

Episode #11: Horses, Herds, and Human Animals

See More at [CANEEL.com/podcast](https://caneel.com/podcast)

Welcome to Allowed. I'm your host, Caneel Joyce. How in touch are you with your inner animal? Are you aware each day that you are a mammal that has mammalian needs?

Whether you are a horse person or not, you are going to love the conversation today with Beth Killoughof Circle Up. The Circle Up Experience is an equine leadership training program that absolutely blew my mind when I got to participate in it about a year ago.

Beth and I became thickest thieves at that point and now we're even collaborators and what she and her horses have taught me about my own leadership was transformational, so powerful you cannot argue with a horse.

So I'm really excited for her to be here today to teach us about natural leadership, humans as animals, and how we respond to pressure. We're also going to learn about the four types of awareness that whether we are conscious of or not actually guide us in our daily lives and when we squash them, we lose a huge part of our power.

We're allowed to honor our inner mammal. We are allowed to listen to our instincts. We're allowed to recognize that we are part of a herd, a herd that has needs, a herd is sensitive to its environment.

Welcome, Beth. I can't wait to learn about all the different forms of awareness we can have with you. Saddle up, giddy-up. Let's get into the conversation.

CANEEL - Welcome back to Allowed. Your journey is unique only to you. One of the things that you may be discovering is that you actually have quite a bit of wisdom there in your gut and your gut instinct. Your body may sometimes send you messages as you become aware of yourself, of others in your environment, of your relationships and even of the space that you're in itself, the physical space and all of what it affords you and doesn't afford you.

This kind of wisdom we have found here is one of the most powerful ways that we can be connected to our inner leadership, our full power. Now you showing up here every week is so helpful in giving you a sense of momentum in your own growth and opening up new things that you can be aware of so that you can claim your full power.

I'm really happy that you're back and that you're engaged here today. We have a very special guest, my friend Beth Killough of the Circle Up Experience, a therapist, an author, a poet, a teacher, a coach, and a master of horses. Her horses also act as coaching collaborators for her and I've had the chance to experience that myself. So let's get straight into the conversation with Beth.

Beth, it's so great to have you here on the show today.

BETH KILLOUGH: It's such a pleasure to be with you.

CANEEL: I just got to see you a couple of days ago in the flesh down here in LA. And now we're sitting here in a zoom call. And where are you calling in from today?

BETH KILLOUGH: I am calling from Take a Chance Ranch in Morgan Hill, California, which is my home base and is in the Bay area South of San Jose.

CANEEL: Awesome. I know I kind of sprung it on you last minute that maybe it'd be a good idea to capture this on video because we have a relationship that I really enjoy and I thought it'd be fun to have that viewable. And you mentioned that you, your hair has been horsed.

BETH KILLOUGH: Yeah, I went on a little adventure with my daughter who's almost nine, who's gotten really into bike riding. And, one of the things I've learned from the horses about parenting is that we need to bring our own needs to the table.

So we went on a little bike adventure, but I brought my horse, so I rode my horse, she rode her bike. And so we got really dirty, which was awesome and fun and really good for us. And then I didn't wash my hair. So this is my unwashed horsed hair. It had a helmet, it had sweat and dirt. And then for close talking horses that like to snuggle.

CANEEL: I too, didn't wash my hair. And I also rode beside my son as he rode his bike to school today. I was in the minivan riding next to him, which is how we like to do it.

BETH KILLOUGH: Oh, I love that.

CANEEL: It's how he likes to do it. And it's not a minivan. It's a mega van.

BETH KILLOUGH: It's a mega van, like professional cyclists. They get followed along with their support team. So very officious of you.

CANEEL: No Juicing, no juicing. So this is really fun to finally be on this podcast together after connecting magically about a year ago through one of my clients and just had a sense after working with you and his, YPO group, his young president's organization, group of leaders. That's where you first met Todd. Right?

BETH KILLOUGH: Right.

CANEEL: And he just had a sense that you and I would hit it off.

BETH KILLOUGH: Yes. We had done a horse experience in Los Angeles and five minutes alone with a horse and a little bit of coaching and he had a lot of pieces come together and they were very similar pieces that you had been working on. And so he couldn't wait to tell you about how all of that came to the surface so quickly with the horses. People are often very surprised at how quickly their stories come about when we do the horse work. And so he introduced us and you and I just clicked.

CANEEL: Yeah. That felt like we had known each other for years. And, similarly then when I came up to to see the ranch and to meet you in person, I got to do some of your, very specific and beautiful form of leadership coaching through horses and I also had downloads that were like, oh yeah, this is my pattern that I've had for years.

BETH KILLOUGH: Those patterns emerge quickly. And a lot of times when they emerge with people and we're talking about them, we're a little stuck because we can understand it intellectually and even emotionally but it's hard to find circumstances to enact something that allows that pattern to change so immediately. But with the horses, there's this space to practice something right there, right then and to notice how different everything feels when we do.

CANEEL: Let's talk about this. Maybe we could back up a little bit. Could you just introduce yourself in your own words of, who are you, what are you about? What do you do?

