

# get Gritty

A MENTAL TOUGHNESS PROGRAM  
FOR PERFORMANCE HORSE RIDERS



CREATE  
CONFIDENCE  
AND  
CALM  
WITH  
PRE-SHOW  
MENTAL  
SKILLS



## This workbook is for you if:

- You feel anxious, nervous, or distracted at shows
- You over analyze your performance, over-school your horse, or worry too much about being perfect
- You ride better at home than you do at shows
- You feel pressured to win

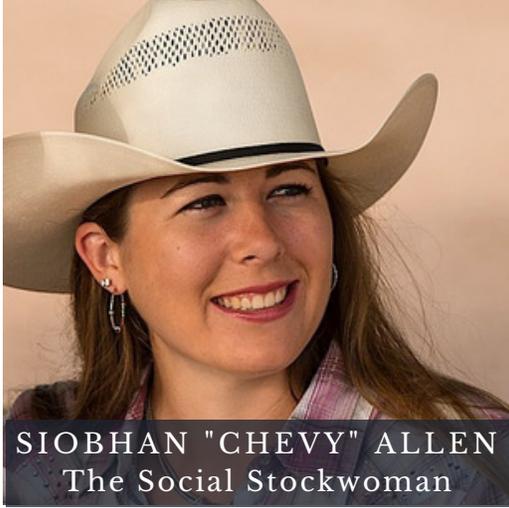
*Welcome!*

*Thank you for including me in your horsemanship journey! I am so excited that you have joined Get Gritty!*

If this is you, then you are in the right place! This program will help you develop the mental skills you need to be confident in the show pen and enjoy your horse.

Let's Get Gritty!

“Somewhere behind the rider you’ve become,  
the trainers who have pushed you,  
the people who believed in you,  
the long hours of schooling,  
the accomplishments you’ve made,  
the ribbons you didn’t win,  
the falls you’ve taken,  
the tears you’ve cried,  
the broken bones,  
the crushed confidence,  
and the horses you’ve given your heart to—  
is a child who fell in love with the sport and never looked back.”  
-Unknown



SIOBHAN "CHEVY" ALLEN  
The Social Stockwoman

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As a lifelong horsewoman, (and also Hereford beef cattle seed stock breeder, farm wife, and Mama to two little cowboys), I understand that horsemanship isn't just a hobby. It is a lifestyle!

And sometimes, that lifestyle can be stressful and overwhelming. That is why I studied to become a Life Coach so that I could be a helping hand to guide you along your horsemanship journey. As a Certified Master Life Coach, my coursework included studies in Life Purpose Coaching, Happiness Coaching, and Goal-Success Coaching.

I also have a passion for western performance horse competition, and a particular interest in how improving your mental skills and mindset can lead to better performance. I have studied sports psychology, neuroscience, neuro-linguistic programming, and how creating specific pre-show routines can help you ease show-pen nerves and be a more confident competitor. Basically, you need to train your brain to perform too!

When combined together, my coaching philosophy is a mix of passion, purpose, practice and perseverance, which when you have all of these traits, you have "grit" and gritty riders are successful.

So if horses are more than a hobby to you, and you are looking to reach the next level on your horsemanship journey, you've found the right coach.

Let's get gritty!

~Chevy



## WHY SHOULD RIDERS FOCUS ON MENTAL SKILLS?

Mental Skills are essential for performance horse competitors to boost confidence and focus.

Mental Skills work because your brain doesn't know the difference between what is real, and what is imagined. When you use mental preparation and mental skills to imagine doing an activity, the parts of your brain that control the physical aspects of that activity are activated. By practicing mental skills, you are training the parts of your brain that you need to use in the show pen, solidifying those neuro-pathways, so that your performance can be more instinctive. It is like building muscle memory for your brain.

Are you ready to be more mentally prepared for the show pen? Let's get started making a detailed mental preparation plan specific to you and your horse.



## STEP 1: TRANSFORM YOUR COMPETITION EXPECTATIONS INTO ACHIEVABLE ACTION GOALS

What expectations do you have on show day? Are they realistic? By recognizing your expectations, evaluating them, and transforming them into achievable action goals, you shift your focus from the outcome of the show-which causes anxiety and fear-to the action goals that you need to be focused on to perform at your best in the show pen.

