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Riding Instructor

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Peer Profile
Catherine Stevens
Alton, Virginia

**Changing the
Shape of Your
Lessons**
by Karis Loop

Called to Change—
How I Learned More
by Teaching Less
by Lydia Fairchok

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Contents

21

- 5 Guest Commentary**
- 6 Peer Profile**
Catherine Stevens
- 7 Ask the Vet**
Smart Seasonal Horse Care Tips for Fall
By Lydia F. Gray, DVM, MA
- 9 Change the Shape of Your Lessons**
Keep Your Teaching from Flatlining by Applying One of These Shapes to Your Lesson Plan
By Karis Loop
- 12 What's New with ARIA's Official Suppliers**
By Donna Hartshorn
- 14 Called to Change**
—How I Learned More by Teaching Less
By Lydia Fairchok
- 17 Is Your Teaching Becoming as Stale as Old Bread?**
By Didi Arias
- 21 The Art of Teaching Beginners**
By Kim Carter
- 23 Develop an Emergency Plan**
Part 2 of 3
By Diane Rice
- 26 What Kind of Inner Coach Do You Have?**
By April Clay
- 28 Teaching Confidence**
What Beginners Really Want to Learn
By Gincy Self Bucklin
- 30 Horse-Sense for Instructors**
Risk-taking Riders
By Jessica Jahiel, Ph.D.
- 32 Legal Focus**
Our State Has No Equine Activity Liability Act —Are We Worse Off?
By Julie I. Fershtman, Attorney at Law
- 33 Business Matters**
Tips for Riding Instructors for a More Efficient Workday
By Doug Emerson, The Profitable Horseman
- 34 Cameo's Cauldron**
Find Your Niche
by Cameo Miller

Cover photo: Catherine Stevens and Sophie at her Snow Hill Farm in Alton, Virginia. Photo by Nelson Stevens.
Above: Sharing your love of horses with beginner riders introduces them to a lifetime of strength and growth. Photo courtesy of Kim Carter.

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Have You Hugged a Horse Today?

By Ginny Elder



IT OCCURRED TO ME a good topic for a guest commentary would be “remembering.” Remembering why we became riding instructors, trainers, and advocates on behalf of horses.

While involved in a research project studying heart rate and emotionality in horses I’ve been launched into the high-tech world of science, marketing, and social media. It has been a tsunami of information and an accelerated learning curve for me.

I think you’d all agree that the amount of information available at the touch of a key is staggering. Our lives as instructors can become frenetic. Multitasking and wearing many different hats in our many different roles from trainer to sports psychologist and everything in between can start to dominate our daily routine. The very busyness of our work can cause us to forget what led us to this life of horses and teaching to begin with.

Part of my research project has been working with students, using heart rate variability to practice calming their emotions, which is such an important component in becoming a good horseman. The awareness to slow down our minds and enjoy the small things can give much-needed balance to our lives. Awareness of our surroundings can be renewing to our souls and minds when we remember to see and feel the beautiful quiet moments of horses. The chomping sounds at feeding time, the memories the smell of a horse brings to us, or perhaps the feeling of calm that the mere presence of a horse can give us. These are the small moments that I hope you will remember. These small moments can bring you inspiration and comfort every day if you let them, by bringing balance and awareness back to your work and busy life. I hope you will hug a horse today with gratitude and always remember how and why you began your personal equestrian journey. ■

Ginny Elder travels between Durango, Colorado and Cave Creek, Arizona where she has riding students in both locations. Her hobbies run the gamut from gardening to oil painting.

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Catherine Stevens

Snow Hill Farm
Alton, Virginia

RI *Why did you decide to become a riding instructor?*

CS I found myself “informally” teaching friends and children who were just starting out and asked for help. I enjoyed it and began to pursue teaching riding as a “vocation” rather than an occasional hobby. Teaching allows me to spend time doing something I really love, and it allows me to help make horse and rider partnerships better. Becoming a riding instructor allowed me to be part of the solution.

RI *How long have you been teaching?*

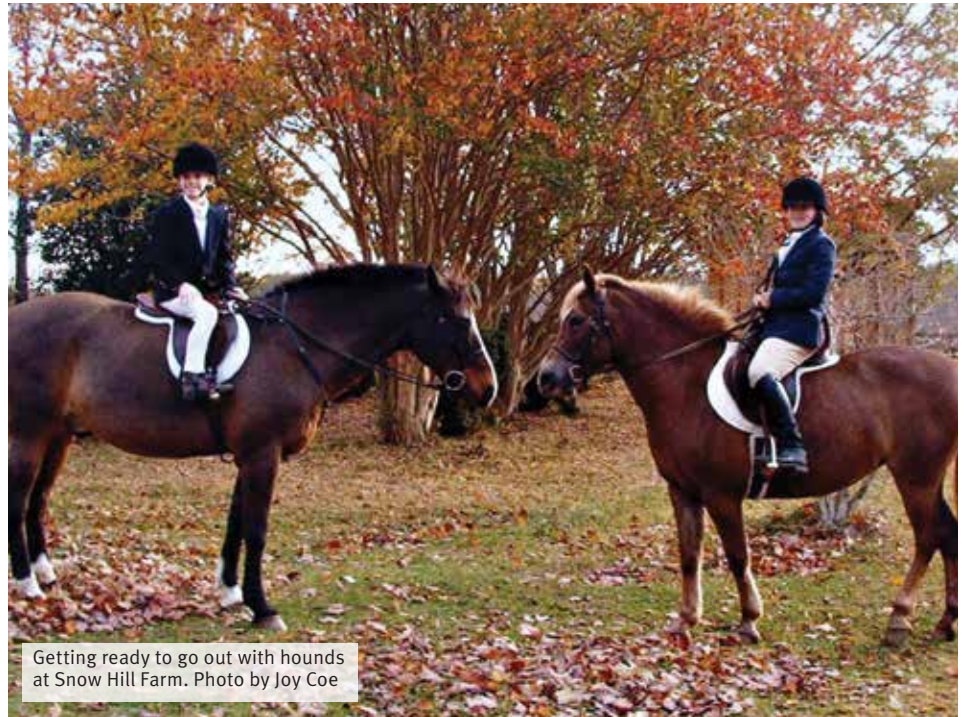
CS I began teaching “informally” about two decades ago, but pursued it as a business in 2000 shortly after our son was born. We had moved to a farm and I was able to balance being a new mom with teaching lessons part-time. At one point I had about 35 students per week; I now work full-time in higher education and have six students per week, which is perfect for me.

RI *What is your background as a rider, horse owner, etc.?*

CS I was one of those truly horse-crazy kids who asked for a horse as soon as I could talk. I rode at hunt seat lesson barns in Jackson, Mississippi from age eight until I graduated from high school. At age twelve I convinced my parents to allow me to buy an OTTB that was probably headed for slaughter; owning him was a formative experience that helped shape me as a rider and instructor. After high school I went to Sweet Briar College, where I had the great fortune to ride with Paul Cronin. After college I didn't have access to horses for several years, but when I did reconnect, it was full-steam ahead! My husband and I acquired horses, joined a hunt, and eventually bought a farm.

RI *When and why did you become ARIA certified?*

CS I remember seeing an advertisement for the ARICP somewhere and mentioning it to my parents. In 2004, they sur-



Getting ready to go out with hounds at Snow Hill Farm. Photo by Joy Coe

prised me with a birthday gift of the registration fee for the annual ARIA conference in Orlando. I prepared for certification so that I could take the exams there.

RI *How has certification affected your business?*

CS I believe that certification is a definite plus for my business. I have had clients, parents especially, tell me that they chose our farm for lessons because I am a certified instructor.

RI *What other aspects of the horse business are you in?*

CS We board a few horses at our farm, mostly for students, and we have been members of Red Mountain Hounds (NC) for almost two decades. Although we have transitioned to social membership in the hunt because of our busy schedules, we enjoy going out with hounds when we can. I also occasionally present to local 4H and other groups of horse enthusiasts.

RI *What are your hobbies and interests outside of the barn?*

CS I am a perpetual guitar student, like to knit, and love to watch our son run cross-country and play soccer.

RI *What is your biggest success?*

CS Our son is definitely our biggest suc-

cess, but I also count the students who have ridden with me, gone on to college and adulthood, and become “good citizens” as successes as well.

RI *What words of wisdom would you share with new instructors?*

CS Keep finding learning opportunities. Collaborate with your peers whenever possible, even those you view as competitors. Keep refining your business plan because the economy changes. Be the kind of person you would want as an instructor!

RI *If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?*

CS I am not sure I would do anything differently, because every choice I made and every path taken has taught and shaped me. Although I still aspire to improve, I am happy where I am today as an instructor, owner, and rider.