BETH KILLOUGH: I have been a lifelong horse person and also very involved with dogs and, it's always been a part of my life that's been, enriching a place for learning, a place to learn, partnership and relationship. And I have sought out that area of my life since I was about five years old.

Along the way, I also got a more traditional education. I started my career path getting an MFA in poetry. I've always been a writer and I'm still a writer and I taught creative writing and contemporary American literature for about eight years. During that time, I noticed that my students spent a lot of time in office hours talking about their inner life and I decided to go take a clinical psychology course, a graduate course.

I knew right away that my path was taking a turn. That same week that I started investigating programs, I found a beautiful piece of writing on equine therapy and I thought, yes, helping people and doing it with horses as partners. It took me another 15 years of letting those paths go side by side before they converged on their own.

I had a very traditional therapy practice and beautiful therapy practice and kind of the secret life as a cowgirl. They slowly came together and when I finally started bringing the animals more into my work, it really changed everything and I realized I couldn't go back into the office and that I needed to do this work outside and with animals and that it needed to be much more organic and spontaneous and that I needed a different clinical container.

CANEEL: You were owning it, you were just owning this brilliance that you have.

BETH KILLOUGH: Yeah. I think your namesake of Allowed, it really was about allowing these two parts of me to be fully integrated into a whole. There's like a wholeness that was born when I allowed those parts to converge.

I played the traditional route for a long time. I played that game for a long time in a variety of ways. But first and foremost, I really take myself through every day and every experience as a human being with an animal body.

CANEEL: Yeah. And what does that mean? Why is that a distinctive insight? Because you know, most of us understand that we are animals, at least on some level we understand

that. But I think from what I've learned from you is that there are big downloads that you can get wisdom wise when you approach life as an animal.

BETH KILLOUGH: So, just to back up, I had a love of language at an early age and a love for it and in the way that there are words I fall in love with. My first career was in poetry. I have an MFA in creative writing and I taught poetry for about eight years before I went onto my next iteration.

I also love thinking and problem-solving and both of those became ways for me to actually numb myself. On the one side, there are these like incredible human brain gifts that we have of playing with words and expressing ourselves with language and doing relationships through language and this incredible brain that allows us to think and problem solve and do our connection through thought.

But I went on to become a therapist and that world is very much about using language and thinking and the intellect and bringing in this emotional piece to try to understand our lives and our relationships and understand who we are and to develop ourselves.

It always felt like something was missing. It felt like there was like this deeper layer that we weren't accessing. But when I was with my animals, I very much felt connected to that. It's a primitive layer that I think humans have had socialized out of us so as to not be barbaric and to not to be able to be good villagers with each other.

We have learned to put the brakes on certain parts of ourselves in a very good way. But the cost is that we have numbed a whole messaging system that is about our instincts and we're not very connected to that anymore. When I think about myself in the world or take myself into situations connected to that human animal piece, I'm inviting that awareness into everything that I do.

It doesn't mean that I'm disavowing language or that I'm disrespecting thought or the power of our intellect in any way. It's just I'm integrating this piece that has been very quieted and there are certain professions where it is utilized more: first responders, people in the military, athletes are more in touch with that human-animal. When we become parents, early parenting experiences are very primitive and we may be more in touch with our survival system.

CANEEL: That was definitely my experience. I remember even when I reached childbearing age, my early mid-twenties, I noticed that when I would get on an airplane for the first time in my life I was afraid of flying.

BETH KILLOUGH: Yes.

CANEEL: I had never been afraid of flying.

BETH KILLOUGH: Yes.

CANEEL: And I was talking to my mom about this and she said, you know I think I remember kind of a similar thing about suddenly things that didn't seem scary were scary. I think it's this instinctive remembering that there's a body here to protect. It is worth protecting and that we are fragile and mortal, material beings.

BETH KILLOUGH: And for all the books that we've read and the trips to Babies R Us or of all the boxes that arrived and the setup that we do when we've got this human life in your arms and you know that the survival is about you and it's so in the body, it awakens a part of us.

When you started to talk about that was your experience, I wanted to replace it with crisis because for a lot of us, when we are in those situations or we become more connected to the human-animal, it feels like a crisis because we're so not used to using it. It's such a wake-up call to those senses that it can be shocking. And I think it's why a lot of new mothers struggle. Where they're so unprepared for what that's gonna feel like. We're so out of touch with those parts of ourselves and we don't know how to lead ourselves or others from that place.

CANEEL: But survival, you know, the existential threats of life, those are also found, big time in the game of entrepreneurship, which you and I both play and many of our clients play as well. We serve sometimes similar populations. Being faced with survival on a day to day basis, the survival of our herd of employees also feels like a crisis.

BETH KILLOUGH: That's so true.

CANEEL: Crushing responsibility.

BETH KILLOUGH: It's so true. Especially because most humans haven't been connected to that animal and that survival piece, we actually don't know how to share leadership. So

we've really lived like lone wolves as humans. Two things happen to a lot of people that end up in leadership roles.

