

# The CoSec and the Art of Dressage

## by Caroline Evans

How much manoeuvrability does the average Company Secretary (CoSec) have to manage the average Board? I'd say the proportion is probably similar to that of a horse and its rider.

So how does around 65kg of sentient being manoeuvre about 550kg of an equally independent mind? We're not talking about weight in a literal sense but how does one individual – the expert guiding hand, but at the same time dependent upon the Board for their mutual progress – ensure that their knowledge and expertise is recognised and respected by the much more powerful entity that leads an organisation?

If you've ever had any experience with horses, you'll know that brute force won't get you very far. No one wants to be on the receiving end of a horse acting in anger or fear and it certainly won't lead to the right outcome; it's self-destructive and potentially downright dangerous.

By the same token we know that any group of individuals under similar pressures are likely to fracture and fail. The very principle of the 'unitary body' is to ensure that a common purpose is properly defined and agreed by all. Navigating discussions constructively to this point requires mutual respect, openness, reciprocity of contribution and trust.

Compare this to the art of Dressage; the discipline on which all other forms of equestrianism are built. Riding horses is all about confidence and communication, making the horse feel confident enough to allow its rider on its back. From there the rider communicates by sitting in balance with the horse so that the horse is not only unhampered in its movement but actively encouraged by a gentle but firm change of position of the rider to make a particular movement. In simple terms, if you want a horse to raise its front-left leg, the rider should shift his weight towards the back-right leg; in this way guiding and actively supporting the horse and 'liberating' the leg to rise. The communication is mutually empowering, there is no friction or resistance from either side.

I'm definitely not talking about trickery, pain or deceit – anyone who has attempted to train an animal this way knows that it will eventually come back to bite them – quite literally! The same is true in the boardroom, the CoSec must operate in concert with the Board. Their expertise and knowledge can position the Board to be its best; responding expansively and cohesively to the challenges presented.

Anyone who remains sceptical of the art of Dressage should remember that the moves of today's sport originated on the battlefields of ancient Greece, where the lives of men and animals were at stake and disciplined communication between horse and rider was crucial to staying alive.

We won't all create the poetry in motion of Charlotte du Jardin and Valero, who gave the UK its most successful medal-winning sport in the 2012 London Olympics, but focusing on positive balanced communications will achieve a great deal. Plus, it's also worth noting that equestrianism is still the only Olympic sport in which men and women compete on equal terms, with a piece of 'equipment' that has a mind of its own.

To summarise, the dynamics of Dressage are not so far removed from those of the boardroom. For both to succeed, all involved must act together and in a way that facilitates constructive progress and resolution. This requires mutual respect, support and complementary contribution, and the acknowledgement that the whole is greater than its component parts. Remember, it's a team sport!

A final point to make, is that the ancient Greeks also developed the first governance system too. Called Κυβερνάω – to steer, drive or pilot!

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