



WOLVES

Animal coaching to improve work performance

Learning from nature
by Boons

WELCOME

Learning from Nature is Boons' social program, designed to promote empathy and thankfulness through the example set by animals and nature.
We believe in the transformative power that they have to bring out the best in us and help us evolve.



UNLEASH YOUR INNER WOLF

CONTENTS

1. UNIQUE

It is their skills and how they use them that gives each wolf its place in the pack.

2. STRATEGIC

They learn how to adapt their survival strategy to different contexts, increasing its effectiveness.

3. SOCIAL

On their own, wolves don't survive well. Their pack is what gives them strength.

© Fog Foggy Hazy



© Michael Mazzone

1- UNIQUE

The wolf as an individual

1- UNIQUE

Wolves are highly social, family-oriented animals that have developed exceptional communication skills and moreover, great teamwork.

They are one of the most highly adaptable animals, having been widely distributed across the planet over millennia.

A combination of strength, intelligence and coordinated pack behaviour has made wolves a thriving species. Their behaviour varies greatly depending on the social group they belong to and the resources they have at their disposal.

Loyalty and affection for their kin are two of the most easily observed characteristics of the common wolf.

The great diversity of wolves means that there is no uniformity between the different breeds. Some wolves can weigh between 20kg to 70kg, but most are between 35kg and 50kg. In addition, their coats vary from the white of those wolves that inhabit snowy areas, to brown, grey or black.

The wolf as an individual

Capable, organised and decisive, wolves can teach us a lot. Their ability to let each individual specialise in a task, and to hand over leadership of the pack to the best prepared member at any given time, is admirable.

© Marek Szturc





Wolves can easily camouflage themselves and their speed and alertness are remarkable qualities.

They have lean muscles that are free of fat, with great physical resistance and strength that allows them to live in severe and harsh climates and feed on a wide range of foods.

They are nocturnal animals that generally hunt at dusk. Their entire anatomy is adapted to perceive the environment in low light and low visibility conditions.

Predominantly carnivorous, wolves also ingest some vegetables, mainly from the stomach of its prey.

Wolf packs are the most complex social structure among canids. Packs are known to consist of fairly large numbers, often family members, which each contribute to different aspects of social organisation.

1- UNIQUE

The older, weaker wolves are the ones who lead the packs during the longest journeys. This way, the pack is able to adapt to their rhythm. Otherwise, they would have to be left behind.

The young normally don't take part in hunting, but rather, they **learn from the oldest** and most experienced adults. Through observation, the pups are able to put the strategies and techniques into practice when they become adults.

The pups are taken care of by the whole pack. While the alpha female is usually the only one allowed to reproduce, the release of prolactin (a maternal hormone) increases throughout the entire pack when puppies are born, even in males! This helps to keep the group tight-knit, working together to care for the young.

The wolf as an individual

Females, swifter on their feet, command the pack when hunting, leading the prey to rocky areas, swamps or rivers. Once disorientated, the males are then responsible for striking it down.

The males that the pack considers less capable are kept as guards which are stationed around the perimeter of the territory. It's their responsibility to ensure that they are not invaded by rival packs or other predators.

The alpha female and male are in charge of allocating resources, directing the hunt, breeding and maintaining the group's cohesion by resolving conflicts.

What wolves teach us

Each member of a team shares their strengths, weaknesses, values and ideas amongst their peers. As a result of this diversity, the group can find the best way to build its collective identity; the very essence of what represents them.

In order to do so, each team member must answer certain questions during the group's creation process: they must evaluate their different competencies and assume the role that best suits them within the group. In this way, they can play a fundamental role in the team through their individual contribution - just like wolves!

A person is better able to perform certain functions over others thanks to their intrinsic skills. The role they play in the team is further defined by the knowledge they have gained from more experienced members, their own life experience, their physical ability and, of course, their unique personality.