One is that the people around them bubble wrap them. So they end up isolated - the leader. Protecting them from mostly the truth. Then on the other side of that same dilemma is that the leader takes on sole responsibility, which is impossible.

There's no other mammal group that would do such a thing. So if you watch the herd, for instance, I have a herd and I watch them in their leadership roles. The leadership cycle through the herd throughout the day, meaning that they're sharing awareness responsibilities and it's an agreed-upon covenant of the group.

It would be comical to watch another mammal in a group take on that responsibility solely. You would watch the horse running around the pasture all day trying to take care of everyone. That's what it would look like. So you can understand why somebody who has a lot of visionary talent that tries to then take on that role falls apart because it's so impossible to be able to do both.

CANEEL: Yeah. We're trying to control things so far out of our control.

BETH KILLOUGH: and it distracts us from those gifts that are uniquely ours. So we can do it some of the time and we all do. It's a shared responsibility, but we certainly can't do it all the time and some individuals are better at it than others.

CANEEL: Let's dive in then. What are you up to nowadays? Are you still working as a therapist and I know that you've got other exciting things happening?

BETH KILLOUGH: So I do a little bit of therapy. Mostly, what I do is coaching and consultation because I have really struggled with the paradigm I think of psychotherapy and again, trying not to fit into molds, but to allow myself to really just be who I am and work how I do.

I'm so grateful to have the classical training that I have, the clinical training that's more traditional and I'm so grateful that I had the courage to break out of it and find this other

way of working. Sometimes people want to call that therapy and so I see them and I guess that's what we're calling it.

I'm wearing that hat in some ways but most of what I'm doing now is working with groups and those groups can come from organizations of all kinds and leadership levels of all types.

I prefer to have the work that I do with people begin with the animals so that we can begin the work that we're doing on development, relationship and culture with an awareness and a language that is different than what we're used to using. It invites us to expand the scope of what leadership and culture really mean.

CANEEL: Can you give us some examples? What is some of the language?

BETH KILLOUGH: A lot of times when we talk about mindfulness, we are encouraging leaders to be more conscious, more reflective, and to have more of a sense of who they are as leaders.

When we are talking about it in terms of natural leadership, which is the model that I work in, I'm asking an individual or a group to consider how they come to the table as mammals. What we're looking at are these four layers of awareness.

CANEEL: Beth, do you have a handout or something that you can share with our listeners around four layers of awareness?

BETH KILLOUGH: I do.

CANEEL: Great. We will link to that from the show notes at CANEEL.com/podcast-11. Beth's website is thecircleupexperience.com.

BETH KILLOUGH: So the first layer is my own mammal system.

What's going on inside of me? What's happening in my thinking, my emotions? What am I doing behaviourally? What's this one system, this one organism doing?

A lot of times when we're talking about mindfulness, that's kind of where the awareness exercise stops or it'll stop at just thinking but not in the body.

But in the animal world, especially in the herd, the next layer of awareness would be looking to others.

What's going on with you? So that empathy layer of what's going on with my fellow herd member? What am I noticing in their behavior? What does it feel like to be near them?

Then the third layer of awareness is now what's going on between us? What's the we? What's the we that's happening?

The herd is always connected. There's like this inextricable fabric. They can pull apart in terms of space and still have that connection where they're tuning into each other. So their survival system is based on being able to tune in on that layer.

CANEEL: I remember sitting in the back seat of my parents' car on a long drive. And now that I have kids, they do this to me too.

Of me just saying, are we there yet? When are we going to be there? How much longer? I want a snack. You know, all those things. We used to drive out to Idaho every summer. Actually, I don't think I drove very many times.

I think my dad gave up on that and he did the drive by himself for 13 hours and then we would fly out there and meet him because it was a nightmare.

But, I remember seeing his scalp lift like maybe a quarter of an inch up higher on his head. That was the signal to me of don't say anything else. He's lost his patience and if I do something else, it's not going to be good. So I was so attuned to that's one of his particular stress responses.

BETH KILLOUGH: I really learned this from my like lifelong horsemanship and a lot of the language that I use in natural leadership comes from my lifelong studies in animal behavior and partnering with my dogs and my horses to do different things.

But we're talking about the feel of the relationship in that car. You could feel something change, you could visually see it as well. That was the signal, but you could probably feel it in the car as well, there is like a thickening of the air.

CANEEL: Yes. It was not clear air anymore.

BETH KILLOUGH: That's what we refer to in natural leadership is there's a feel in the relationship and we're so used to being in our language and in our thinking that we are not able to connect with that.

But when we start paying attention to this other frequency, you can see and feel those things changing in a group, whether it's 1, 2, or 22. You can feel those things shifting and changing.

We tend to talk about this in terms around emotional intelligence, but I don't think it hits the mark. I think this is relational intelligence.

I like that a little better but that third layer that you're remembering, kids are completely connected to their natural leadership their animal piece, they haven't lost it. It hasn't been fully socialized out of them. A lot of our memories of when we were most tuned into that are from our childhood.