RI *What are your future plans and goals?*

CS I fully intend to teach for another couple of decades! I have aspirations for two young horses that we own and that I am bringing along, mostly that they become safe and excellent partners for their riders (including me). Beyond that, I have some competition goals for them, but we'll see! ■



Smart Seasonal Horse Care Tips for Fall

By Lydia F. Gray, DVM, MA

HORSES NEED CARE YEAR ROUND, but special attention during the changing of the seasons can help ease horses into the different environments with their unique challenges. First up is fall, which officially begins September 23rd and ends December 21st. It's tempting to be distracted by Halloween and Thanksgiving, but if your horse is coming off a busy summer of lessons and shows, he may need some "TLC" before winter arrives.

Nutrition

Depending on where you live, pasture may be dwindling as a forage source, so it's probably time to start increasing the amount of hay you feed. While you're in the hay barn, make

sure you've got enough hay, and also that it's not dusty, moldy, or weedy. With green grass declining, it may be time to add back in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins E and A, and other nutrients. At the same time, most insect control products can probably be discontinued. Consider swapping out electrolytes (to replace minerals lost in sweat) for plain salt (to meet daily sodium needs and promote drinking). If your horse does better on a joint supplement, a hoof supplement, or a digestive supplement, continue to support his systems but be practical and "dial things down a notch" without stopping altogether if the workload, travel, or other stress begins to lessen. For example, 20 grams of biotin may be sufficient in the off-season instead of 30 grams.

Exercise

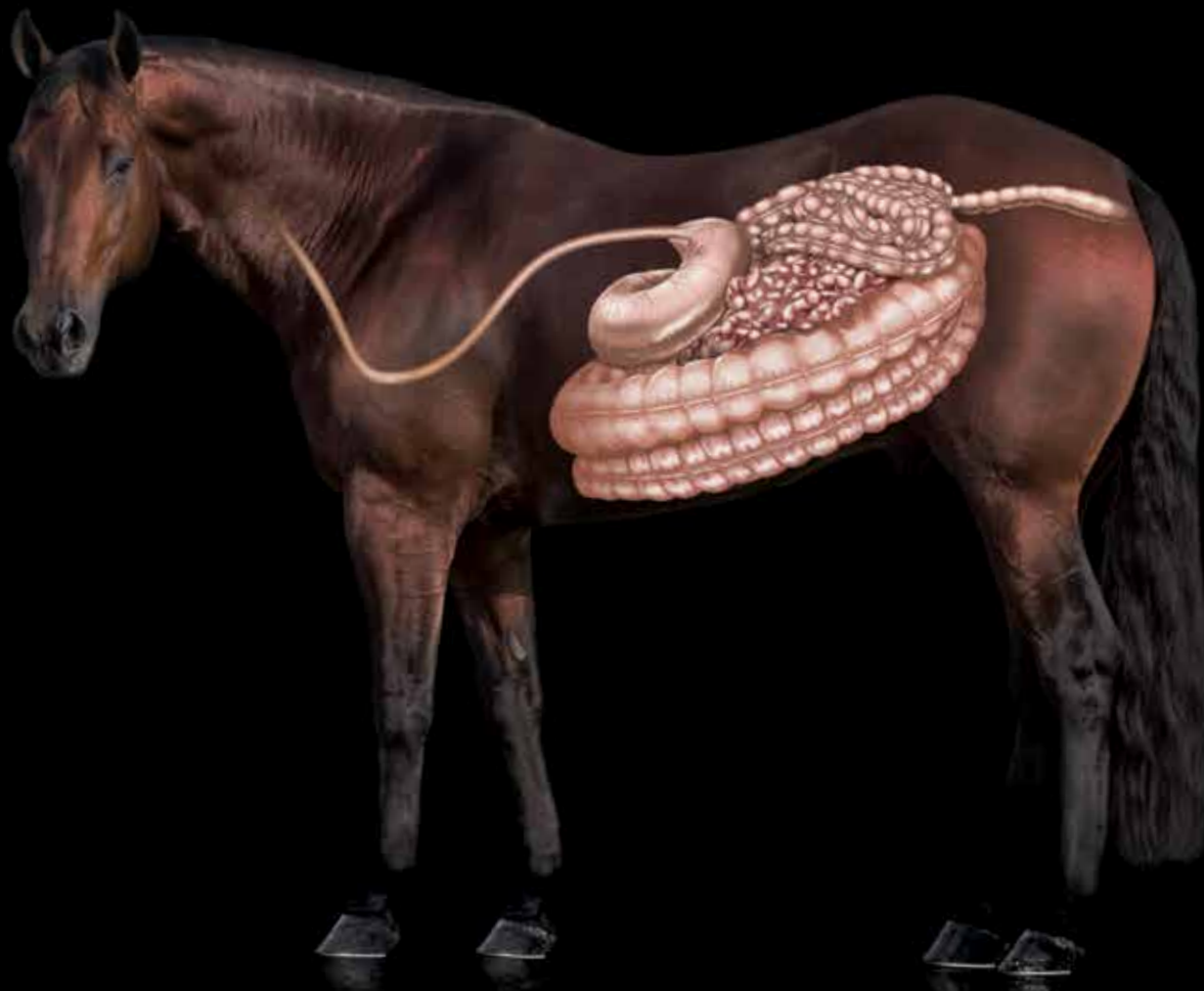
Speaking of workload, fall can be a great time to ride because of cooler temperatures and fewer bugs! As always, make any changes to your horse's exercise program gradually, whether you're adding to the intensity/duration or subtracting from it. So if show season is ending, develop a plan to keep your horse's joints, muscles and other soft tissues, heart and lungs, and his mind active and engaged.

Health care

Nearly every horse needs to be dewormed in the fall, either because the grazing season is ending OR because it's just beginning. Either way, fall is a great time to ask your veterinarian to give your horse a once-over for any unsoundness that may have developed, for sharp points on his teeth, for his body condition score and weight going into winter, and other issues. Use this time to chat about what vaccinations your horse might benefit from at this time of year, what plants and trees become toxic in the fall, and at what temperature sheets and blankets might be a good idea. Save plenty of time to rake those leaves! 🍂

Lydia F. Gray, DVM, MA is the Medical Director/Staff Veterinarian for SmartPak Equine.

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Photo: Carol Walker; Illustration: Celia Strain

Change the Shape of Your Lessons

Keep Your Teaching from Flatlining by Applying One of These Shapes to Your Lesson Plan

by Karis Loop

Illustrations by Susan E. Harris

EVEN THOUGH I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AN ORGANIZER—creating elaborate and detailed lesson plans—I often felt a sense of aimlessness when I tried to connect the different segments. I'd decide on the skills I wanted to teach and come up with one or more exercises to reinforce them. Sometimes I'd have an overriding theme for the day, emphasizing leg position or impulsion or turns and circles, and sometimes I'd have different areas of focus for the walk, trot, canter, and jumping portions of the lesson. But until I started visualizing the shape of the elements I was teaching, the execution of my lesson plans had a disjointed feel.

Now I take each skill and choose how I want to structure it within my lesson. Is this a new skill for my student? Then I might want to choose either the *building block* or the *staircase* form to make sure the base abilities are in place before the more difficult exercise is attempted. Am I reinforcing or building on an existing skill? Then the *pyramid* might be the better option. Let's take a look at the three shapes in action, using a single activity—canter transitions—as an example.

Building Blocks

When working with this shape, the separate facets that make up a skill or movement are taken apart and worked on as single units. This is a great way to make certain the basics are in place before stu-

dents are asked to attempt a more difficult or new-to-them exercise. Using the example of canter transitions, we can create a list of the foundation skills required for a successful canter departure. They might include the following building blocks: prompt and impulsive transitions from the walk to the trot; the ability to move the horse laterally; and control of the upper body during upward transitions. The resulting lesson plan will address these blocks as separate units, and the instructor will easily be able to see whether the required skills are in place before the actual goal of the lesson—the canter transition—is attempted.

The building blocks can be as difficult or as simple as necessary. The same basic blocks can be applied to a more advanced student who is learning to do lead changes, to

a beginner who is just learning to canter, or to an intermediate rider who needs to sharpen and improve the canter departure. The expectations and degree of competency will vary, but the elements are similar. For example, to meet the lateral movement building block, the advanced rider might perform a side-pass, the intermediate a haunches-in, and the beginner a few steps of leg yield or turn on the forehand. The blocks can be tailored to the degree of difficulty of the resulting skill, the abilities of the particular riders, and the order in which you teach new exercises within your lesson program.

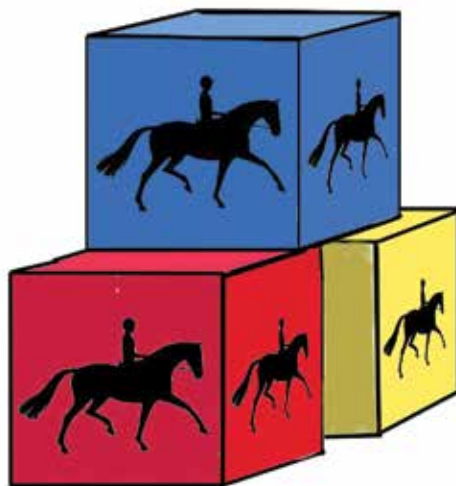
Students should understand how the blocks apply to the goal exercise. Why is each block important? How does it affect the larger skill in question? What level of proficiency is required for each block? This way, riders become more aware of the importance of strong basics. They'll have a better understanding of the way simple exercises and movements (which might seem boring to them when considered in isolation) will help them advance to higher levels. They'll also develop a repertoire of blocks they can practice on their own, to enhance what they're learning in lessons and improve the foundation of their riding.