A high-performance team is one that runs smoothly when all members work together and perform the tasks that firstly, give them the most satisfaction and secondly, those which they are naturally good at. This, accompanied by confidence in fellow colleagues and good communication, is a recipe for success.

On the other hand, if roles are not assigned naturally, they can be perceived by the individual as a threat and cause instability in the team.

Rather than being interrupted or imposed upon by somebody else while carrying out the different tasks or projects under one's charge, a natural flow is evident.

Even though it may seem that our role in a team has been assigned to us by someone else, if everything is working in harmony it is because that person has made the decision based on the skills we have demonstrated.

Wolves also teach us that a conflict or threat, whether internal or external, goes beyond the individual and can be solved simply by being part of a pack and having the support of those best able to solve the problem at that particular time and place.

Moreover, caring for those who need the help of others is a sign of strength for wolves; it should be for us too.





© Michael Mazzone

2- STRATEGY

Learned survival

1- STRATEGY

Just like human beings, wolves show a great variety of temperaments and psychological attributes. Their social and family structures resemble ours more than that of many primates.

One of the most visible characteristics of wolves is curiosity. Curiosity is a powerful tool which facilitates learning.

So, when pups sniff around, explore the environment and play, they're actually doing much more than that: they're developing strong social skills, figuring out their place in the pack and establishing survival strategies.

While interacting with their kin, they learn how each member of the pack responds to the different behaviours, including how the pack communicates between themselves. This serves as a reference that will help them to avoid future conflicts and will also enable them to be more effective in getting what they want from an individual at any given time.

Learned survival

This same curiosity can be seen in some adult wolves that tend to play more and observe their environment with less suspicion. We can even see them interact with other predatory species that occupy their territory.

In these interactions they use expressions characteristic of play behaviour. This means that they behave in a non-threatening manner in contexts that, if other higher-ranking members of the pack were present, might lead to the pursuit and hunting of the intruder.

Within the pack, access to resources is subject to the decision of the alpha pair. The alpha male and female are the first to feed and are responsible for ensuring that sick pups and wolves in the group are also provided with access to meals.

When the alpha female has just given birth, the rest of the pack bring the food to the den, serving it to her.



© Yannick Menard

The alpha pair acts in the best interest of the pack

While they play, wolves develop social skills



Highly territorial, wolves aggressively defend their territory from other wolf packs. However, they will always try to avoid conflict, because deaths in the pack have enormous impact: they destabilise the group, breaking its cohesion.

The territory they cover depends on the density of prey, the size of the pack, the presence of other packs in the area, and the use of the land by humans; the latter being avoided at all costs. In addition to the external area and a perimeter well determined by urine and visual markings, the territory includes the so-called living space, where the wolves hunt, play and rest, as well as the area referred to as the home, which is the area closest to the dens.

An area of approximately 2500 ha per wolf is considered adequate.

While the males defend the perimeter and external territory more aggressively, it is the females who defend the home and living space with more force.

1- STRATEGY

Wolves have learned to develop different camouflage strategies that allow them to not only hide while hunting, but moreover, hide from humans.

Wolves can hunt small prey such as rabbits, rodents and even snails. However, they prefer larger prey such as deer because this allows them to exercise the art of hunting: targeting, chasing, cornering and finally, capturing the prey.

The hunting group howls to attract their fellow pack members and moves counter-clockwise, performing different functions and taking turns to mislead the prey, guiding it to specific areas where other pack members lay in wait.

Learned survival

As far as coexistence with other members of the pack is concerned, each wolf develops its own strategies in how best to relate to others in the group.

If it wants to get affection, to play or receive food, it will approach the corresponding wolf in a particular way. If it is involved in a conflict, it will also vary its behaviour, choosing the option which either best avoids or best solves the problem, by using different communication rituals.

Communication is vital in resolving conflicts within the pack.

Wolves adapt the way in which they relate to others in the pack.