# Identify Your Expectations

What expectations do you have for yourself and your horse on show day?

Your expectations for your performance:

Your expectations for your horse's performance:

What you believe others (trainers, friends, family, sponsors, clients) expect of your performance:

Other expectations:

# Evaluate and Transform Your Expectations

Look over your list of expectations on the previous page. Are they realistic? If you are expecting a perfect performance from yourself, that your horse will perfectly perform EVERY maneuver, then you are setting yourself up for failure. Also, by filling your self-talk prior to entering the show pen, and as you are in the show pen, with these perfect expectations, you will feel anxious and nervous about the outcome of the show. These feelings will bubble over to your horse, and impair your horse's performance.

What we will do in this exercise is transform your expectations into achievable action goals. By shifting your focus to the action that you need to do, you can keep your calm and focus, instead of feeling nervous and anxious.

For example, if your performance expectation was performing a perfect lead change, transform that expectation into what you need to do in your performance: set up your horse for the change, cue softly, etc. Repeat this for each expectation that you identified. Then on show day, when your thoughts shift to these expectations, you can re-focus yourself on your action goals.

# Evaluate and Transform Your Expectations

Write down your action goals:





## STEP 2: REFRAMING DOUBTS

Doubt is the number one killer of confidence.

In this exercise, you will identify your doubts, then reframe them into positive affirmation statements.

# Reframing Doubts

List your Top 5 Doubts, then reframe them into a positive affirmation statement. For example, reframe "I hope I don't mess up my lead change," to "I am focused and calm and can smoothly cue my horse to perform clean lead changes today."

Doubt #1:

Reframed Positive Affirmation #1:

Doubt #2:

Reframed Positive Affirmation #2:

Doubt #3:

Reframed Positive Affirmation #3:

Doubt #4:

Reframed Positive Affirmation #4:

Doubt #5:

Reframed Positive Affirmation #5:



## STEP 3: CREATE A CONFIDENCE COMMERCIAL

In this activity, you will list out your previous accomplishments, strengths, skills, and talents to create a confidence commercial.

On show day, read your confidence commercial to "sell" yourself confidence by reminding yourself of your skills and abilities to create a confident, "can-do" attitude before you enter the show pen.

# Confidence Commercial

A Confidence Commercial sells confidence to yourself by highlighting what you have already accomplished. To help you brainstorm what to include in your confidence commercial, ask yourself the following questions:

What are your strengths as a rider?

What have others complimented you on in your horsemanship? (Dedication, Quiet hands, Feel, Timing, etc.)

What horsemanship accomplishment are you most proud of? (This can be a competition award/win, or it can be as simple as getting a score for the first time in reining, completing a pattern, or making a clean lead change.

What can you say about your horsemanship that gives you confidence?

What can you say about your dedication to your horsemanship?