The fourth layer is what's going on in our surroundings that's affecting me or the we. Might be affecting me, you or the we.

We're very ego-driven. If I'm reading myself or you, it's all about me. What is going on with me? How did I impact you?

But if you look around and expand your scope you'll see that there's something environmental affecting the system.

It could be, like the tension from your Dad, if you looked at when that happened and patterned over time, it might be the time of day. So it wasn't just about you guys or you. It might've been the time of day, like maybe it was dusk and so his eyesight started getting affected and so there's more tension in his face causing his scalp rise to change.

We often ascribe the things that we're noticing about what's happening relationally. We forget to expand that out to take in what's going on environmentally. Those environmental pressures affect things relationally. Sometimes we just need to do the slightest pivot to shape things so that we can release the amount of pressure that's going on that can actually make or break a relational experience.

CANEEL: Oh, completely. I'm really sensitive to sound. If there are multiple people talking at the same time, I really lose track of both people.

Before I really realized this about me, I realized that my experience was really different from other people's experiences. If my son was crying or talking to me and then my husband starts talking to me about something that's not my son crying, I would look at him with daggers in my eyes.

Like, how could you talk to me right now? Which felt like their relationship. But truly my stress level was so high from trying to process so much, especially when one of them is your baby crying. It's all-consuming. But it was just the environment for me that's so heightened is that sound and voices layer.

BETH KILLOUGH: In a lot of the work that I focus on now is about wellness for people and really looking at culture from how we do our relationships and how we take care of ourselves and take care of each other or the environment that we work in.

I think about things like an open workspace and how much pressure that puts on a human-animal system. It's very stimulating for our nervous system to be in that open workspace. There's not a mammal on the planet that would not have a reaction to that.

But we don't think of ourselves that way. So we like the idea of it, and we like the esthetic of it. Then when you put your animal body in it, something happens that doesn't feel right. It's actually that piece of what kind of pressure is on the nervous system. So you'll see more conflict and actually more social isolation in those environments because you're loading up all those nervous systems.

CANEEL: Oh wow. So I'm wondering, we are on some level aware of the stress of a situation like an open office, but I don't think we give ourselves permission for that to matter to us. We might not even know where the stress is coming from.

BETH KILLOUGH: Absolutely. We don't give ourselves permission to be nervous systems first and foremost. That have this incredibly sensitive, almost like a soundboard that like a sound technician would use with all of these different dials and that it's an incredibly sensitive system that we're not connected to until it's flooded.

We flooded it so much that it's numb. So what happens is we only really talk about those pressures at the point of overwhelm.

CANEEL: Wow. Yeah. And we get reactive and we get triggered and then our brain goes offline often.

BETH KILLOUGH: When I first learned about emotional reactivity and the brain was probably in 2002, I was studying to be a therapist and I got to go do a few day workshop with Dan Segal. It was like earlier in the integration of neuroscience and psychotherapy and really looking at interpersonal neuroscience and starting to think about our nervous systems.

I really started connecting with this human-animal piece at that point because I had been sitting on horses for 30 years at that point and knowing what it was like to be a synced up nervous system with another mammal.

Still, I think today around reactivity, it has like a bad rap. Like you should not be a reactive person. But our reactivity, the problem is that we're so disconnected from all the signs of reactivity that we're getting the signals of it coming down the pike, like you just described with your crying baby and your husband, were so disconnected with all those signs and signals that the reactivity happens way down the road from where it began.

CANEEL: This connects to boundaries too, right? We let the boundaries get crossed and we keep thinking like, it's okay. It's okay. It's okay. We should on ourselves. I need to be able to handle this. It should be okay with me, but it's not.

BETH KILLOUGH: That's right.

CANEEL: And actually this was one of the first conversations that you and I had where you spontaneously offered me some powerful coaching that really profoundly supported me, and helped me. But it was if this relationship is going this way, of course, it's not working for you. It's not respecting you as an animal.

BETH KILLOUGH: We have to slow down and start to tune in on that nervous system layer and it is in the body and give ourselves permission that we are having a reaction. Actually most of them make good sense. When we blow up and detonate, those don't, but it's because they do. Everything makes good sense. But those happen because of 35 offenses to our nervous system. All those boundaries crossed that we allowed.

CANEEL: How does this relate to leadership? If I'm a leader and I'm leading a team, how does understanding this model with four layers of leadership, how does four layers of awareness, how does that help me? How do I put this into actual use?

BETH KILLOUGH: Well, let's say you think about how you run your meetings. Most people hate meetings, period. The reason people hate meetings is because they are not getting their needs met in those meetings.

Most of the time, what people are actually needing is connection. They're doing a lot of information sharing or they're having to do a lot of being talked at and they're having to do a lot of lying. They have to sit there and not do anything about any of that. They have to sit there, allow it and not change it.

Cesar Milan says that humans are the only mammals that follow unstable leadership. We're the mammal that will sit in that room and not do anything about it and then do it the next week and the next week and the next week.