Getting to know ourselves and acting accordingly

In terms of planning, if we take wolves on the hunt as an example, parallels can be drawn. Planning involves choosing targets, designing action plans to achieve said targets, developing the necessary tools to integrate them, and coordinating activities required by the project.

Objectives form the basis of all planning, and the strategy for achieving them will vary from case to case. Returning to the hunting analogy, the chosen strategy will be different depending on the size and type of the prey, requiring varying degrees of energy, time and resources.

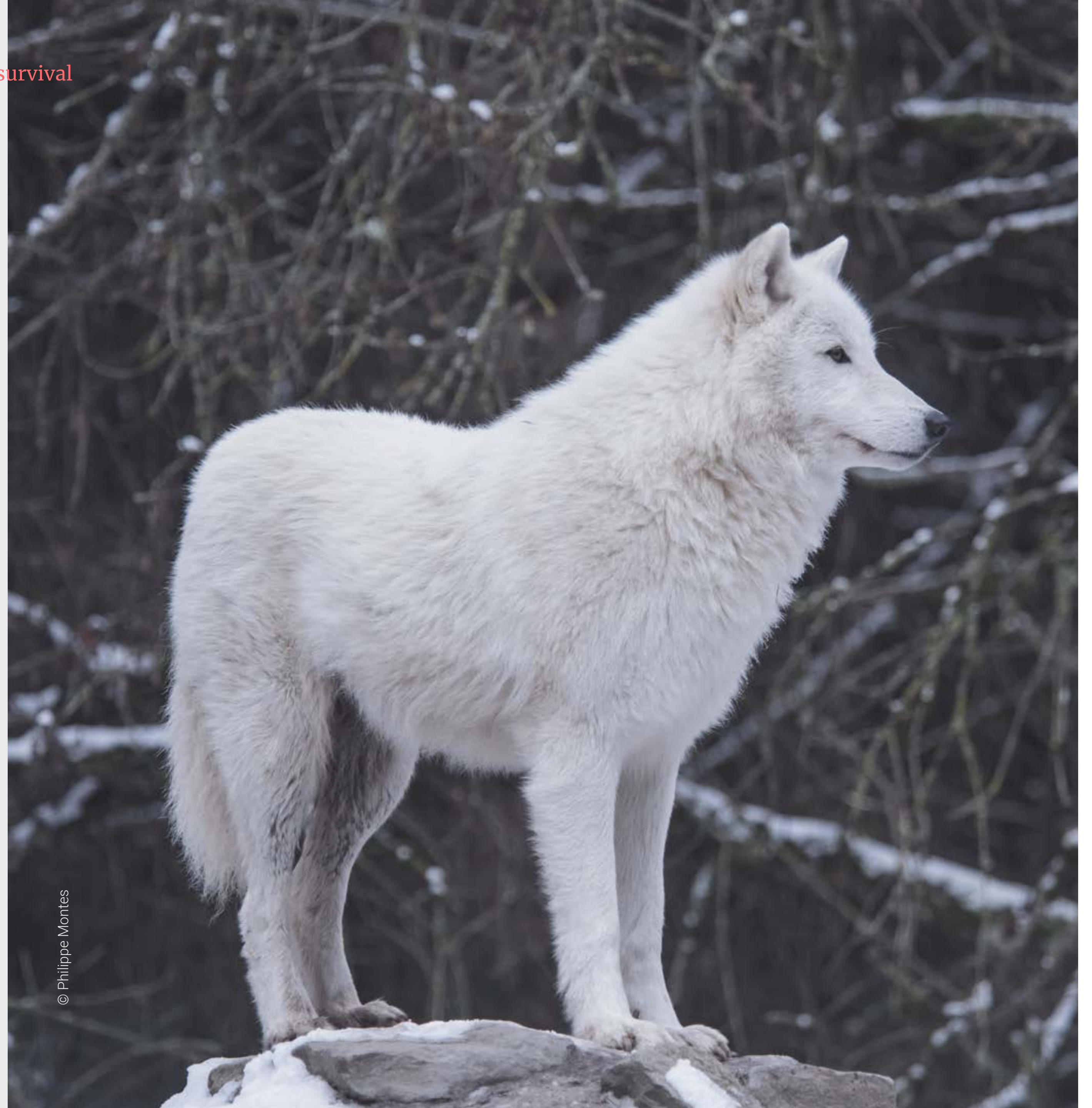
A person who is part of a team with set objectives must be aware of the general behaviour and dynamic of the group. Additionally, they must also be able to identify the modus operandi of the individuals they are working with at any given time. In other words, they must be flexible in how they relate to others. The idea is to treat others as they wish to be treated, and to show social empathy in the same way that wolves do.

