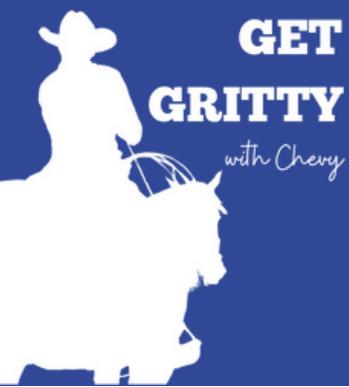


CONFIDENT & COMPETITIVE COWGIRL



Mental Skills for Cowgirls that want to Get Gritty, Face their Fears, Live their Dreams and Be Confident in the Competition Arena.

WEEK 2: BUILDING A POSITIVE FOUNDATION

‘Mental toughness is many things and rather difficult to explain. Its qualities are sacrifice and self-denial. Also, most importantly, it is combined with a perfectly disciplined will that refuses to give in. It’s a state of mind – you could call it character in action.’

– Vince Lombardi



CONFIDENCE VS COMPETENCE

Our mindset about confidence, or how we think about Confidence, is important. First, I find that many riders confuse confidence and competence. While we need to be both confident and competent to be successful with our horses, they are not the same thing.

Confidence is belief in yourself, belief in your horse, and the willingness to take action and try.

Competence is having the knowledge, skills and abilities to do something.

CONFIDENCE VS COMPETENCE

You can have confidence without competence. I'm sure you've all seen a beginner or a kid be very confident with a horse and go out and try something new that they've never done before. Sometimes that confidence works out great, and that beginner is able to accomplish that task. Sometimes it doesn't work out so great.

You can also have competence without confidence. After my first son was born, I lost confidence with my horses. Before I had kids, I was a horse trainer, and had trained mustangs for mustang makeover competitions. I had the competence, the knowledge, skills, and abilities. What was lacking was the confidence, the belief in myself and the willingness to try.

It is normal for us to move through different phases as we build our confidence and competence. And ultimately, we need both to be successful. When we feel competent, that we have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do something, we are much more likely to believe in ourselves and our horse. When we are confident and have willingness to try new things, then we can expand and grow in knowledge, skills, and abilities, and we will be more competent.

