

Martha de Jager. How information beats iron or knowledge management enables Strasser hoofcare

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The nailing of iron shoes to horses' hooves is an established tradition. The discovery that this practice is not in the interest of horses, in fact, that it can be detrimental to their hooves and health in general, was quite revolutionary and is to this day a controversial topic. At present, however, the idea of barefoot horses is gaining in popularity worldwide, as excellent results have been achieved, particularly with the Strasser method of hoofcare.

Strasser Hoofcare Professionals are trained by specialists at practical sessions, in addition to distance education. Trainees are introduced to a comprehensive list of conventionally published material and have the added advantage of a wealth of information on a number of Web sites and through on-line discussion groups. Once qualified, Hoofcare Professionals continuously share their knowledge. They attend annual recertification meetings and support each other by participating in discussions on the Internet. Digital technology is used extensively.

Peter Senge, an authority on learning organisations, contends that learning organisations require leaders who are designers, stewards and teachers.

The leader of this barefoot movement is Dr Hiltrud Strasser of Germany. According to her "The

dissemination of knowledge is one of the most important tasks of the Hoofcare Professional, because the goal is not just to rehabilitate lame horses, one after the other; it is to further the understanding of the horse's biological needs in the equestrian community on a global scale. Only through education can we lay the foundation for a lifetime of soundness for horses worldwide."

Peter Drucker, a management specialist, among others, argues that, in the emerging economy, knowledge is the primary resource for individuals and for the economy overall; land, labour, and capital do not disappear, but they become secondary.

Owners of horses, once they have been fully informed about the condition of a horse and the cure, are also encouraged to participate in the rehabilitation process and have access to many of the sources of information mentioned.

The Strasser method harnesses the technical possibilities available today for the capturing, dissemination, sharing and use of knowledge, under the leadership of experts. In this way, many horses that are in a bad state, especially as far as their hooves are concerned, are being rehabilitated, as can be evidenced by case studies.