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Participants in a 'leader-follower-trust' exercise which involves getting all three horses around a series of obstacles without breaking the crepe paper.

## It's Back in the Saddle Again to Learn Team Building Skills

BY NATASHA LEE  
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As leadership development programs have increased in popularity among upper management and businesses, so have the types of activities offered. Today, team building is taught through such outdoor activities as rock climbing, rope courses, team river rafting and now horses. Horses?

Since its inception in 2000, **Saddle Sojourns, Inc.** has been offering local executives and managers courses in management and organizational training that feature an equestrian vibe.

The San Diego-based training company conducts custom workshops on strategic thinking, team learning and tolerance training while riding horseback.

"We use horses the same way others use rock climbing or ropes," said Ivy Gordon, vice president and one-third of the company's founders.

Participants are matched up with one of 16 horses and spend up to four hours in the saddle each day increasing their leadership abilities and learning the importance of team collaboration.

Gordon and her partners, Heidi Helly and Terri Egan design exercises to be complex and force participants to figure out how to get themselves and their horses out of a particular situation.

The ordeals faced by the horse and rider are designed to parallel different situations in the workplace.

For example, a person who is really challenging will be paired up with a horse known to be a little stubborn, Gordon said.

The person will then have to find a way to reach a specified destination or goal, using decision making to either work with the horse to guide it in the right direction, or taking the risk of letting the horse lead in a situation where it may be more familiar with the trail.

The interaction and learning to work with the horse, increases a rider's ability to be tolerant and more effective in a work environment, Gordon said.

"We want them (participants) to leave with an increased commitment to team learning and team building," she said.

Local participants have included representatives from **Union Bank of California** and **Children's Hospital**.

Avid horse-lovers, the three women started the company after seeing the similarities between their own consulting practices and their experiences with horses.

"We found that it all tied into the characteristics of leadership and organization, things we are trying to encourage people to develop," Gordon said.

Held at Warner Springs Ranch resort in the East County, workshops run three to four times a quarter and range from one-day workshops to three-day overnight retreats.

A one-day workshop runs around \$657. Three-day retreats, including room, board and materials, can average \$2,500.