ACTIONS OF CONFIDENCE & RIDING IN YOUR GRIT ZONE

*"Actions of Confidence come before
Feelings of Confidence."*

-Dr. Russ Harris, The Confidence Gap



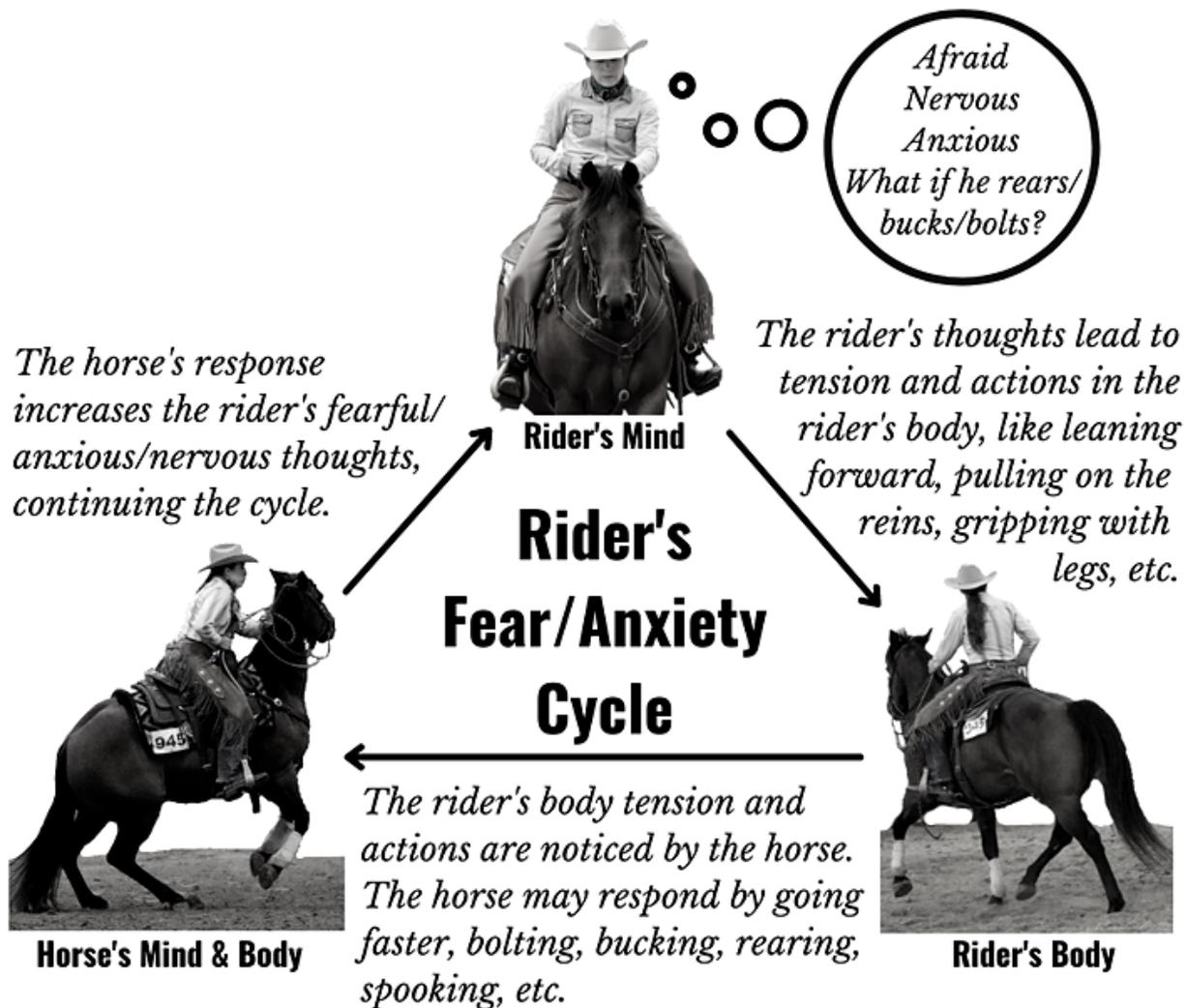
BE CONFIDENT FOR YOUR HORSE

Horses are very sensitive flight animals. As herd animals, if one of the herd is fearful, the others pick up on it and become fearful too. And they react by running away and asking questions later!

So when a rider starts experiencing thoughts of fear, anxiety, nervousness and worry, these thoughts quickly affect your body. These thoughts trigger your fight-flight-freeze response, causing your heart beat to quicken, your breathing to become fast and shallow, your muscles to get tense, your posture to change, etc. Your horse notices this change, and it can trigger their fight-flight-freeze response. When your horse's fight-flight-freeze response is triggered, it can result in dangerous behaviors like bucking, bolting, spooking, kicking, etc.

To be a confident cowgirl requires a variety of knowledge, skills and abilities, including the mental skills to manage your emotions in the saddle, the horse sense to read your horse and assess the situation, and the riding skills to safely lead your equine partner.

THE RIDER'S FEAR/ANXIETY CYCLE



Photos by Changing Winds Photography

We cannot get rid of fear or negative thoughts. However, we can replace them with positive, productive thoughts and actions instead, breaking the fear/anxiety cycle.

WHAT ZONE ARE YOU RIDING IN?

And here lies the confidence conundrum.

If we need to take actions of confidence before we feel confident to become confident, yet our horses can sense if we are not authentically confident, how can we build our confidence?

We need to be like Goldilocks and assess if the situation is Too Hot, Too Cold, or Just Right.

Too Hot-This is the Danger Zone. This is where you don't feel safe, where the demands of the situation are beyond your skills/abilities, or beyond your horse's skills/abilities. Going into the Danger Zone will greatly decrease your confidence level at best, and at worst, you and your horse could get hurt.

Too Cold-This is the Comfort Zone, or the "stuck zone". This is where you are comfortable, but you are not building your confidence, you are not making any progress towards your horsemanship goals/dreams. You are stuck.