Adapting to different learning styles and the respective situation of each team member results in increased satisfaction and productivity, reduces conflict and increases the chances of success.

With regard to those individuals who do not integrate well with the rest, wolves have several solutions: they keep them on the fringes, in the perimeter zone; they expel them from the pack; or, the wolf itself leaves to form its own pack, or wanders alone.

**Social empathy
is essential for the
smooth running
of a team.**

© Philippe Montes







© blacktigersdream

3 - SOCIAL

A formidable team

Both male and female wolves can spend periods of time alone, but what a lone wolf seeks is other wolves. Like us, they need to be amongst others.

They are not interested in living in solitude, as they are by nature social animals that maintain friendships and lifelong bonds.

Living in a pack makes breeding easier, hunting more coordinated and collaborative, and defending territory possible. But, above all, it allows for unique emotional bonds between group members to form and favours the passing of knowledge from one generation to another; all of which lay the foundations for a truly collaborative way of life.

In order for these social behaviours to be maintained, wolves have developed an effective communication system which allows them to live in a group environment with virtually no conflict.

When a wolf pack, which is generally composed of direct descendants is stable, coexistence is established in a relaxed, dynamic way with minimal conflict.

However, packs that have not formed naturally and that humans have tried to build (by introducing previously unknown adult individuals, kept in captivity or partially free) have, on many occasions, resulted in the death of some members of the group through aggression, or from increased levels of stress. This has led to the emergence of strong conflicts in the face of the slightest disagreements, with wolves forcibly imposing themselves on others, as well as extreme competition for available resources.

3- SOCIAL

A formidable team

In stable and balanced packs, respect and trust between individuals is very evident. Each member takes his or her place within the group and the leaders, the alpha male and female, do not exercise their power to access resources. Rather, it is their own pack that yields to them.

Something to keep in mind is that the alpha pair hold their place in the pack precisely because they demonstrate natural leadership skills as well as through their abilities to guide, protect and care for the rest of their pack in a fair and collaborative manner. They are a prime example to follow.



© Ross Sokolowski

Communication is a fundamental component of peaceful coexistence.

At birth, wolves are blind and deaf, and they stay in direct contact with their mother or other females in the group while suckling, until they can fend for themselves at about eight weeks of age. From then on, they start eating the semi-solid food that both their mother and other members of the pack regurgitate for them.

As they begin to eat more solids and gain better mobility, they leave the den (which wolves only use when they have litters) and are moved to social areas where they begin learning the behaviour and rules of the group.

The pack begins making long journeys after the litter has reached 25 to 50 weeks of age.

Social norms and communication differ from pack to pack and various 'dialects' have even been observed among different wolf groups or families.

Wolves mainly communicate through body language, emission of sounds and chemical signals. Smell, their most developed sense, plays a fundamental role in the interpretation of these signals.

They have developed a complex system of specialised postures and extensive body language which help to reduce aggression between pack members.

Both their facial expressions and tail movements indicate the emotional state and intentions they have towards others. They are extremely sensitive to detecting any subtle changes in posture or expression.



3- SOCIAL

A formidable team

Howling allows wolves to claim their territory, to gather the pack, to warn intruders to stay away or to alert the rest of the members of the pack about a specific location where prey has been located. Contrary to popular belief, wolves do not howl at the moon; they simply have to position their necks upwards to achieve a greater range, and their peak activity occurs during the night when they hunt.