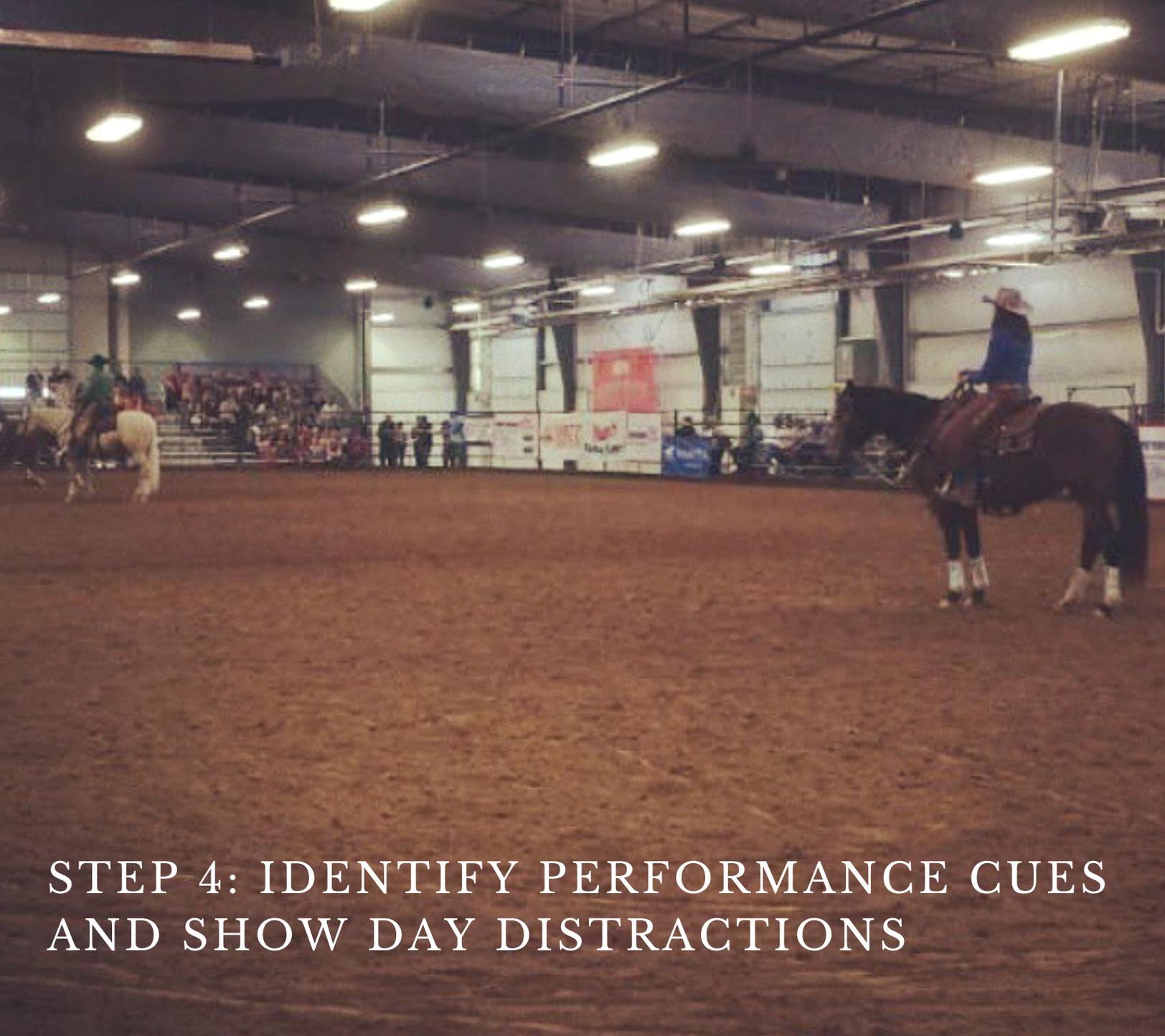
How are others supportive of you and your horsemanship that helps you feel confident?

# Confidence Commercial

Write your confidence commercial on this page. Then read it on show day!

My Confidence Commercial:





## STEP 4: IDENTIFY PERFORMANCE CUES AND SHOW DAY DISTRACTIONS

In this activity, you will identify the performance cues, the thoughts and images that help you execute a maneuver. You will also identify the distractions that interfere with your ability to perform these cues.

Identifying these distractions will allow you to narrow your focus and concentrate on what is really important on show day. You will then be able to set action goals (just like you did in Step One) that will help you focus on show day.

# Performance Cues and Distractions

On show day, it is so easy to be distracted by so many things: other riders in the warm-up, chatting with your friends and family, the weather, the judges, the ground/footing, the outcome of the show, etc.

By narrowing your focus on the "now" and what you need to do during your Pre-Show Routine you can avoid letting distractions affect your performance.

There are 5 Parts to this Step:

1. Identify Performance Cues, the thoughts, feelings, and images that helps you execute your pattern/performance in the show pen.
2. Identify Distractions, things that are not important to think about on show day.
3. Develop Action Goals that will help you focus on what you need to do in your warm-up/performance
4. Become fully immersed in your action goals and performance cues that will help you perform your best.
5. Refocus quickly when you become distracted at the show.

# Performance Cues and Distractions

## Part 1: Identify Performance Cues

Performance Cues are thoughts, feelings, and images that helps you execute your pattern/performance in the show pen.

Some examples of Performance Cues could be:

In reining, executing your lead change in center of the arena.

In cutting, making a clean cut deep into the herd.

In a trail class, smoothly opening and closing a gate.

Ask yourself: What are the things that you need to focus on to perform successfully in your event?

List your specific performance cues below:

# Performance Cues and Distractions

## Part 2. Identify Distractions.

Identify what is NOT important to think about at the show. There are two types of distractions: Internal and External.