If I'm a leader and I'm thinking about natural leadership awareness and how I might want to bring those into my world, I would start with what I notice in my meetings. Where do I see people seeking connection? Where do I see people trying to move away from pressure that's in the room? Are people desiring to be part of the conversation?

I would be taking this concept of scope and trying to lean back a little bit so that I can see what's really going on in the system in that room and where things might be out of balance. I would start with my own instrument of me. I can tune in here and feel all of that.

So as a leader, what do I want out of the meeting? How am I going into the meeting? Do I have enough calmness and presence that I can actually feel what's happening in those relationships? So I'm listening to the content and I'm feeling the process of it all.

But I'm just going to observe it and then I can walk away and really think through like, what information did I get? Where do I want to adjust things just a little bit and start to play with it to see where am I going to get the most out of that time together? How am I going to get the best out of people in that experience? And what's really at the end of the day, what really is at the heart of what we're needing when we all come together? What's really the utmost significance of that gathering?

CANEEL: Can you talk more about pressure? What do you mean when you say pressure?

BETH KILLOUGH: When you ask that question you bring a piece of pressure into the relational system between the two of us. If I had like barking dogs outside and like an itchy leg and my phone was ringing and a deadline and we had run out of time, those would be all pressures as well.

How would it impact my ability to take that question in and synthesize it and be able to actually think and connect with you?

Pressures are an inevitable part of life. It's part of the physical universe. It's an inevitable part of relationship and it's actually how we influence each other. So our power begins with being able to bring in elements of pressure into our relationships.

It's what moves us, but if we're not tuned in to what pressure is and our sensitivity to it, whether some of us are more sensitive like, those of us that have dog ears, for instance, our pressure is sensitive to auditory pressure, some people are less sensitive to pressure, but when we're not paying attention to that layer in our relationships, whether with ourselves or each other, we are flooding ourselves or each other more often than we realize.

A lot of the time if you think about the points of the day where you get flustered, overwhelmed, exhausted, lost, you don't know what was happening, where was I, those are all signs and symptoms that you're not tuning in to pressure and adjusting to it. We aren't trying to eliminate it. We're actually trying to tune in so we can adjust it, adjust ourselves to it.

CANEEL: and use it thoughtfully.

BETH KILLOUGH: Exactly. Yes.

CANEEL: Why have a bunch of employees feeling pressure for a lot of reasons that have nothing to do with what's really, really important.

BETH KILLOUGH: Absolutely. And if we're not tuning in to the herd and kind of those lessons from the horse herd, if one individual in the herd is experiencing, let's say an environmental pressure, they're going to signal that. The whole herd is going to take a look at that and look if there's something to respond to.

If there's not, they're going to signal to each other that they can go back to a homeostasis and back to calm alert. That calm alert state gives us the best chances for survival as any mammal. So conservation of energy, attunement to each other and moving forward at a sustainable pace.

When we're not tuning in, listening to and adjusting your pressure, we often get caught by surprise. That's where all of a sudden the environment has sucked us up or we've gotten kind of swallowed up by it because we're surprised by the pressure. We're so tuned out until it's too much.

CANEEL: Our focus gets really narrow.

BETH KILLOUGH: It does.

CANEEL: And I think that's often based on our personality is what are we going to narrow in our focus on? Like habitually speaking.

For some of us, we're going to only be attending to the relationship, right. For others, we're really only attending to myself, my personal safety, my physical needs and, maybe some of us also much more focused on just the environment and we're not really attending to the relational elements.

I'd love you to share with our listeners about the way that you actually teach this. That is so powerful because this is where the horses come in. Now we understand a lot of the things that we can learn about us as human animals, looking at a herd of horses, but the way that you do this is very surprising. So it has nothing to do with getting on the back of a horse.

BETH KILLOUGH: It doesn't, everything we do is on the ground. Although, I've been recently exploring doing a little bit on horseback as well, because there's some amazing stuff that can happen there. But everything we do is on the ground.

The beautiful thing about the horses as teachers is that because they're prey animals and their sensitivity to things like pressure and their environment is so beautifully hardwired and that hard wiring hasn't been touched, they're connected to that survival piece and will respond in order to take care of themselves no matter what.

They will give feedback to us about what they're noticing in their environment, in themselves and with us. The feedback is honest and direct. The nice thing about working with them as prey animals is that because flight is their best defense, moving away from pressure versus going into fight is the safest option for them.

You could do this work with dogs. I've been working with dogs my whole life. They are just as important teachers to me. But as far as working with clients horses are actually safer. Basically anything that we decide that we want to do with a horse, if we start taking a step into relationship with them and bring all of our expectations and ideas and relational gestures and relational invitations to the table, they immediately start to respond by trying to figure out what kind of relationship are we going to have.

By beginning a nonverbal conversation with the human about how to have some partnership. In any horse herd they have to have that shared leadership. So somebody has to be in awareness commitment at all times.

CANEEL: What is awareness commitment?