Growling, barking and whining indicate different emotional states depending on the context.

With respect to smell, it is 100,000 times more powerful than that of humans and is so sophisticated that we cannot yet reproduce it or understand it in its full magnitude. Needless to say, it is a very effective form of communication.



Wolves mark out their territory, claim it and defend it from other packs or other members of its own group through the use of urine markings, faeces and visual markings (it drags its legs and marks visible furrows in the ground for other wolves to detect, smell and capture information). All this chemical communication is possible thanks to pheromones.

When group members are able to communicate effectively with each other, their communal life radiates balance and well-being. They are even capable of changing the course of rivers...

© Gregoire Bertaud

The truth

As for working in teams, wolves can be taken as a model for building strong bonds of trust and respect between individuals. Wolf pack behaviour teaches us the importance of developing fluid and socially empathetic communication, that encourages cooperation without the use of force or imposition. If we truly want balance, a team must feel comfortable to take small risks, experiment and enhance their professional and personal growth.

3- SOCIAL

In order to develop an effective relationship, two of the key factors are communication and the establishment of the group's own codes of ethics and conduct. Wolf packs are built upon these two pillars.

The way in which a species perceives the world is related to its evolutionary strategy. As such, wolves have a highly developed sense of hearing and smell, whereas humans have evolved with sight and touch as their main sensory systems.

© M Zonderling

A formidable team



3- SOCIAL

Although we still don't know exactly how humans developed language, in recent years, one of the most widely supported theories suggests that language may have evolved as an equivalent of primate grooming. That is, as a way of facilitating social interaction. Furthermore, language is suggested to have been developed as a result of the construction of mental images that needed to be communicated, and necessary in order to facilitate cultural development.

Robin Dunbar argues that, after exceeding a certain group size, grooming becomes ineffective in maintaining social bonds. Instead, language favours the inclusion of those who are not present and facilitates the ability to tell stories through abstract thinking, which thus reinforces the creation of social bonds in large groups.

Language is the vehicle of thought. Thought can occur without language, but language cannot occur without thought.

Our body language and (non-verbal) gestures came before verbal language, in the early stages of development. Its role in communication is key because it is directly linked to emotions.

A formidable team

In a social context, our non-verbal language says more about us than verbal language does, as it is most strongly linked to emotional expression. Therefore, even though we can relay facts and communicate verbally, our non-verbal language is as important, if not more important, than what we are saying verbally.

That is why non-verbal language should be kept in mind during social interactions; it's what gives us the most information about the emotional state of the person we are communicating with, and helps us to be more empathetic towards them. Being aware of our body language also allows us to reinforce the message we want to convey.

In the same way, our communication is also influenced by how we make use of time and space. For example, if we 'invade' each other's territory (for example, living space or personal space), or make someone wait, negative emotions will arise prior to any interaction, which will minimise both trust and positive communication.

We unconsciously classify people according to the first impressions we get from them - all within the first two to seven seconds of meeting. It's a survival-based tool of evolution that we cannot avoid.

When we have to choose between what we say or how we say it, we will always stick to what allows us to best express ourselves. So, in the end, how we communicate is fundamental, as is understanding what others want to tell us. Without doubt, this is another lesson that wolves can teach us.



The balance of nature

Large predators play an important role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, which means wolves play a vital role in nature.

In the 1990s, the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone Park (they disappeared for more than seventy years due to indiscriminate killing and hunting by humans) produced a phenomenon called a widespread trophic cascade. What happened was truly incredible.

During the wolves' absence from the park, herbivores proliferated on a large scale due to the lack of natural predators.