Internal Distractions are the most common. They can be things like: negative self-talk and self-doubts thinking about how nervous you are, replaying negative past show experiences, thoughts of what ifs and I can'ts

External Distractions are things like: bad ground, hearing the scores from other competitors, spectators, weather, judges. External Distractions are things that you CANNOT control.

List your Distractions below:

# Performance Cues and Distractions

Part 3. Develop Action Goals that will help you focus on what you need to do in your warm-up/performance to be prepared and avoid letting distractions affect you and your horse.

There are two types of Action Goals:

**Performance Oriented Action Goals:** These are measurable performance actions, such as clearing a pole/jump, making your transitions at the cone, making your lead change in the center, a balanced stop, etc.

**Mental Oriented Action Goals:** These are action goals for you and what you think on show day, such as having a pre-show routine and following it, keeping calm and relaxed, performing a mental rehearsal/visualization of your performance as part of your warm-up, breathing to stay relaxed, picking out points during your performance to pause and think of power words, etc.

# Performance Cues and Distractions

Part 3 Continued: Think back to your last performance. Pick 2 specific things that you want to improve, and then make 2 action goals for those two specific things. After each show, review your performance, repeat this activity.

For example, if the two things that you want to improve are:

1. Ride more accurate circles in the reining
2. Be more confident and calm entering the show pen

Then your Action Goals could be:

1. Look ahead in my circles and hit the center marker.
2. Create and Follow a Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal to calm my nerves.

My Two Areas I want to improve are:

- 1.
- 2.

My Two Action Goals are:

- 1.
- 2.

# Performance Cues and Distractions

Part 4. Become fully immersed in your action goals and performance cues that will help you perform your best

By completing parts 1-3 and identifying these performance cues and action goals ahead of the show (don't wait until show day!), you will be prepared and able narrow your focus on your action goals.

On show day, you have be dedicated to thinking of your performance cues and action goals, and putting your work from parts 1-3 into action!

Part 5. Refocus quickly when you become distracted. If you notice yourself getting distracted, refocus your attention back to your Pre-Show Routine and action goals.

Use the 3 R's Process on Show Day:

1. Recognize-recognize that you are thinking about a distraction
2. Regroup-tell yourself to stop thinking about this distraction because it isn't important.
3. Refocus-pull your focus to your action goals and what you need do right now to get ready for the competition.



## STEP 5: CREATE A PRE-SHOW MENTAL REHEARSAL

Create a Personalized Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal to help you visualize your performance and build your confidence. You can, and should, use this Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal multiple times in the days before your show, as well as part of your warm-up before you enter the show pen.

# Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal

Creating your Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal:

1: Identify the thoughts, feelings, images and power words that help you perform at your best. Write a list of these words below.

2: Visualize Confidence. Write down what confidence feels like to you. Is it knowing that you are prepared? Believing in yourself and your horse?

3: Write Three Positive Performance Affirmations  
For example: "I am a relaxed rider."

# Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal

Creating your Pre-Show Mental Rehearsal Continued:

4: In this step, you will write out your pre-show mental rehearsal. This mental rehearsal should be a descriptive visualization of what you want to experience on show day. Include the positive emotions and feelings you identified in on the previous page, and the power words and positive affirmations that build your confidence.

To make your mental rehearsal most effective, include the following:

- Describe the show environment-be descriptive-the sounds of the crowd, sights of banners on the arena fence, judges sitting/standing in the ring, etc.
- Describe waiting at the in-gate:
- Describe entering the show pen:
- Describe the first few maneuvers (or the entire pattern if you know it ahead of time).

Write down your pre-show mental rehearsal. If you can, it also helps to record yourself talking through your script. Then you can save the audio to your smartphone, and listen to it the morning of the show.



## STEP 6: MAKE A PLAN FOR COPING WITH PRE-SHOW BUTTERFLIES

In this activity you will create a plan to cope with Pre-Show Butterflies, and transform them into a positive instead of a negative.

# Pre-Show Butterflies

Pre-Show Butterflies are a normal reaction that ALL riders experience before they show. Pre-Show Butterflies can occur the night (or even the week) before the show, or sometime they show up right before you enter the ring. The difference between successful competitors and unsuccessful competitors is how they view, and cope with, Pre-Show butterflies. Successful competitors view the Pre-Show butterflies as a positive, and direct the energy from the Pre-Show butterflies to focus and be prepared for their performance.