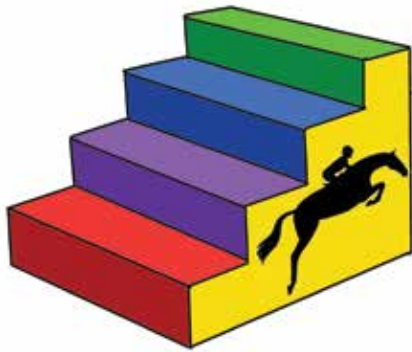
Staircase

This shape is similar to the building block, but the exercises are progressively harder. The student accomplishes a series of steps on the way to performing the main goal of the lesson. Again, this can be designed to meet the level and ability of any student.

Using the example of canter transitions again, the staircase might begin with canter transitions on the longe line, where the instructor is helping to control the horse's movement. The next step would be transitions from the trot to the canter, then from the walk to the canter. For a more advanced rider, the staircase can be extended to include transitions within simple changes through the trot and walk, and then flying changes.

I've found it helpful to pause at each step along the way, praising my students for ▶





what they've accomplished and explaining how the exercise fits in the general staircase I've built into the lesson. Even if they don't achieve the top-floor landing exercise, they can still see progress and feel proud of the skills they're building along the way. These pauses help the riders internalize and process the separate steps, and give them a greater understanding of the progressive nature of riding lessons.

The Pyramid

When I began giving shape to my lesson plans, the pyramid was the first one I used and is still my favorite. It is similar to the staircase, but instead of stopping with the exercise that was the goal of the lesson, we work back down through the simpler steps. This is particularly effective when teaching difficult skills or when teaching a student who is a perfectionist or very self-critical, because the lessons tend to end on positive notes because the simple skills should be easily performed. (If the student is having difficulty with even the basic skills of the pyramid or staircase, then extend the steps back until you reach one he or she is able to perform well. Don't build either of these shapes on a shaky foundation!)

Once the main goal or exercise has been performed (whether or not it is perfected at this point), the student then performs each pyramid exercise in descend-

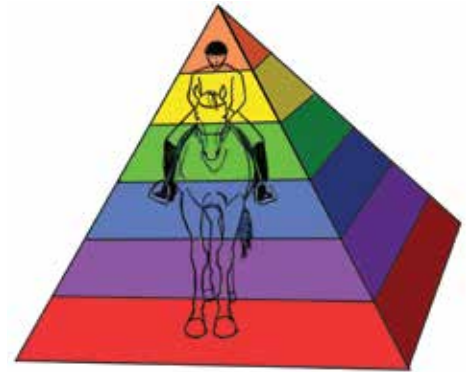
ing order, ending with the simplest step. Students can repeat the entire pyramid more than once, or you can have them repeat each step's exercise several times. In the staircase, you'll want to make sure your student is able to consistently perform each step before you move on. Using the example above, upward transitions from the trot should reach a certain level of proficiency—determined by you—before the student is cantering from the walk. In a pyramid, there's more leeway. Students can sample the more difficult phase of the movement—within the bounds of safety—because they'll revisit the other steps on the way down the other side.

The pyramid can be used no matter how many steps lead to the top. Mini-pyramids are useful and are excellent ways for students to see improvement. For example, a

mini-pyramid with a horse that has trouble picking up the right lead in the canter might be the following: left lead canter transition, right lead transition, then another left lead transition. Having riders perform pyramids gives them a sense of accomplishment, because the earlier steps are often easier to perform on the way back down than they were on the way up. This helps riders understand how much they are improving and lets them see the lesson as a success even if they had difficulty with the exercise at the top of the pyramid.

Putting It All Together

Choosing a shape for your lesson plans will not only make your lessons more effective and interesting, but will also help you see where there might be gaps in foundation skills or in a rider's understanding of the components of complex exercises. Switching shapes can also provide variety. Using a different approach to teaching the same exer-



cise or skill helps you communicate with your students until you find the most effective way of delivering a lesson.

The three shapes can also be applied to an overarching structure of a lesson series. This article talked about the short-term goal of canter transitions. If you give shape to long-term goals, entire sessions can fit into one of the shapes described. The building blocks can be added week by week. Staircase steps can span several months on the way to a larger goal. Pyramids can provide diversity in lesson intensity. During the lessons toward the top of the pyramid, the work will be more challenging. At the lower end of the pyramid, easier stages will provide opportunity to focus on the basics in simpler exercises. Stagnation and disconnected lessons will give way to a unified structure that helps you organize your lessons and moves your students progressively toward their riding goals. ■

Karis Loop has taught hunter-jumper, dressage, and Western lessons for more than 30 years. A Pacific Northwest native, she now lives and writes in Texas.

Using a different approach to teaching the same exercise or skill helps you communicate with your students until you find the most effective way of delivering a lesson.

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By Donna Hartshorn

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Charles Owen

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Ms. Sellers's first love in life began with her award-winning horse Foxy. Foxy, now 24 years old, was diagnosed with Cushing's disease in 2012, and although she has deteriorated over the past couple years, she is still doing extraordinarily well for a horse of her age and condition. Ms. Sellers said, "Of all the teachers I have had in my life, Foxy has definitely been one of the best. She has taught me the fearlessness and care that everyday life demands."

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The author at the beginning of a 12-hour shift in the communications center. Photo by Shae Worl.

I had pursued, qualified for, and been hired as a dispatcher at my local 9-1-1 communications center.

Asking the Right Questions

One of the first things I learned as a new 9-1-1 call-taker was to remember the five W's: who, what, when, where, and why. It's no surprise, then, that these were also the principal questions I was faced with as I examined my continued role as an instructor alongside another full-time career.

Who would my students be? I was forced to admit early on that there was no way I could maintain the same hours in the arena, and ending partnerships with other lesson programs meant that I no longer had the resources to help some of my students reach their goals. Providing referrals to other programs was a difficult but necessary step to provide for the needs of some of my riders. The riders who remained with me were a mixture of experience levels. Their common denominator was a willingness to adapt to my new schedule and a desire to continue learning whole horsemanship regardless of specific discipline.

What changes would I need to make to adapt my business to a smaller scale? I knew that I would need to revisit topics such as insurance, tax considerations, and certain policies. I chose to change to an insurance company that could provide me with coverage that better suited my reduced number of students and offered a reasonable rate for "extra" programs I might choose to offer on an infrequent basis. I took a careful look at tax requirements to make sure I would avoid falling into the murky waters of a "hobby" classification and thus increase the risk of an audit. I decided to have my students pay only for the lessons they would be able to take on a weekly basis, rather than purchasing lesson packages. This would eliminate a cumbersome backlog of classes to be made up if weather or illness prevented regularity. Although this did create potential for income loss, it was an important step in

Called to Change —How I Learned More by Teaching Less

By Lydia Fairchok

IF SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME A YEAR AGO that I would soon voluntarily downsize my teaching program and begin a career in another field, I would have laughed. "Me? No way!" Summer of 2014 found me six years into my full-time teaching endeavor with plans for expanding programs, procuring more horses, and keeping an eye out for a bigger facility. I was upward bound. But at the same time, deep in my soul, I was restless. Something didn't feel right. I wondered, prayed, and questioned: Was this really the direction I was supposed to go?

On a whim, I signed up for the Citizen's Academy—a 12-week community outreach program presented by my local police department. I entered it simply to experience something new, but the glimpse I had into the intriguing world of public safety had a profound effect on me. After just a few classes I became convinced that God

was directing me to be a dispatcher. But what about teaching? Horses and instruction weren't just part of me—they were my life! And yet the calling for public safety became stronger. I swallowed my fears, stepped out in faith, and started looking into what it would take to make the leap. By the time the Citizen's Academy ended,



Izzy Lawson riding Sadie. Lydia said, "I have always loved that particular picture —Izzy is learning about "opening the door to her core" and I love the concentration on her tiny face. The helmet strap is definitely fastened, by the way. Izzy has such a tiny head that what you are seeing is all of the excess from tightening (even though her helmet is an extra small!)." Photo by Michele Fairchok.

making sure that I would not be over-extended.

When would I find the time to fit everything in? When would I give time to my own continuing education? I set a firm number of hours each week I was willing to spend on instruction, including bookkeeping and arena hours. I asked students to be flexible with a series of "trial" lesson times until I found a schedule that worked well with my other obligations. I made a goal of working one-on-one

with my horses a minimum of once a week to keep them—and myself—tuned up. I made sure that I set aside funds to take a few lessons for myself, and in pursuit of the old adage "iron sharpens iron," prioritized time to ride with an experienced friend with whom I could exchange ideas and feedback.