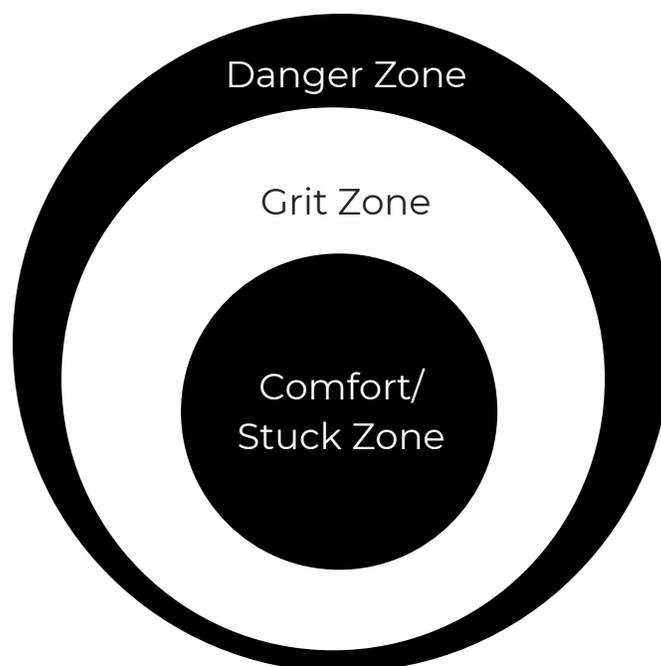
Just Right-This is the GRIT ZONE.

THE GRIT ZONE

What is the GRIT Zone?

The GRIT zone is the in between zone, outside of your comfort/stuck zone, but not into the danger zone. In the GRIT Zone you are learning, growing, taking action, and trying new things. When you are in the GRIT Zone you are making progress towards your goals. You are building your skills and confidence.

Only you can determine what Zone you are in. As you are working with your horse, occasionally pause and ask yourself, "What zone am I in right now?"



OSCILLATING ZONES

When you are in the Grit Zone, it takes a lot of focus and effort. As such, you cannot always be in the Grit Zone-you would burn yourself out.

When you are practicing it works to oscillate between your Comfort Zone and Grit Zone. Work on something that requires your focus for a bit, then return to something you are comfortable with, and repeat.

When you compete, there are some events when you will be in the Grit Zone the entire time you are in the show pen. In other events, there may be parts of your competition where you oscillate between your Grit Zone and Comfort Zone.

If you find yourself and your horse often in the Comfort Zone when competing, it can be a sign that you are ready to step up a level.

If you find yourself and your horse nearing the Danger Zone when competing, it could be a sign that you aren't quite ready to compete at that level yet.

RIDER ZONE/HORSE ZONE

Ideally as a rider, when you are learning new skills or starting to compete, when you are working in the Grit Zone, you will be matched with a horse that has been there, done that, and is working in the Comfort Zone.

If the horse is learning new skills and working in the Grit Zone, ideally their rider will have been there, there that, and is working in the Comfort Zone.

As both horse and rider gain experience, confidence and trust in each other as a team, it is possible for them to be in the Grit Zone together without crossing into the Danger Zone.

FOCUS

Focus. Concentration. Attention. As riders, it is important that we are focused on our horses and our riding-after all, we are working with a flight animal that is ten times our size! A lapse in concentration, or paying attention to distractions instead of your horse could be the difference between a successful, fun, winning ride and a potentially dangerous situation.

Being able to control your focus is a key mental skill. When you can concentrate on what is important, so you can be safe and successful with your horse!

Common Focus Errors:

- Focusing on things you can't control
- Focusing on the outcome instead of the process
- Wondering what other people might be thinking about your performance
- Comparing yourself and your horse to others
- Overthinking instead of doing
- Worrying about what might happen, worst case scenarios
- Thinking about past mistakes

THE 4 P'S OF FOCUS

When you are preparing to compete and while you are competing, your focus should be on the four P's:

1. Positive
2. Process
3. Present
4. Progress

Positive: Is your focus on the positive things that will help you and your horse perform at your best?

Process: Is your focus on the actions you need to take to prepare or what you need to do in the show pen? (Hint-go back to your Competition Goal Setting sheet and look at the Process Goals you set.)

Present: Is your focus on the right here, right now? Focusing on the mistake you made in the warm up or what might happen later won't help you .

Progress: Is your focus on your own progress? It is common to compare yourself and your horse to others. What other riders and horses do is outside of your circle of control. Focus on yourself, your horse, and your own progress.

THINK BETTER TO RIDE BETTER

We all have voices in our heads. The key is to reprogram them to say the right things!

Our default is to think negatively. We all have ANTs, or Automatic Negative Thoughts. ANTs happen without us choosing them, and most of the time they happen without us even noticing

Our subconscious mind is listening to our thoughts, and works to make what we think into reality. So when we have negative self-talk, or lots of ANTs, we are actually programming ourselves to fail. If we tell ourselves "I'll never be able to compete in that class, I can't lope that fast, I'd just fall off!" our subconscious takes note of these messages and works to make it happen-we will never get any better, we will stay nervous, and we might even fall off! This is the Law of Attraction, or the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy at work!

