

# Entrepreneurial spirit or equine heart?

As a little girl of three years old, maybe four, you start drawing your first horse. One with an egg shaped body, four sticks as legs and of course a nice full tale. At night you are dreaming about what it would be like to ride such an amazing animal.

Then a few years later the walls of the bedroom are covered with posters of horses. No wallpaper can compete with this. Every night before falling asleep watching at your own herd and after that dreaming about having an own horse.

Then there comes the moment that you can look for that one horse, which will be special to you. Suddenly you are standing in front of that horse. You are watching this horse in the eyes and you know that everything is right.

For many people working in the equine industry the story started like this. Emotion is therefore the characteristic of the equine industry. This is seen in the so called refined hobbyism within the equine farms.

The equine industry is of great importance to the Dutch economy. Within the industry there are approximately 16.000 until 17.000 enterprises with horses. The equine industry is a very marginal industry. There are only a few companies who run profitable or even break-even. The sector is experiencing the consequences of the economical deterioration. Especially the trade and breeding are strongly reduced. Working in the equine industry is nowadays compared to choosing for voluntary poverty.

To be able to achieve a sustainable economic industry in the future, a substantial share of the sector needs to be professionalized. In order to come to the best degree of professionalization, several things need to be changed at enterprise level. An entrepreneur must have the proper knowledge and skills, to be able to get his enterprise to at least a break-even position. Or in other words the entrepreneur needs to be competent.

This trend was discovered by Alfa Accountants en Adviseurs. To be able to tailor their advices better and to stimulate the professionalization of the equine industry, the demand was created to know which competencies are important to an equine entrepreneur in order to be successful in the equine industry. Alfa Accountants en Adviseurs offered me the opportunity to conduct a research on this subject.



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Rianne has been active in the equine industry since the age of 7 years. She performed dressage with her horse. Next to this she has been secretary of the riding association PC & RV Wijhe for 5 years.

The objective of this research was to identify and define the necessary competencies of an equine entrepreneur, who is active in the primary segment now and in the near future, to be able to respond to the developments in the market.

My personal role in this research was that I was responsible for all the processes related to the research. I had several contacts with experts in the equine industry (for example Mr. Ger Visser, owner of Stal Eurocommerce) and experts on the field of entrepreneurship and competencies (for example Mr. Ir. T. Lans). On the occasion of the gathered information I developed competency profiles for four different entrepreneurs. These were owners of a breeding stable, trading stable, riding school and a livery yard. After the development the competency profile was tested. This made even possible to test whether the current entrepreneurs are competent or not.

The research showed that the current equine entrepreneur can not yet be referred to as a real entrepreneur. Many of the entrepreneurs are living on the 'island' of their own enterprise. Therefore the entrepreneurs are lacking market orientation, having overview and innovation. Precisely these competencies are of great interest in order to be innovative and distinctive. And being innovative and distinctive is important in creating turnover and eventually a profit. In contrast the entrepreneurs are clearly competent in leadership, management and emotional intelligence. This confirms that emotion is also a very important incentive.

It can be concluded that the research shows that it is very important to shift the equine hearts more in the direction of the entrepreneurial spirits. There should be a clear mission and vision for the equine industry. In order to reach the goals the entrepreneurs should be more communicating with each other as well as with the leading organizations, such as the Sectorraad Paarden.

In the end the equine entrepreneurs should never forget that they are all driven by the same passion. The passion about horses. However, the art of the equine entrepreneur of the future is the ability to dose the emotion. Be aware of what horses mean to people, but make sure that the motion does not put the managerial thinking and professionalism to the background

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Alfa Accountants en Adviseurs is a consulting firm for small and medium enterprises and the agricultural industry. Within Alfa Accountants en Adviseurs the department 'Equine farming' is working for the equine industry.

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