Where would I continue to teach? Previously I had enjoyed working with local partners to reach a wider range of riders with more activities and

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resources. I had been seeking a facility that would allow me to add to my herd, but student numbers were not the only thing that would need to stay smaller. I sidelined plans for another horse and committed to making my current premises into what I needed rather than continuing to look for a different facility. And while I continued to travel to riders who had their own horses, I found it necessary to end partnerships with local horse camps, shows, and 4H programs to prevent myself from being spread too thin.

Finally, why did I want to do this? It seemed like an insignificant question at first, but the “why” was the heart of the matter. If I didn’t have a strong vision and a clear sense of what was pushing me to accomplish it, I knew I would quickly tire. The changes I was implementing meant stepping back from a lifestyle I had known and loved my entire working life. At times, I felt much more like I was losing a part of myself rather than gaining something new. The enormity of the transition was daunting. I wrote a statement of what I wanted to accomplish as an instructor—instilling strong horsemanship and life lessons in my riders—and what I wanted to accomplish as a 9-1-1 dispatcher—serving my community by providing help at critical times and supporting responders. When I became overwhelmed by the effort of creating a new “normal,” I reminded myself of both of these goals and the sense of calling I had to accomplish them equally well.

Making the Transition

Asking and answering these questions was only the beginning of the adventure. Learning a new career meant becoming a student myself all over again. The shift in perspective was refreshing, but the differences between my life as a riding instructor and as a dispatcher were day and night... literally! I traded fresh air and sunshine for the night shift in a basement facility. My ball cap was replaced by a headset. Miles and miles of walking around farms, fields, and arenas became hours and hours of monitoring six computer screens and numerous radio channels and telephone

lines. Early on I experienced the harsh reality that I was handling people at their worst moments—and not every call would end well despite my best efforts.

The similarities, however, were plentiful. I found myself drawing on skills straight from the arena such as maintaining control of my voice, projecting confidence, and taking charge of a situation. Experience with a wide range of comprehension styles and with handling rapidly evolving situations with horses helped me to quickly become comfortable with handling 9-1-1 emergencies. Calmness, communication, patience, and people skills served me well with callers, co-workers, and field personnel alike.

It took longer for me to realize the ways that dispatching benefited my lesson program. Yet as time went on I began to see that there was much to be learned from my new venture. I had always made a practice of posting the barn address in case of emergencies—but were my riders aware of it? Did my younger students know what to do if an emergency should require them to be the one calling for help? Hands-on training in pre-hospital care procedures gave me an added measure of confidence in first aid. I also developed a new eye for averting potential emergencies by learning from the sometimes improbable mishaps that led others to dial 9-1-1.

Perhaps most importantly, though, taking a step back from full-time instruction and opening myself to another career path led me to articulate what I had felt intuitively for some time: I am passionate about breaking down fear and replacing it

with confidence. Whether equipping a rider with balance and control or directing a frantic caller to administer life-saving first aid, being able to guide a person from fear to action and success is the driving force behind what I do as an instructor and as a dispatcher. “Giving up” my full-time teaching operation wasn’t a loss at all—on the contrary, I have gained more richness to pass on to my students, more awareness of who I am, and the privilege of serving my community through 9-1-1.

It’s true that at one time I would have balked at knowing where I was headed. On the other side of the transition, however—and still at the outset of a great adventure—I know that all of the challenges and obstacles were worth the end result. Where will I be a year from now? Only time will tell. The one thing I can guarantee is that I will still be learning from everything that comes my way, both inside the arena and out! ■

Lydia Fairchok is certified in Recreational Riding at Level 1, and lives and teaches with her three horses in Westfield, Indiana. She is a communications officer by night and an instructor by day, and one of her greatest challenges is maintaining a good sleep schedule! When she is not working with horses, she enjoys being active in her church and spending time with her family. Lydia prefers to travel by bike if possible and just participated in her first 55-mile “Cops Cycling for Survivors” bike ride to raise awareness and funds for families of fallen police officers.



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Is Your Teaching Becoming as Stale as Old Bread?

By Didi Arias

Illustration by Susan E. Harris



Diary Notes: Saturday

6:00 a.m. feed. Yawn. Ugh. I cannot face the thought of another work day. The only thing that makes it tolerable is the new show pony that will arrive today. He looks a good sort—that driver didn't look half bad either, hmmmm. Must make note to change into clean t-shirt before their arrival.

Grooming—Done. Will deal with those stable stains later. Tails full of straw, but the kids love picking that out. Will keep the little monsters busy and quiet for a while.

Tacking Up—Done. Note to give a “tack cleaning” class. That should get most of the grime off.

Must remember to go shopping and pick up healthier options. A can of fizz, chocolate, and potato chips are the new food group. (I must remember to not snort when I laugh.)

Groan...they're here. Car loads of them. Pigtails, pompoms, purple whips, and pink joddies...did they escape from Whoville or what? Ugh. Ugh. Ugh.

Early starts, ending in falling-into-bed-exhausted-finishes at the day's end.

Physically demanding workload.

Corner cutting.

Slipping standards.

Same subject, riders, and level.

Same instruction, same corrections, same examples.

Boring same old, same old.

Your performance report may read: “Knowledgeable but needs to improve on enthusiasm.” Even that looks boring.

IF YOU FEEL that you have turned into the stale-bread version of your former bakery-fresh self, then perhaps you are suffering from teacher B.O. (Burn Out). Burn Out, like Body Odor, is a stinky state of being. It must be a very rare individual who never experiences some inkling of slipping into the work-a-day doldrums; most of our peers, professionals from other walks of life and self-help experts have faced similar challenges in their careers. I've gathered this modest collection of useful tips that help me when I feel a B.O. slump coming on—nothing earth-shatteringly new or novel, but just a reminder of what we already know, and sometimes a reminder is all it takes. Please feel free to add your own advice to the list!

Safeguard your health: Make sure that you look after yourself first and foremost. Continued long hours and poor diet are not going to benefit anyone in the long term. You must find a way to balance a healthy lifestyle with your work. Fizzy drinks, chocolate, and potato chips are NOT a food group!

Have fun: Horsey jokes, teasers, puzzles, and games can all have a place, when safe, in the riding curriculum. Laughing never hurt anyone, so why not try it more often?


Be positive: Avoid negative or trash talk (“this horse is an idiot”) or (“you'll never learn it”). Don't bring your business or personal worries into your lesson time. Try to find positive solutions to problems, give options and support. Because of our chosen line of work, many of us have high

➤ continued on page 20



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► continued from page 17

expectations, goals, and ideals about how things should be done, and we tend to put these expectations onto ourselves. Use positive self-talk and don't be so brutal to yourself. Would you be so mean to others?

Lighten up: Robert Dover said in his talk at an ARIA Convention something like: "The world does not end or stop spinning because your horse took the wrong lead." That is just so true. We have a tendency to take ourselves way too seriously at times. Have the ability to shrug some things off, ignore the little stuff, and let things go.

Smile: Smiling must be included if I talk about "having fun," "being positive," and "lightening up." I have read that people who go on "laugh courses" practice smiling, and a starter exercise is to hold a smile for a minimum of 10 seconds. It's not as easy as it sounds, especially if you're not a naturally smiley person, like me!

Learn and share something new: No matter how good we are, we don't know everything there is to know about horses (that takes two lifetimes, they say). Make sure you keep learning and spread the knowledge throughout your teaching career. I have always held two yearly experiences very dear to my teaching soul: the annual ARIA Convention and my work on the Sunshine Tour. Both always gave me refreshing new ideas and the chance to talk with like-minded people, and I always came home with renewed enthusiasm. Think "regenerate" and "recharge."

Help another teacher: Your experience and support can be very useful for another teacher, whether by taking a learner teacher under your wing or advising a colleague on a difficult situation. Helping others feels good. Rotating classes with other teachers in your barn can give you, your students, and the other teachers a little refreshing change, beneficial to all. I was once invited to stand in for another teacher at her facility for a few days to give her some much-needed time off. This option can open up the chance of a return favor, which could give you your

get-away time, too. That reminds me, she still owes me...

Avoid routine practices: Whilst there is a certain amount of structured routine necessary for safe riding classes, you do want to prevent your lessons from becoming boring, with the same exercises taught in the same way and drilled over and over with the same corrections. You will be bored and your students will be bored—stale bread. Look for fresh ways to teach a skill, use different examples (audio/visual sessions instead of verbal explanations), set up little tests and exercises, encourage student participation and feedback, use question-and-answer sessions. The fresher you are the more creative you will become.

Have another life: The riding instructor job is not the Emergency Room: it cannot be 24/7, though at times it feels like it is. There has to be a reasonable start and finish to the day, and you need to have days off. Make it clear to your clients the hours that you are available to them, turn off the phone and the computer at a set hour of the evening and on your day(s) off. Do something for yourself and have an interest or hobby outside of horses. In my case, outside interests complement my teaching, as through them I find balance and the ability to carry on.