BETH KILLOUGH: Awareness commitment means that whoever is sort of on duty at the time is taking in those four layers of awareness that we talked about and is taking responsibility for alerting the herd of changes.

CANEEL: Okay. So this is a role that you could be committed to but you're not always.

BETH KILLOUGH: Impossible to be always. As a human, if you feel that that's your role in your household or your team in your workplace, in a group, and that you're the one, there's probably something wrong.

You might be the best at it. It might be a natural gift of yours, but you should never be the one and the horse herd, they share that. When we show up with them in relationship and we're stuck in our head and thinking about ourselves or we're obsessing about them; What does the horse think of me? Do they like me? I really want them to like me or signaling to them that we're not available to be an awareness partner.

Because we're not safe to follow and not follow in terms of, tell me what to do. But in terms of can I relax while you're aware and partner with whatever it is you're doing so that my nervous system can have a little bit of a break. So when we are stuck in one layer of

awareness, which we often are as humans, we're often signaling to them that we're impaired and so they will start to give us feedback, trying to figure out what's possible in this relationship. As that emerges, regardless of what activity we've decided to do, it starts to open up a channel for asking the human what's going on with them.

CANEEL: The horse is asking the human.

BETH KILLOUGH: That gives me as a coach an opportunity to ask the human, usually with a place that the human initially gets stuck is the place where they always get stuck.

CANEEL: So give us some concrete examples of what this can look like.

BETH KILLOUGH: Well, I love what happened when we were working together last week and this was a great connection back to the topic of pressure.

CANEEL: Yes. And just for background, Beth came down last week to work with the folks in my year-long leadership development program, my leadership forum, and this was the final event in a series of year-long monthly gatherings.

So for those of you who are curious to see what this actually looks like, we are going to post some beautiful videos of Beth and I and our experience of some real clients doing some genuine natural leadership training with the horses.

So go to CANEEL.com/podcast-11 and you can check that all out there.

So at this point, everybody there knows each other really, really well. They know each others strengths, weaknesses, where they get hung up, their personality quirks, the patterns that they really continue to keep working on, but that are going to probably keep showing up for them for a very long time.

They also really trust each other a lot, but Beth knows none of it. Beth knows none of this content whatsoever. So we're sitting in this ranch up in the Palos Verdes peninsula area and we're just observing her work with each of the members of the group... Continue.

BETH KILLOUGH: Okay. So very early on in the day they were in two different groups selecting horses to work with and two of the women picked their horse and the goal was to pick the horse and halter the horse and bring the horse to an area to groom.

And these are not horse people.

So they're having to really experiment with how do we choose, how do we approach, how do we do this whole haltering and leading a horse. There's a lot of tactical pieces and then there's a lot of relational pieces both for the people that are having to work together and also human to horse.

The best example of what this work can look like happened after this group had gotten their horse to the area where we were going to groom and it was kind of a tight area and they had walked the horse into this tight area too.

CANEEL: A little kind of like a stable.

BETH KILLOUGH: Just a stall but very tight. It's a cross ties or a wash rack, but it's like a narrow little area where you would walk the horse in and you can turn them around and then tie them to wash them or groom them.

So they had walked the horse in both of them together and then they'd gotten themselves into the corner and they were stuck there. And that's when CANEEL and I found them.

CANEEL: behind the horse. It's a 1500lb horse.

BETH KILLOUGH: That they don't know, between the wall and the horse and they were trying to figure out what to do.

And the horse had kind of moved on and was like looking for something to graze on.

I asked them what's going on here? I also saw there was a potential safety issue. I had already assessed it was a very calm horse, it was really sweet. He was completely focused on other things, but there they were in this tight spot. There's literally no way for them to turn around in this situation they've gotten themselves into.

CANEEL: They didn't seem scared or concerned about this in any way. They were busy talking to the horse and to each other and praising it.

BETH KILLOUGH: And so what I do is I step back as an animal and I see the pressure in that situation, which is the wall, the narrow walls on either side, this big horse, these two people nowhere to turn around. And the fact that they're not aware, which is its own pressure.

So when you're dealing with people and they're in autopilot, it creates its own pressure in the system. And so I jumped in and said, so let's step back. I'm going to hold the horse and I want you guys to step back and take a look at where you were.

And they realized that they had walked themselves into a corner and they didn't know it. And so we got to ask.

So you walk yourself into a corner and there's an incredible amount of pressure, like, do you want to go back in there? No, I do not want to go back in there and now that I'm out of there I can see that that was way too much pressure and there's nowhere to turn around.

CANEEL: I remember distinctly both of them saying, but when I was in there, I didn't feel any pressure at all. I didn't feel uncomfortable at all. And I said, did it feel kind of familiar?

BETH KILLOUGH: Yes.

CANEEL: Because these are two extremely high performing individuals, like big-time leaders, superstars who tend to put a lot of pressure on themselves.

BETH KILLOUGH: Right?

CANEEL: It was very familiar. It was like home.

BETH KILLOUGH: It was like home and high performance is not the problem. High performance is such a human gift. It's such a beautiful gift. That is not the problem.

