

# LaidOffCamp unites, empowers diverse 'herd'

As part of the grayer work force, I think it is easy to feel isolated, puny and discouraged.

On Oct. 3, I attended the Larimer County Workforce Laid-OffCamp. I expected a long day of professional speakers. Instead, I discovered an intriguing venue that relied upon the expertise of the participants — skilled laborers, business managers, creatives and consultants.

Using an “unconferencing format” in which informal conversations were scheduled based upon the talents and needs of those present, we networked and energized each other.

I really enjoyed the day, but a “big aha” occurred for me after I disclosed that I manage a small



**Cheryl Courtney**  
Guest columnist

horse boarding business as an alternative stream of income.

The work force counselor remarked, “You have been keeping a horse business afloat in these hard economic times? Wow. That is really something.” I have indeed kept it going in spite of the fact that many of the boarders are laid off, self-employed, retired or 50-something — like me.

Rising costs and job woes could have caused some of the

patrons to sell their animals, but I opted to blend a bigger herd and thus kept the rates stable. In mixed herds, where mares cycle and the geldings spar, most boarding businesses depend on fields separated by fences. The 100-acre property I manage has no fences, and the herd has prospered as the business has grown. I believe it is because I created a respectful and dynamic community by risking a connection with a wide variety of people and horses.

By relying upon the expertise of everyone involved, varied ages and skills, I developed a mutual dedication to the health and welfare of all involved.

The LaidOffCamp blended

various age groups, skill sets and employment histories. The tone was positive and energetic, accepting and respectful. Like my little horse business, we accepted the challenge of diversity and became united for mutual support and encouragement.

I left hoping that each person felt a pull into a bigger herd — one where they grew stronger, and, ultimately, experienced empowerment. I know I did.

Check out the next LaidOffCamp, sponsored by the Larimer County Workforce Center at [www.larimerworkforce.org](http://www.larimerworkforce.org), or call me at 691-3986 for additional information.

*Cheryl Courtney is a writer and pasture manager in Loveland.*