Remember why you wanted to be a teacher: Take a moment and make a list of all the wonderful reasons you thought that this was the job for you. This reminder alone may be enough to give you the kick that you need. Your performance report now reads: "Knowledgeable and professional, knows how to encourage good riding skills. An enthusiastic instructor with a positive attitude—much respected by students. An asset to our facility." ■

Didi Arias is a Level 3 ARIA Certified Instructor and national dressage judge and teacher, who resides in Almeria, Spain.



The Art of Teaching Beginners

By Kim Carter

THE RIDING ACADEMIES OF THE PAST are held dearly in the hearts of equestrians by name and by reputation—the riders who graduated their ranks, the books they left for us to study. All these memories live on, so why did the riding schools go away?

Teaching beginners is an art form that we're losing in the battle to sell horses, to get to the show ring faster. It's a task often relegated to the most inexperienced instructors when the old pros may be better suited to the job.

Maggy Schwab (left) and Samantha Bouvier. Maggy has been a student of Kim's for 15 years.

Almost two decades ago I left my career on a whim to take a position feeding and cleaning stalls for a farm in Landrum, South Carolina. Tucked at the base of a Blue Ridge Mountain peak, the land was sheltered from the true brunt of summer, although temperatures exceeded 100 degrees some days. I had my first taste of teaching beginner riders that summer, and though it was the most grueling job I ever had, my purpose bloomed with possibility.

As I continued in the horse industry and my skills as a teacher grew, no matter how much I loved my beginning riders there was always pressure from all corners to do more, achieve more, take on more advanced riders. I didn't have the nerve to say I enjoyed teaching beginner riders best. Continuing in the traditional route, I gained clients, leased space at larger facilities, went to shows, but I was never truly happy. The urgency to produce tangible results at an accelerated pace, to stick to an agenda, created unease in my riders and horses. Something had to be done.

Using the riding academies of the past as a model, I changed my program, moved away from showing and sales to focus entirely on lessons and the continued growth of our riding academy. We replaced our show-focused trainers with riders who were fascinated by the process of teaching.

During that time I wrote an essay for my college *alma mater* exploring how the liberal arts process was fundamental to my work as a riding instructor. The horse asks us to pull knowledge from every subject, to draw parallels, to solve problems.

Beginning riders must learn to allow their bodies to work independently and in tandem with their horses, every piece doing a different job. The work never grows old and no two riders are the same. The mind is at the root of this process as we allow the horse to show us the best way to accomplish a task. These skills grow as we advance in our work in and out of the saddle, but the foundation, the muscle memory, is instilled the moment we first sit on a horse—and that is why those initial introductions >



The joys of communication and discovery are for all ages and riding abilities.



Riders never forget the bonds they form through horses.

create the atmosphere for the most important work we do as instructors.

A couple years into our transformation into a riding academy a local pro offered me a backhanded compliment, saying, “We all know you’re the best instructor for beginners.” It was meant as a slight, but I didn’t become defensive. I finally had the confidence to say I preferred teaching beginners.

Teaching introductory lessons is a fiscally sound decision that won’t place all your client “eggs” in “one basket.” If a student leaves, there will be another ready to take his or her place. Students will, eventually, leave. You have to be okay with that. If you’ve done your job right, their passing interest turns into a potentially lucrative pool of advertising. Just because riders have moved on to another sport doesn’t mean they won’t refer their friends.

Lavish the same attention on the beginners that you do on your more seasoned riders. Your program will flourish. Delight in the moment of infectious joy that happens when a beginner rider experiences the trot on a longe for the first time. All you seasoned, sarcastic instructors out there (myself

included) take heed—that moment of full-out delight was the reason you decided to do this for a living. Allow yourself to relive that passion through your students.

The horse world seems built on a medieval labor system. Our mentors bring us along and teach us what to do, or what not to do, by example. Let’s bring our working students and apprentices into the fold and apply a teachable theory to riding that we can pass along to our next group of instructors.

When a candidate for a teaching position approaches me, I’m not looking for a skilled, impetuous, bold rider. Often the most hesitant and timid riders make the best instructors for beginners. Similarly, our school horses are well into their teens and twenties, finished with the show world and ready to enjoy life as professors. Timid riders and steady mounts are your lifeblood as a beginner instructor. Cultivate those relationships with empathy and understanding. An older horse will remain fit with hours of trot work, the occasional canter, a low jump—and this is really all most riding students want. Safe horses can be schooled by working students who might have difficulty tuning a more

complicated mount. Your pool of potential hires grows exponentially and you’re sending good teachers out into the world.

I’ve watched aggression and ego do more damage to the instructor/rider relationship over the years than any other emotions. Riding is a sport, no doubt about it, but even the best riders and horses thrive in an environment where they’re not continually pushed to their limits every time they enter the ring. This is where the beginner mindset can aid your work with more advanced riders.

We ship elementary school teachers off to college for four years or more to learn the trade of teaching. We would never say those teachers are less skilled than their high school counterparts—it’s simply a preference. The high school physics teacher must have a student who first understands basic math. We need to cultivate an environment where teaching beginners is not considered a lesser job. Own it, love it, revel in each new skill your rider understands and integrates, even if it’s as simple as a halt. Because when it comes down to it, that halt at X is pretty important.

We spend so much time at the trot and canter, it is time that we re-discover how to walk. ■

Kim Carter is the owner and head trainer at Bramblewood Stables in upstate South Carolina. A writer by trade and passion, she uses a multidisciplinary approach to guide her students toward a greater connection to their horses and the world around them.

Develop an Emergency Plan

Part 2 of 3: Prepare to care for your horses—including your students'—during disasters requiring evacuation.

By Diane Rice

Illustrations by Susan E. Harris



A S A HORSE OWNER, you've probably thought a lot about what to do to ensure your horses' safety in case of an emergency. Every geographic location will have its own set of possibilities for potential disasters, and by now you've probably narrowed down the likely scenarios for your area. Yet, as a riding instructor, have you considered how you'd safeguard any horses your students may own as well?

In the summer issue of *Riding Instructor*, we presented some emergency scenarios for you to consider and plan for:

- Who will provide what type of insurance in case of injury to horses or students
- How you'll contact parents in case of injury or other emergency
- How you can ensure that everyone on your teaching premises knows what to do in case of emergency

In this issue, we'll delve a little deeper into specifics regarding the possibility of evacuation. Although each type of emergency (severe thunderstorm, earthquake, volcanic eruption, tornado, flood, mudslide, bliz-

ard, avalanche, hurricane, fire, chemical spill, or other) will have unique requirements, a few basic procedures apply to a wide variety of situations.

Disasters are stressful and nerve-racking if you have only one or a few horses of your own, but when you're responsible for others' horses as well, the pressure to create a positive outcome for all involved can be overwhelming.

The following will help you get "your" horses to a safe place or reunite you with them if you have to turn them loose during a disaster. Be prepared (read: have the necessary supplies organized and handy)

Make sure your horses will load easily in a trailer.

by doing the following so that if you need to evacuate quickly, you'll be able to get as far from danger as possible, as quickly as possible—and have everything you need when you get there.

Naturally, to create a positive outcome for large numbers of horses in the long range, you'll want to teach your students these procedures as well.

1 Assemble two ID kits for each horse—Keep updated (close-up!) photos of each horse along with any registration papers and/or a complete description including color, markings, whorls or cowlicks, identifying scars, and any other significant identification. Also include the horse's health and travel papers (Coggins, medical history including any allergies, and its veterinarian's contact information). Make two copies. Seal each original ID kit in a plastic ziplock bag or other waterproof container and store it in a safe and accessible place (see bug-out bag below). Give one copy to the owner or his or her parent. You might also want to scan it and store it in a "cloud" server for access in case one or both hard copies aren't accessible.

2 Assemble a bug-out bag—An old backpack makes a great emergency supply kit so you can evacuate quickly. Include each horse's ID kit (see above) and some basic supplies (adjusted to meet the needs of the number of horses you're dealing with): at least one water bucket per horse; leg wraps; a couple of tarpaulins; a pair of scissors; a pocket knife; twine; and a basic tool kit including wire cutters. Also include a first aid kit. Chris Newton, DVM, of Rood and Riddle Equine Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, recommends a thermometer, bandages, duct tape, a piece or two of PVC pipe to use as a splint, vetwrap, ophthalmic ointment for eye injuries, a banamine shot, bute paste, a stethoscope, triple antibiotic wound ointment, a couple of disposable diapers to apply pressure in case of bleeding, and a recent list of each horse's normal vital signs. Keep it all handy—in your trailer,

► *continued on page 25*

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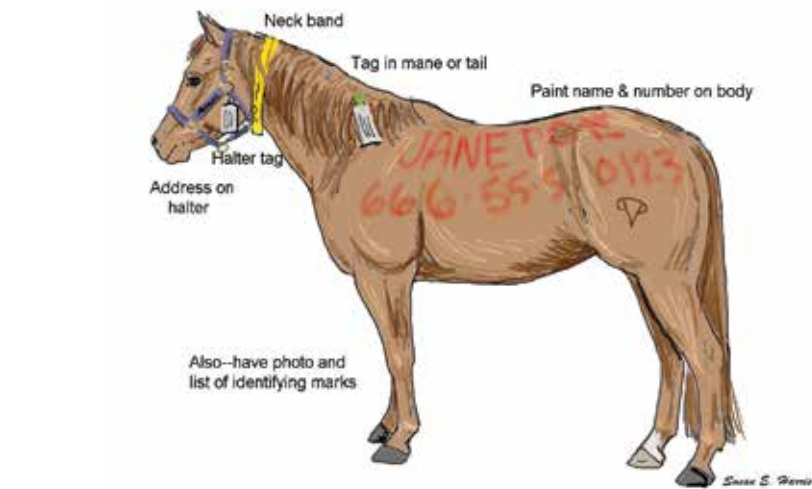
3 Keep halters and lead ropes handy—That means hanging them the same way, in the same place, every time you or your students put them up. When seconds matter, you don't want to have to fumble around in the dark or race up and down the barn aisle searching for them.