The problem is what an autopilot person does with pressure to high-performance potential. It actually chisels away at the high-performance potential.

It comes with a huge cost to not be aware of that because they're signing up for things and taking on things that they could begin saying no to those and attending to that pressure, it would probably skyrocket that high performance into a whole different dimension.

CANEEL: Which actually interestingly, was the path of both of those women over this year. That was completely the theme. And that actually happened with every single client that you worked with on that day.

What showed up in the ring was, so familiar. It was just such a concrete expression, like a manifestation of the very leadership patterns that they've been working on.

Which is why I love your work so much. We can often think to ourselves, oh, this thing I was talking about with my coach or my therapist, you know, that's important, but that may not be really my main thing.

Maybe it's something else or maybe that growth wasn't real. But then we get in with the horse and we see it's unarguable. The horse is responding to me this way. So talk again about the, how the horse responds. Maybe we can go into when you work in the ring.

BETH KILLOUGH: I want to just touch real quickly back on what we did with them. One of the beautiful things like what you said around like highlighting, underlining, validating an etching into our consciousness. This is a theme for me is one thing that happens and it happens also in the body.

When they were able, I asked them to go back into that space so they could feel how much pressure was actually there because we need to feel it in our body so that we can use that part of us in the future. Then what we did was an exercise where they could go in there slower and noticing how far into the corner could they go before there was too much pressure.

If you can slow it down and start to feel that instrument of the body as a sensor of pressure, you can use that going forward knowing that you're used to loading yourself up and that you can be a little numb to that.

How can we slow that down and adjust more frequently and more consistently because there is where we can make those changes.

And that's one exercise that we'll do is like an overall pressure audit and start to notice during certain times of the day, morning is a really high-pressure time for a lot of people, especially when they have kids and jobs. And like how can you do a pressure audit around how you start your day and how that impacts the rest of your day as an animal in the world and animal leader.

CANEEL: So what are all the sources of pressure in my, in my space, in my system.

BETH KILLOUGH: Exactly. And then how can I slow that down or start to actually eliminate some of them because some of them don't need to be there. I'm loading up in ways that I don't need to be.

I probably shouldn't be listening to the news because it's too much and I can't make lunches in the morning. I need to stop doing that and I should not be checking email until my kids are already out of the general vicinity. It's too much.

So we can start to look at where we're loading ourselves up. So when we had them go in just one by one and go into that small space and noticing where it actually felt like too much pressure and then step back and see where could you tolerate it and where was it too much. Then you start to get a sense of that instrument that is your natural leader.

CANEEL: Finding that little moment of choice where if you keep going and then getting more tuned. Allowing yourself to notice. Actually, when you have too much pressure, it is hard to notice.

BETH KILLOUGH: Well you'll notice that you're flooded, but you won't notice all of the micro-moments and all of these smaller elements of pressure and that's actually what needs to be studied in our lives is those.

CANEEL: I can imagine a lot of our listeners are eager to begin doing their own pressure audits in different areas of their life. Is this something that you have an exercise for, a worksheet of some kind or can guide us through in some way, Beth?

BETH KILLOUGH: Sure. I'd love to give you a handout and a worksheet.

CANEEL: Wonderful. So we'll link to that in the show notes at CANEEL.com/podcast-11. In the ring. Ring work.

BETH KILLOUGH: Ring Work. What do you want to know?

CANEEL: First just describe to us how you did that kind of work and because that's an experience where you actually get to see if and how the horse will follow you.

BETH KILLOUGH: Yeah. So we'll use a round pen, because the horse is loose and there's enough typically there's enough space, where you and the horse can move out of each other's space to get relief from pressure and move back into it depending on what feels right at any given moment.

I'll give people about five minutes without any coaching to just have an introduction, like a greeting with the horse and to just get used to the space and notice what kind of relationship you can start to get going with the horse.

I'll show them how you can actually create some space or movement from the horse if that's what you want or so that you can have a boundary if you want or need it. Then also how you can invite the horse to come be closer to you if that's what you're wanting.

Most people have a very challenging time with there being so little direction in that exercise because we're not used to doing relationship, especially a new relationship without the social go-to's of small talk, which is how we relieve our anxiety. Instead what people are faced with is the intimacy of just starting to see each other. That's typically what comes up in those first five minutes of open relationship time with a human and a horse in the round pen.

CANEEL: Wow. What's intimacy feel like for me?

BETH KILLOUGH: What is intimacy? What does that feel like to be seen? What does it feel like to want? What does it feel like to be confused or lost and to not know what I want? And those core themes of the human experience typically we get glimpses of them or we get them when we're in crisis, but it's unusual to just have a brand new relationship bring them up.

One of the things I love most about this work is a longing for the joy of simple connection. I'm remembering there was someone in our group last week who at the end of the day it was like, well, maybe this horse can follow me and we can go faster and what if I could do this?