Humans' attempts to contain them were insufficient resulting in the destruction of a large part of the vegetation. In addition, the possibility of plant regeneration was eliminated due to two factors:

- 1- The devastating way in which herbivores feed, moving from one area to another until they finish with what is available, destroying the land.**
- 2- The effect of overgrazing, which destroys the base of the plant and eliminates the possibility of new growth.**



© Andrew Ly

3- SOCIAL

Consequently, there was a lack of resources both for the herbivores themselves and for other species, which also ended up disappearing because the carrying capacity of the ecosystem had been exceeded. In addition, the park's terrain was modified and even the course of the rivers became erratic.

With the reintroduction of wolf packs, herbivores decreased in number due to predation. But, more importantly, they kept moving, avoiding the areas they had previously populated. They did so by following the principles of the so-called ecology of fear, in which prey feeling threatened move more easily and avoid places where they can be easily preyed upon.

As a result, deforested areas began regenerating, with some trees growing five times as much as they had before in just six years, increasing diversity exponentially.

The valleys were filled with forests attracting different species such as beavers and migratory birds, which in turn attracted many more species.

A formidable team



As the wolves also hunted coyotes, this caused the population of rabbits and other small prey to increase, thus attracting other predators and scavengers such as vultures and eagles.

Little by little, the ecosystem gradually and steadily recovered its balance.

As the forests regenerated, stopping the erosion, the rivers changed their course and favoured the wild fauna. The impact: the physical geography of the park and the ecosystem's health were once again stabilised.

Although these ecological phenomena are still being studied, and while it seems that wolves are not the only ones responsible for these changes in Yellowstone Park, they have played a crucial role in the regeneration and balance of the ecosystem.

The modification of any element of the food chain causes a series of reactions that directly and indirectly influence the subsequent elements.

The fragility of today's ecosystems, in part due to the careless actions of human beings and the mass extinction of natural predators, calls into question the values that our species prioritises and must be re-evaluated.

Fortunately, the way in which wolves and other large carnivores are viewed is changing, although not as quickly as it could. This is because sometimes the ultimate motivation for such changes are essentially economic.

Our knowledge of species like the wolf can make us think about their role in our ecosystems, and also in our culture.

Perhaps a good starting point for protecting wolves is to reflect on the stories we tell our daughters and sons before going to sleep. After all, it is both wolves and our children whose lives are impacted by the decisions we make.



A formidable team

"Every culture, at one time or another in its history, chooses an 'animal king' and makes it the star of its symbolic bestiary. The facts of language, oral traditions, poetic creations and the world of logos and representations give this animal a superiority over all others, as well as a central place in belief systems, worship and rituals"

(Pastoreau, 2008)

Wolves in history The Controversy of the Predator

WOLVES

"Animals play an important role in defining the identity and culture of different human groups and are significant to people because they are representative of their values"

(Hamilton & Taylor, 2010)

Although there are problems that arise from the coexistence of humans and wolves, we should not forget one fact: throughout history, the massacres and extermination to which this animal has been subjected are directly related to the meaning that the wolf has held for humans in each era.

Whether this meaning evokes positive or negative emotions leads to the conservation or extermination of this wondrous animal. As different authors state, this is proven by the fact that, in the face of a provocation, rather than retaliate against those that have specifically provoked conflict, mass wolf killings are seen. As we have already mentioned, wolves - like human beings - are not all the same. They are extremely diverse in their social conditioning and behaviour.

To explain the wolf as symbolic, we have to understand the specific context of the eras in which this symbolism arises. We also need to examine how such imagery has been transmitted orally and in written form in the past.

The study of these symbolic relationships is very complicated and diverse, since there have been positive and negative perceptions of the wolf in each era.



A formidable team

In fact, wolves are one of the most represented animals in the West. Despite symbolising strength and being respected for its prowess since ancient times, during the Middle Ages it acquires a negative connotation. It is branded as vermin, as being demonic as well as many other negative perceptions. In fact, it becomes such a lowly animal that it is not even worth hunting through direct confrontation, but instead is exterminated at large.