4 Take a load off—Make sure each horse loads and unloads easily; you don't want to have to leave any behind because they won't load.

5 Arrange for your ride—Make sure your truck and trailer are road-ready; regularly inspect the tires, hitch, and floor. And never let your gas tank fall below half-full. If you don't have a large enough trailer of your own, identify several people who might have extra room on theirs, and talk to them about the possibilities.

6 Know where to go—Arrange an evacuation site with friends or other horse owners. Check with your local animal shelter or emergency services officials before a disaster to determine whether they've designated emergency horse shelters. And, plan more than one route in case one is impassable.

7 Mark your horses—Regardless of whether you evacuate your horses or have to turn them loose, identify each one. Permanent



methods (microchipping, tattooing) trump temporary markings, but in a pinch, you can fasten pet ID or luggage tags to each horse's halter; use a permanent marker to write your and/or your students' names and phone numbers on their horses' halters or on tape stuck to them; write contact information on a plastic neck or leg band; or simply spray paint your name and phone number directly onto each horse. Include an alternate phone number in case your phone is inaccessible, damaged, or destroyed.

A relatively small amount of time spent preparing (and teaching your students how to plan) will not only keep you sane in trying times and keep the horses in your barn as safe as possible, it'll teach your students how to ensure the best possible outcome should they ever encounter a similar sit-

uation. It will also assure your students' parents that you're proactive and detail-oriented; and it'll make you a hero in everyone's eyes should you ever have to put your plans to work. ■

Diane Rice earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural journalism from the University of Wisconsin; then married her education with her lifelong passion for horses in editorial positions at *Appaloosa Journal*. She now freelances in writing, editing, and proofreading, and has served on American Horse Publications' board of directors. She spends her spare time gardening, reading, serving in her church, and spending time with her daughters, grandchildren, and pets.

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The Tyrant

What Kind of Inner Coach Do You Have?



The Scaremonger

By April Clay

Illustrations by Susan E. Harris

YOUR INSTRUCTOR ACTS AS A “GROUNDS-PERSON” FOR YOU, giving you feedback on your riding and helping you make adjustments. But ultimately you filter this information and make your own choices about how to act. It is your internal direction that forms your decisions. In this way, each of us could be said to possess an “inner coach.” Similar to our regular coach, this inner trainer has a style that is quite distinct, and can have positive and negative effects on learning and performance.

Look for Patterns

To get to know your inner coach better, get ready to put your detective hat on. Fortunately, your mind works in patterns. Try to watch and see what messages you give to yourself about your riding, particularly messages that are repetitive. Do you tend to tell yourself to opt out of challenges? Does your mind keep repeating “you will not be able to do this” ad nauseam? Keep a journal, watch your mind, observe how it approaches problems.

Determine Your Style

Your notes can help you assess the personality of your inner coach or director. Here are a few typical types:

1 The Tyrant This kind of manager drives you to excel, but in a negative and sometimes cruel way. If you sprained your ankle last week and your balance is a little off today on your horse, it doesn't care. It expects more from you, and without whining. Don't look for empathy here. One of the problems with this type is you don't end up

with much room for learning. The tyrant intends mostly to punish after you make a mistake, not help you figure out what you need to do differently the next time.

2 The Avoider This one doesn't like to get in trouble or be challenged by anyone, so it also doesn't challenge you. Whatever you do is okay. You don't need to set goals or evaluate yourself. Don't get frustrated or upset—those are uncomfortable emotions. It says, “Go ahead, avoid entering that class, you'll feel better.” You may feel somewhat comfortable with this type of boss, especially when it gets you out of things, but there is such a thing as being too comfortable. We all need to reach, to be challenged and yes, to learn from not-so-great experiences and not-so-pleasant emotions from time to time. We also need limits; just as in raising a child, limits are healthy.

3 The Scaremonger This one loves to



The Avider

point out all the things it thinks you can't handle. "Did you see who the judge was? Never liked your horse." "You're first in the order of go, what a disaster." By the time this one is finished with you, you're just a little freaked out. Just when you should be concentrating on your riding, it takes you away and shows you all that could go wrong. But of course this is not where your focus needs to be, it needs to be on your connection to your horse. The scare-monger ends up wasting a lot of your valuable energy.

Make Adjustments

Now that you have really gotten to know this internal trainer, you may or may not want to continue retaining its services. You may just want to fire it. If you do, what are you going to look for as a replacement? Or it may seem more prudent to put your current one on probation, get it to smarten up a little, to work in your best interest.

Whatever changes you may be considering, take a look at your individual needs first. Do you need more balance in terms of positive versus negative feedback? Do you need more compassion and patience for your feelings of fear? Maybe you require more messages about your ongoing progress. It is important to know that you can custom-design your ▶ continued on page 29

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*Source: American Farriers Journal, Jan/Feb 2015, Page 87.

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What Beginners Really Want to Learn

By Gincy Self Bucklin

Illustrations by Susan E. Harris



Photo: Deborah Lazar

FALL IS A TIME when many people decide to take up riding for the first time. Whether they continue, and—more importantly—*whether they become safe, horse-considerate, and fairly correct riders, all depends to a great extent on their early lessons.*

Unfortunately, early lessons are not always very good. Often the instructor assigned to beginner lessons is inexperienced (the equivalent of having a novice rider train a four-year-old horse), and even more often the perception of what the novice should be learning, and *really wants to learn* at the start is unrealistic.

Some instructors think that, to keep the customer happy, you have to give her “what she wants.” The student sees other riders trotting and cantering and “wants” to do the same. But if you follow the traditional pattern of putting the beginning rider in “control” of the horse, and having her trot and canter as soon as possible, she will not enjoy herself because *she will rarely succeed at anything.* Her lessons will be struggles with an unhappy horse, and she will know on some level that she is not really doing anything well.

This brings up another misconception: that beginners have to do everything clumsily and badly, because “that’s how they learn.” However, using the traditional approach, they mostly just learn to do things badly, then have to spend years trying to unlearn their early bad habits. This also is not a formula for keeping your students happy!

Here is where the experienced instructor can make all the difference. A good instructor can present information in small but interesting bites, so that the student fully



understands each new concept and can easily relate it to what she already knows. The good instructor can determine what the student needs to learn at each level to prepare her for the next. She can also explain to the beginning student—or the parents—the necessity for proceeding slowly—and as correctly as possible—at first. Safety is the main reason, but for the novice who wants to ride because she really cares about horses, riding badly has a still more undesirable effect: *it is not fair to the horse!* (Sadly there is often little understanding or appreciation by either the student or the instructor of the effect of clumsy riding on the horse.) So the novice student finds that taking time to learn in depth and detail, and being aware of how the horse responds to what she is doing, all contribute to a positive experience that will make her want to continue.

Now, what should you be teaching in those first lessons? How do you create a foundation for a safe, confident, and happy riding career? First you must help the novice rider overcome her instinctive fears.

Your student’s fears may not be obvious even to her, but they are still present; and she cannot have a happy riding experience until she has overcome them with your help. And fears cannot be overcome by saying, “Get over it.” Fear originates in the reflex brain, and can only be changed by changing, carefully and slowly, how the body reacts.

Fear arises from three causes: fear of **the horse himself**; fear of **being on the horse**; and fear of **failure**, which is caused by being overfaced, that is, *too much information to process, combined with too many challenges.* The in-depth approach I’ve just described should address this third kind of fear. The student is never asked to attempt anything beyond her present ability, so her failures will be much rarer.

Fear of the horse himself. Those of us who grew up with horses often fail to recognize this, but to the novice, the horse is a very large animal who kicks and bites. Think how you would feel about going into a stall with a tame bear!