And it was all about in the future and big ideas and at the end of the day, what he wanted was a hug. And what it took for him to give himself permission was enough and then to slow down and let go of those expectations enough for that horse to accept that hug.

CANEEL: That was just beautiful.

BETH KILLOUGH: An exquisite moment.

CANEEL: So much that's what we're wanting. That's why we're in organizations. So we were in a team. We really do want to connect at.

BETH KILLOUGH: That's the problem with the meetings. There's no fellowship, there's no kinship. That's not what they're, and that's why we're having them.

CANEEL: And that's why we always advocate beginning every meeting, like checking in as a human. What's your experience in your body right now? What's your experience emotionally? How are you coming into this meeting? Where are you coming from? Which is a bit of extension on your other practice of settling in.

BETH KILLOUGH: People come here for group work and the pace that they arrive tells me a lot about the system that they live and work in. And it's like arrive and let's do small talk and get my name tag and teach me things about how to be leaderly.

One of the first things that we do is take your human-animal body for a walk. Usually like a good 15 minutes of wandering and noticing and letting yourself be curious and put your body where it wants to be.

If it wants to lay on the ground, do it. If it wants to sever a tree, that's the thing to do. If you just want to keep wandering and looking and exploring. But letting ourselves settle into a space.

If we're in a group settling into a connection in that group, like we actually need to transition and let that part of us get oriented and re-establish safety and comfort and settle from

whatever the travel was that it took to get from point A to point B and release ourselves from some other residue of whatever we just did. Before we're ready to really relate.

We don't have practices like that that are part of our social structure. So it's different to ask it of people.

CANEEL: Christmas just happened and we walk into Christmas parties, company Christmas party. Literally not a single person at the whole entire company Christmas party has ever been in that space before. And from the moment you walk in, you're on, you're interacting with a bunch of people, like simultaneously with a bunch of people, eating a bunch of foods that you don't know where they came from or what they are. And I'm realizing how much pressure that is.

BETH KILLOUGH: Huge amount of pressure. I really learned that from my daughter when she was little and she just been such a beautiful voice box for the human animal.

I remember walking into a baby shower at a country club and there were all these high top tables and she was like three years old and she just stopped in her tracks. I kneeled down and I looked up and from her vantage point, what the room looked like and then I stood back up and just thought about what's my vantage point right now?

Like, I gotta stand here a minute too. Like, good idea. Where am I? What's going on here? Where do I want to put myself? What's the best pace to enter this? What do I need to do first that allows me to breathe?

CANEEL: Well, I know that for my clients when you were here, it was such a powerful and such a simple experience. You have certainly touched my life in a similar way. I'm really excited to have more opportunities to work with you and I know that our listeners will be really hungry to get to have some other way to connect with you and perhaps if you want to take this work on, is there some way that they can that's accessible?

BETH KILLOUGH: So I have tried to create as many entry points into the world of natural leadership as possible and I'm still in that process, but I understand that people can't always jump right into the horse work. And the horse work is a beautiful starting point because it's such an instant immersion and really allows a whole lot to wake up within us.

I have started creating a lot of content that's accessible online and some coaching groups that allow us to start to learn some of these concepts. All of the programs that I create have experiential elements and experiments that people can go do. Then we can come back

together as a group to talk about. While we don't have the horses with us, one of the things that's a passionate message is that the horses wake this up in us, but we already have it.

They're a fast track that works to that natural leadership. But actually if we stay committed in our human relationships to tuning in on that layer we actually can give that to each other. I'm going to be launching a couple of mini-courses around natural leadership awareness. One is the power of desire as a natural element.

CANEEL: Those are two of my favorite words, power and desire.

BETH KILLOUGH: I love it. They go hand in hand. Those mini-courses, you can start to get into the world of natural leadership through that online content and audio recordings and then group coaching and those experiments. And it at least is a way into this work and to get started.

I have a training cohort that I'm running right now. That's a group of people who are anyone who is relating with other humans can bring this natural leadership approach to what you're doing. So whether you're a coach or a therapist, a teacher, whether you're leading a team or perhaps you're leading a family, those are all opportunities to practice these elements.

How you lead yourself and how you show up in your relationships. That's a nine-month program that I've been running and I'm going to start another cohort that's a combination of online material, a lot of content, group coaching in group classes that are live and then we do three in-person on-sites at the ranch that they are using nature and animals, using the horses as our teachers. It's a really deep dive as well.

CANEEL: So where can they find more information? We'll link to this in the show notes as well.

BETH KILLOUGH: thecircleupexperience.com That's the best place to find me.

CANEEL: Beth, thank you so much for being here with us today.

BETH KILLOUGH: Thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure.

CANEEL: To our listeners, thank you so much for being here today and joining us for this fascinating conversation with Beth and thank yourself for taking the time to learn and to reflect and to grow.

I really hope that these are some practices that you can bring back into your life, settling in and four layers of awareness, and really reconnecting with the animal that is you.

Thanks for being here. And all of the resources that Beth mentioned will be available, and we'll link to them in the show notes at caneel.com/podcast-11 and we'll see you next week.