© Tom Pottiger

Among the many examples that can be given to explain this shift from a respected to a despised symbol, the link with the rise of ecclesiastical power in the Middle Ages is clear. For the Christian religion, the lamb is one of its most sacred symbols (it even takes the form of Jesus Christ). It seems understandable that the wolf, its natural predator, would henceforth become a symbol of evil.

Nevertheless, wolves have accompanied humans during their hunts from as early as prehistoric times, even before the first settlements existed. And between our two species a close bond was established which, for various reasons, would eventually lead to the birth of a new species: the first domestic animal - '(wo)man's most faithful friend' - the dog.

Yet, from the moment that humankind begins to disconnect from the natural world and acquires the right to own property, territory becomes a source of conflict between wolves and humans; in fact, it becomes one of the most recurrent causes of dispute. The rural world has since been in conflict with wolves, mainly because they are a threat to farmers' livelihoods.

Europe, North America and some regions of Asia have all faced the wolf in a struggle for ownership and dominance over nature.



A formidable team

So much so, that there is a great difference of opinion among people regarding wolves. Those who are traditionally hunter-gatherers, (as is the case in many tribal societies in North America), live in balance with their natural environment and see wolves as having similar capabilities to humans, with great spiritual influence; they even worship them. On the other hand, pastoral societies or human settlements that have exercised control over the environment, see wolves as the enemy; they are feared, considered cruel and are understood to be the cause of their misfortunes.

An example of this vision is the practice of sport hunting, which considers the successful hunting of a wolf as a trophy or show of power. Since hunting a wolf represents a challenge, doing so increases one's status in certain social circles.

Fortunately, nowadays the cultural perception of wolves is changing. It is swinging towards a more positive view of wolves and large predators in general, which arguably coincides with the current need to reconnect with nature and the growing concern for environmental sustainability.

Also, popular culture considers the wolf as an animal that has a positive influence on the environment. Characteristics such as strength, loyalty and even courage are attributed to them. And all this is partly thanks to the more objective information available about the behaviour of these animals, combined with the growing tourism trend of wildlife-watching.

Many of the studies that we have conducted reveal that the dominant figures who take advantage of their surroundings to reach the top, owing to their ambition and self-confidence, all too often end up destroying their own companies, since everything is centred around them. They are not individuals who place the mission above their own needs, and I think people are already starting to notice this attitude.

Adam Grant,
one of today's most valued
social scientists.

Learning from Nature
Workshop Series

Workshops



Unleash your inner wolf

- Work as a team.
- Know how to plan and define objectives.
- Develop individual skills.



The queen of the seas

- Value diversity.
- Communicate and empathise.
- Strengthen individual capacity.



Sheep that bleat, don't eat.

- Conflict management.
- Motivate and be motivated.



Eight's enough.

- Make the right decisions.
- Work as a team.



Monarch in the making

- Communicate and empathise.
- Create productive relationships.

For more information, please send an email to:

hi@learningfromnature.net

WHAT IS LEARNING FROM NATURE?