Starting to address this kind of fear brings us to the first of the true “basics”: how to develop a good relationship with the horse. This means **mutual trust and respect**, which we get, not by *demanding* them, but by giving them. As a teacher you give your beginner a quiet horse whom she will find easy to trust, which gets her past her initial fear of the horse. Then you teach her how to respect him by *considering his needs* in the way she handles him, *not* by trying to “be the boss,” which only creates resentment, and which she is certainly not



prepared to do anyway. *By showing him understanding and courtesy, she will earn his respect. You also **don't ask her to control him on the ground** until they have developed some mutual trust, which means *he must be tied or held for her, not be loose in the stall* (remember that bear!).*

Besides being considerate of the horse on the ground, the beginning rider needs to be even more considerate of him when she is on his back. *Long experience has taught me that there is no way a rider can correctly use **any aids, or even the stirrups**, until she can **sit comfortably and correctly on the horse**. Asking for these skills early on simply results in more bad habits to correct later.*

So the second basic is to develop a correct seat. And this brings us back to fear, this time the fear of being on the horse. This is *the main obstacle to a correct seat because it causes tension.*

Fear of being on the horse is not so much fear of the horse or of movement. Rather, it is similar to the fear we get when we climb trees. Going up is easy, but getting down safely feels scary and difficult. The simple solution for this, which I have used with great success, is to *teach the student to dismount* in the very first lesson. This is easiest using a mounting block and a naked horse, because there is nothing to get caught on. Like the introductory ground work, this lesson is done very thoroughly, and repeated until the student feels comfortable mounting and dismounting.

The lessons proceed with introducing the student to the correct, relaxed seat and balance. The student should continue on a bareback pad—with a grounding strap and a hand leader—until she is sitting comfortably at the walk and jog. She will then find the transition to riding in the saddle and using her aids (the third basic), if taught with the same attention to detail, easy and satisfying. And so will you. ■

Books by Gincy Self Bucklin

The Gentle Art of Horseback Riding; What Your Horse Wants You to Know; How Your Horse Wants You to Ride; More How Your Horse Wants You to Ride

Gincy's website <http://whatyourhorsewants.com>

Gincy's e-group ridingwithconfidence@groups.yahoo.com

► *continued from page 27...* inner coach to reflect your personal needs. It may be helpful to flesh out your idea of what type of inner director would suit your needs best, similar to what you did for your "negative" boss. What does it look like? Sound like? Draw a picture or write out the attributes and attitudes you think would best work for you. And now and then, don't forget to review its contract and work performance! ■

April Clay is a Calgary-based psychologist and a former competitive rider. She specializes in sport psychology services for riders at www.ridingoutofyourmind.com. She offers both individual consultation and group services, clinics, and online courses (www.outofyourmindcourses.com). She has been a featured speaker at such events as Equine Affaire and EqWest. April is a regular contributor to numerous publications both locally and abroad. You can reach her at april@ridingoutofyourmind.com.

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Risk-taking Riders

By Jessica Jahiel, Ph.D.

Illustrations by Susan E. Harris



I have several students who think that they can't get hurt, and that they are too good riders to have to wear helmets. They are teenagers. They have to wear helmets during lessons, but as soon as the lessons are over I see them racing around on their horses (we all board at the same barn) with their hair blowing in the wind. I'm sure they think it's very romantic but it scares me. They are nice girls, polite, listen pretty well in lessons, but they just laugh off my advice to wear helmets whenever they ride. I have asked the barn owner to make a helmet rule, but he just laughs and says "You wear a helmet, Marcie wears a baseball cap, Dana wears a bandana; everybody has their own way of doing things." Boots aren't a rule, either. Since I give these girls lessons, I feel sort of responsible for them. This is stressing me out. My next plan is to tackle their parents, and I'm afraid they'll just say that lesson rules don't apply when the girls aren't in lessons. The parents are motorcycle riders, and they have to wear helmets or the cops will stop them. I guess that's the only reason they wear them, and I guess they figure the girls don't ride on pavement so they don't need to protect their heads or feet. Ack! How can I get across to them just how important this is?

REALISTICALLY, you may have to accept that there's nothing you can do, since they follow your rules when they're in lessons and the barn owner doesn't set safety rules for the facility. If you think that you have a chance to influence the girls' parents, perhaps you can persuade them to at least think about the risks of riding without proper protective clothing. Occasionally I encounter parents who truly cannot believe, or even imagine, that a child could possibly

be harmed by that sweet, large animal that so clearly adores the child. Some such parents are reachable; others taught themselves to ride "back in the day" by jumping off the farm fence onto their own or the neighbors' horses, fell off a few times, didn't break anything, and truly believe that their children are safe without helmets and boots. Still, you may have a chance to make your point. I've found that if explaining in "horse talk" isn't effective, I can sometimes get a point across by relating

a safety issue to "car talk" or "truck talk" (seatbelts, air bags)—or "motorcycle talk."

In my college years when I too was—ahem—a teenager who couldn't get hurt, I dated a couple of fellows who were very devoted to their motorcycles. They were close friends, and at one time there had been three of them who rode together. They all took silly risks until the third rider had a bad wreck, suffered major brain damage, and couldn't ride again. After that, his two friends had revised their riding style considerably, signed up for a class for more serious riders, and learned all sorts of useful things that would help them enjoy their sport more safely. After that, they practiced and preached safety. They taught me a few things that I could easily apply to horseback riding! Here are two ways to express one concept I've found very useful to cite when I'm trying to persuade a motorcycle rider that horseback riding can be dangerous too. They're really just two different ways of saying the same thing—which is also essentially the same thing that you said in your letter above!

Dress for the crash, not for the ride

Part of motorcycle riding safety involves the operator/rider being attentive, aware, and taking sensible precautions. You've probably seen motorcycles being ridden by adults in flip-flops, shorts, and short-sleeved shirts, with only a bandana for headgear. EMTs refer to those riders as "organ donors" and wise motorcycle riders simply shake their heads and say, "they're riding stupid." It's a bad way to lose a friend. I'm sure it would be a terrible way to lose a child.

ATGATT—All The Gear, All The Time

I had heard this many times before I understood it; my assumption had been that "gear" must mean saddlebags. I was wrong. It meant, and still means, proper protective clothing: Helmet, boots, gloves, pants, and a jacket. (Sounds a lot like our sport, doesn't it?) At that time, we didn't yet enjoy the



benefit of today's lightweight helmets or the new technical fabrics that are lightweight, breathable, and yet extremely strong.

As for your responsibility for the girls' safety, you must remember that you are not the boss of them, or of their parents. You can offer advice until you are blue in the face, but you can insist on proper safety precautions only during lessons, which is, *not* coincidentally, the only time you are actually in charge. In your lessons, you can stress the importance of correct equipment and clothing. Outside your lessons, they don't have to follow your advice. If neither the girls nor their parents are willing to listen, there really isn't anything more you can do. I know it's tempting to try to get more and more involved, but *your students' behavior and wardrobe outside of lessons are simply not under your control*. All you can do is hope that the girls will eventually become inspired to take your advice or follow your example. I hope that the loss of a friend won't be that catalyst.

I sympathize with your frustration—I've always made helmet-wearing a rule, because I decided many years ago that there would be no preventable accidents on my watch. The key words are "on my watch," because when I'm away from home, at no other time do I have the power to say "Put on your helmet!" Keep those sound principles intact, though, because someday you may be teaching at a barn of your own, and then you will be able to *require* the use of helmets and boots by everyone riding on your property—*every time, every ride.* ■

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Our State Has No Equine Activity Liability Act—Are We Worse Off?

By Julie I. Fershtman, Attorney at Law



FORTY-SIX STATES across the United States have some form of an equine activity liability act. Are people in the four states without such a law—California, Maryland, Nevada, and New York—worse off? If two recent California cases are any indication, courts have shown a willingness to dismiss lawsuits that involve people who died in horse-related activities, even without an equine activity liability act.

Wrongful Death Lawsuit Involving California Teenager

In a 2015 court ruling, the California Court of Appeals found that a horse trainer/riding instructor's release of liability, signed by a mother as well as her teenage daughter, was enforceable. Accordingly, the court held that a lawsuit against the trainer (also referred to as a "coach") arising from the teenager's death, was properly dismissed.

The teenager at issue in the lawsuit was a highly experienced rider who was competing in a three-day eventing competition in California. Minutes before the fatal incident occurred, the teenager rode her own horse in the cross-country portion but had been excused because of her horse refusing too many jumps. In an apparent effort to school her horse before leaving the course, however, she steered her horse toward another jump. The horse fell on her, and she later died.

The parents sued the "coach," but they lost at trial. They appealed. At issue was whether the release barred the litigation. The California Court of Appeals found that it did. It also ruled that the parents' claims of "gross negligence," which could potentially override the release, were likewise dismissed because of insufficient evidence.

The case was *Eriksson v. Nunnink*, 233 Cal. App. 4th 708 (Cal. App. 1/27/2015).

Wrongful Death Lawsuit Involving Farrier

A farrier with 45 years of experience was hired to trim a horse's hooves. While working in an outdoor corral, the horse knocked him down, and the farrier's head hit a rock. He died from his injuries, and his estate sued the horse owner who also owned the property. The farrier's estate claimed that the horse owner negligently failed to secure and restrain other horses that were in the corral where the farrier was working, failed to remove rocks from the corral, failed to warn that the corral was rocky, and failed to warn that the horse had a "volatile disposition and temperament."

