeated positive reinforcement and success. One of the gifts of equine experiential learning is to be able to see this healing taking place in the present moment. An individual can *feel* in the body the difference and can actually start creating the new neural pathways right in front of our eyes. Their old worn superhighways to emotional triggers in the past can start being replaced with new and open systems. The tiny path created by one positive equine interaction can help build the super highway of their future.