COMMON ANTS

Common ANTs are thoughts like:

Highlighting the Negative: For example, focusing on only the single constructively critical comment during a lesson, and ignoring the 5 comments about areas where you and your horse have improved.

Labeling: For example, when we make a mistake we attach a label to ourselves, like when we think, "I'm a terrible rider, I'm never going to get this."

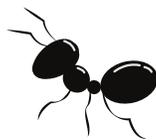
Shoulding on Yourself: Anytime we use the word "should" we are basically guilt tripping ourselves, which are not motivating to actually taking the action we should be taking!

Blaming: This ANT is the most dangerous, as it makes us feel powerless to change the situation. When we blame (especially if we are having blaming ANTs about our horse), we rarely take action to fix the situation.

SQUASHING ANTS

So now you know about Automatic Negative Thoughts, the next step is to Squash them!
Here's how:

- First, you need to be aware of your ANTs. This requires paying attention to your internal dialogue and what you are saying to yourself.
- If you have an automatic negative thought, label it. Say to yourself, hey look, there's an ANT! Recognize that ANTs are just thoughts. Just because you have a thought doesn't mean it is true, and you don't have to believe it.
- Challenge the ANT-is it true? Do you have any evidence that it isn't true?
- Squash the ANT by reframing it and replacing it with a positive affirmation.



SQUASHING ANTS

Here's an example:

ANT: "I am a terrible rider. I am never going to be able to learn how to sit balanced and keep my horse collected and under control at the canter."

- I notice that I just had an ANT.
- Label the ANT. "Hey look! An ANT!"
- Challenge the ANT. "I used to think the same thing about the sitting trot, and look now, I can sit the trot balanced and keep my horse in control and at the speed I want in the trot. It takes time to learn, and if I can learn it at the trot, I can learn it at the canter too."
- Squash the ANT. "I can learn how to sit balanced at the canter. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and be a better rider for my horse. I am so blessed to be able to ride and spend time with my horse!"

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS & SELF TALK

Positive affirmations are a common form of positive self-talk and are an effective way to give instructions to your subconscious. Also, by keeping your self-talk positive, you keep your thoughts on the positive. When your thoughts are positive, your emotions are more likely to be positive too. And when your mind is positive, your body is positive, which means your horse will also be positive. And it all starts with positive affirmations!

TIPS FOR CREATING POWERFUL POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

1) The subconscious mind doesn't understand "Don't." Your self-talk needs to be about what you want, not what you don't want. The subconscious mind works in pictures, and there is no picture for "not". So when you say, "I don't want to fall off my horse today!" the subconscious mind hears "I want to fall off my horse today!"

2) The subconscious mind doesn't know the difference between what is fact and what is fiction. All it does is compare your self-talk to what you are currently experiencing. So if your self-talk is "I am a secure and balanced rider," and you are not a secure and balanced rider yet, then your subconscious will go to work to make it happen.

3) Act "as if" and word your self-talk in the present tense. To make your self-talk more powerful word it as if you already have the qualities or skills you desire. For example, "I am calm and focused in the show ring," instead of "I will be calm and focused when I show my horse next weekend."

4) It will take time to "delete" prior programming. If the subconscious mind has been previously programmed with negative thoughts, it will take time to replace those negative instructions with positive ones.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Here are some sample positive affirmations to get you started.

- I ride in the grit zone so I can improve as a rider.
- I am patient and kind to myself and my horse.
- I am enough. I am worthy of success. I succeed with practice, determination, effort, and grit!
- I choose to see obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow.
- All things are difficult before they are easy. Bring it on!
- I am inspired by the success of other riders. If they can achieve it with their horse, it is proof that it is possible, and that I can do it too!

MY POSITIVE POWERFUL AFFIRMATION

Create your own positive, powerful affirmation:

Once you've created your own positive affirmation, use it! Repeat it daily, by saying it out loud to yourself. Post it places where you will see it regularly, to remind yourself to say it! I write my positive affirmations down on index cards or post it notes. Then I stick them where I see them daily, I put one on my mirror, on a sticky note that's stuck to the side of my computer screen, on an index card in my grooming tote, I've even put them in the visor of my truck. Remember, it takes time to "delete" prior negative programming and replace those past negative instructions with positive ones!