Affirming the trial court's dismissal of the case, the California Court of Appeals found that the legal doctrine of "primary assumption of the risk" applied in a variety of occupational settings, including veterinarians, but California apparently had no comparable precedent involving farriers who were hurt on the job and sued horse owners. The court noted that the assumption of risk doctrine encompassed "any physical activity that involves an element of risk or danger as an integral part of the activity." Accordingly, the court extended "assumption of risk" to the farrier, reason-

ing that "the job of a farrier is an inherently dangerous occupation as much, or more so, than that of a veterinarian."

The estate also argued that the horse owner was liable for failing to secure or restrain horses for the farrier or help him do his job, but the court disagreed. It found that securing the horses was an essential part of the *farrier's* job, and the horse owner had no duty to secure the horses once he relinquished care and control to the farrier.

Finally, the estate argued that the horse owner should be liable because the presence of rocks in the corral posed a hazard to the farrier. Dismissing this, the court explained that the rocks, to the extent that they were dangerous, were obvious, and California law prevented recovery "where the danger was obvious." It found that the farrier could assess the risks and the safety of working with horses in that environment.

The case was *Barrett v. Leech*, 2014 Cal. App. Unpub. LEXIS 5185, 2014 WL 3659366 (Cal. App. 4th Dist. July 24, 2014), an unpublished case.

Conclusion

Although every lawsuit's success or failure depends on its facts and applicable law, these two recent cases show that courts in California, one of four states without some form of an equine activity liability act, will consider dismissing litigation based on a release or principles of "assumption of risk." ■

This article does not constitute legal advice. When questions arise based on specific situations, direct them to a knowledgeable attorney.

About the Author

Julie Fershtman is one of the nation's most experienced equine law practitioners. A Shareholder with the firm Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC, based in Michigan, she has successfully tried equine cases before juries in four states. She has also drafted hundreds of equine industry contracts and is a Fellow of the American College of Equine Attorneys. She has spoken on equine law in 29 states. For more information, please visit www.fershtmanlaw.com, www.equinelaw.net, and www.equinelawblog.com.

Tips for Riding Instructors for a More Efficient Workday

By Doug Emerson, *The Profitable Horseman*



AS YOU KNOW VERY WELL, your workday as a riding instructor is clock driven, with little room for flexibility. Lessons are scheduled, students arrive, you teach, they finish, and the next students arrive. Although a physician's day is filled with appointments, too, patients are more accepting of being delayed for their time with the doctor. Instructors don't enjoy the same kind of understanding from their customers. Can you imagine being an hour behind schedule with a full waiting room for students and horses anxious to begin their lessons?

Having each workday programmed for earning money through riding lessons is an ideal way to make a living. However, it comes with the disadvantage of little time flexibility for doing other things important for business and your personal life.

Although most riding instructors start their days consistently at the same time each morning, some have difficulty committing to a reasonable quitting time because of the need to do everything else not done while giving lessons. In contrast, workers in the nine-to-five world know when it is quitting time by the clock and by the exit of their co-workers from the business. Quitting time is clear for switching from work mode to non-work mode.

In contrast, the professional horseman often defines the end of the workday as "when everything is done." Although horse care, including feeding, is a must-do each day, other things that are not must-do, but instead should-do, can prolong the workday well beyond a normal quitting time and create chronic exhaustion.

Granted, long days are necessary at certain times, but not all times. As one way to finish your workday at a normal quitting time, try adopting the "I've got a plane to catch" attitude. You already know when faced with the departure time of air travel how you can adjust, shorten, and expe-

dite to board the flight on time. Now you can think "I've got a plane to catch" during your regular workday to help get more done in your non-lesson hours using the same techniques.

Here are tips to help increase your work efficiency:

- Plan your day the night before. It helps the mind with a running start in the morning. It's simple and eliminates planning in the morning as you fight early morning brain fog.
- The Two Minute Rule: "If the next action can be done in two minutes or less, do it when you first pick the item up," from *Getting Things Done*, (Allen, 2001, p. 131). The two minute rule will save you substantial time when you put it to work. It eliminates the refocusing required when saving a task for later. David Allen's book is one of the best books I've read on organizing for productivity. You'll also benefit from reading *The Checklist Manifesto*, (Gawande, 2009), a quick read demonstrating the superb results from using simple checklists in business.
- If you are a list maker, Evernote, a free software, is easily downloaded to your computer and your smartphone as an app. Entries on your computer and smartphone are always synced as your information is stored in the cloud. I use

it daily and did I say the basic version is free? You can't afford not to give it a try.

- Set reminders on your smartphone. The timer or alarm clock mode can be very helpful for staying on schedule.
- Video record your student's lesson. Seeing is believing. There are three primary types of learners: visual, auditory, or tactile (hands-on). Most learners are visual; 65% some sources say. But a riding lesson is predominantly auditory and tactile. The student hears your instructions and feels her positions on the horse, but beyond a chance, quick glance in a dressage mirror, does not see herself except in her mind's false eye. After the video is reviewed the quick response is often "Now I get it!"
- Use 3 by 5 index cards for taking notes during the day. They are cheap and fit conveniently in a pocket. Or, use the notes function on your smartphone. However, hand writing the note will give you better retention, many studies report.
- Take photos of: serial numbers, model numbers or parts that need replacing, tack for sale, building repairs to be made, documents, forms, fliers. Mailing, scanning, and faxing are a waste of time when you can photograph and text or email. The possibilities for saving time with photos and videos are endless. Develop your discipline of taking a photo to help communicate.
- Use the voice record function on your smartphone to capture ideas and notes to yourself. Chances are good you already talk to yourself, dictating to your phone should be a snap once you get over the initial awkwardness of it.

Use these tips to get more done in less time. Use your time savings to finish your work at a respectable quitting time and enjoy your after-work hours. ■

About the Author

Doug Emerson, the Profitable Horseman, consults, writes, and speaks about the business half of the horse business. He publishes a free electronic newsletter about making money with horses. Visit www.ProfitableHorseman.com to subscribe and find more articles like this one.

... in which Cameo Miller stirs her thoughts and ideas to see what rises to the top.



Find Your Niche

By Cameo Miller

Illustration by Bethany Caskey

MOST OF US do several or many different things within the equine industry to survive financially. We own our own stables, we muck stalls and bale hay, we teach several different disciplines, we run camps or summer programs. We have to wear a lot of hats. Many of us are still trying to think of more ways to expand our operations. So I'd like to help you think "outside the box" in this column.

Many equine-related options don't involve actually teaching. This list is endless: marketing, publishing, or writing the next book—scholarly or children's, equine insurance, photography, feed supplier, tack repair, blanket repair, equine-themed pottery or jewelry. Are you into gardening? Could you help area horse people plant beneficial plants or warn them of potentially dangerous or toxic plants near horse areas? I just saw an ad for stick on-peel off bling for hooves—now that's in the "I wish I'd thought of it" category.

There is a plethora of specialty programs popping up, from therapy for an expanding range of disorders/issues/problems to a myriad of different ways of dealing with the same for our equine counterparts. Although just being involved (as opposed to being the director) in some of the programs is usually not paid, it does get you noticed, and each of those riders has family and friends.

What are your strengths, what are you really good at—children, adults, people, horses, researching and details, coming up with new and creative solutions, techy stuff? How could you combine things you are already good at in ways you may not have thought of before? What are your other interests or proficiencies? How could you intertwine those with the equine world? Alternative therapies and herbalism are gaining in popularity, but their uses in humans and animals differ. Music can be used for kuns in dressage, or as a therapy for horses or riders. Do you sew—can you make specialty items for the horse or rider, or repair favorite items they already have? Do you have one of those embroidery machines that can transfer an image from a picture—a little picture of your horse's head on the back corner of his saddle blanket would be a special gift in the right situation. Do you have electrical skills—trailer owners always need help with the wiring. Have some awesome entrepreneurial skills? Could you help others get their ideas developed enough to get them going in the right direction?

Maybe you are one of the many people who *do* have great techy skills. What can

you do with those? Not just designing web-sites, what about linking services—those looking for something with those who have it to sell? How about an index of the horse-related videos on YouTube? Maybe some kind of "go-to" service to help non-techies find the right sites? As you can probably tell, I am *not* one of those techy literate people. Which means you should be able to come up with a lot better ideas in this area than I can.

What are your weaknesses? Be honest with yourself. The column this time isn't about improving your skills, but about using what you are already really good at in new ways. Maybe you need to quit trying to batter against the difficult stuff and flow with the easy stuff instead.

Some ideas may result in you simply being helpful to those around you. But, if you allow yourself to think outside the box, it could develop into a whole new career path, doing something no one else has done or has not done as well. And it would be something that you would enjoy, because you wouldn't already be this good at it if you didn't. Set your mind free to dream and imagine—then figure out how to start making it happen. ■

Cameo Miller is a Masters-level clinical psychologist and a Level IV ARIA Certified Instructor based in Michigan. She is a member of the ARIA Evaluation Panel and National Riding Instructors Convention Staff.



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