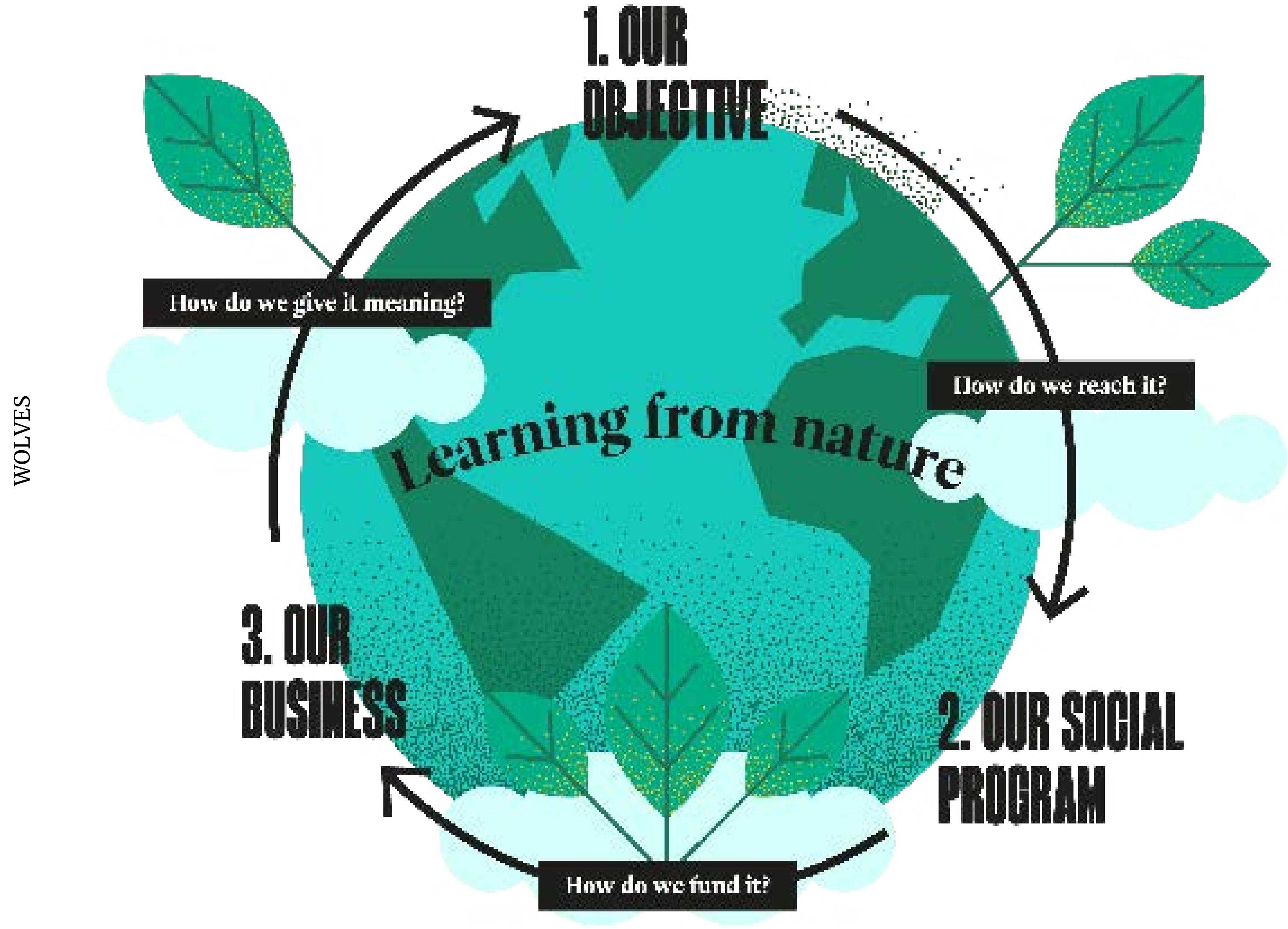
Learning from Nature is BOONS' social program that aims to inspire each and every person through nature and animals.

It has two clear objectives:

To build a more empathetic and thankful society.

To reconnect human beings with nature.

There is a tendency to try and make animals more human. However, we suggest the opposite: that animals can make us more human. That we can learn from their virtues. We believe that animals and nature are a vehicle for social transformation.



1- Our objective is to promote empathy and thankfulness in the world. We are convinced that these are the most powerful and effective attitudes for building a better planet.

2- Through Learning from Nature we want to inspire individuals to be open to doing just that: learn from nature. We believe in the transformative power animals and nature have to bring out the best in us and help us to evolve. Animals make us more human.

3- At BOONS we prepare top quality dog food recipes with natural ingredients. BOONS is honest food; a way of thanking dogs for everything they give and teach us.

Animals make us more human.

HONEST FOOD, HONEST RECIPES



Learning from nature
by Boons

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LEARNING FROM NATURE?**

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