Negative Pre-Show butterflies cause the rider to feel tense, a sinking feeling in their stomach or feel sick to their stomach, heart racing, etc. Your thoughts shift to negative self-talk, and worries about the outcome of the event, anxiety, and cause you to lose focus and perform poorly.

Positive Pre-Show Butterflies are excitement, a heightened level of focus, getting into the flow where your riding feels instinctual. You are confident and think "Let's go, we can do this!"

By recognizing that Pre-Show Butterflies are normal, and developing a plan to cope with negative Pre-Show Butterflies, you can embrace your butterflies and use them to your benefit.

# Pre-Show Butterflies

## Pre-Show Butterflies

1. Do a Reality-Check of Your Fears: What are your fears? Are they related to the outcome of the show? What will really happen if you don't win?

My Fears Plan:

2. Recognize that Pre-Show Butterflies are natural part of showing horses: What are your normal butterflies? How do they help you on show day? Transform them into a positive, and write them down below.

My Pre-Show Butterflies Transformation:



## STEP 7: DEVELOP A TRUSTING MINDSET FOR COMPETITION

In this activity you will develop a trusting mindset to perform freely, automatically, instinctively, and allow your riding to be more automatic in the show pen instead of over-riding and micro-managing your horse and striving for perfection.

Many riders show in a "training" mindset, causing them to ride with tense muscles, a tight rein, and focusing on perfection and over-correcting your horse. The show pen isn't the place to train your horse.

# Develop a Trusting Mindset

## Common Breakdowns in Trust during a Show:

1. **Concentrating on Mechanics:** being too technical, thinking too much about form, causing your performance to be mechanical instead of automatic or instinctual.
2. **Micro-managing:** Not trusting your horse, and micro-managing and over-controlling your horse. This also occurs when you ride differently at a show than you do at home.
3. **Over-controlling your body:** trying too hard, doing too much, this interferes with your horse's ability to perform.
4. **Letting Self-Doubts and Negative Self-Talk** affect and overwhelm you.
5. **Perfectionism:** Trying too hard to be perfect, expecting perfection from yourself and your horse.
6. **Over-analysis:** Over thinking and being over-critical. This is especially damaging during the performance, when you over-analyze each maneuver, which causes you to lose focus and be thinking about the previous maneuver instead of what you should be doing now.

# Develop a Trusting Mindset

Which of the common breakdowns in trust listed on the previous page do you experience at shows?

My Trust Mindset Breakdowns:

Now, write down solutions to these breakdowns. For example, if you micro-manage your horse, your solution could be "remind myself to cue my horse softly and keep my hands slow."

My Trust Mindset Solutions:

Create "Trigger" words to remind yourself of your solutions. For the example of cueing softly, your trigger words could be "slow hands." Say your trigger words to yourself when you start noticing yourself breaking out of your trusting mindset to get yourself back on track.

My Trust Mindset Trigger Words:

# Sample Pre-Show Routine

Sample Pre-Show Routine		
Time	Focus	Tasks
Week Before the Show	Release Pressure-Packed Expectations	Identify your expectations
		Replace your expectations with action goals
Morning of the Show	Cancel Negative Self-Talk	Recognize any Negative Self-Talk or thinking about distractions
		Regroup-remind yourself that these distractions are not important
		Re-focus your mind to your action goals
Grooming & Saddling Your Horse	Warm-Up Your Confidence	Review your Confidence Commercial
		Reframe any self-doubts that you have about your performance
Watch Other Competitors	Focus on the Process	Keep your mind on what you need to do to prepare yourself and your horse
		Plan for strategy in the ring-spacing, identify landmarks, parts of the arena to make transitions, etc.
Warm-Up Your Horse	Mentally Rehearse Your Performance	Use mental imagery to visualize your performance
At the In Gate	Prepare To Perform	Do not assess the quality of your warm-up. If it wasn't perfect, let it go
		Focus on trusting your horse and yourself.
		Remind yourself to perform functionally-focus on how to get it done!
Entering the Ring	Embrace the pre-show butterflies	Transform the pre-show butterflies as positive, as a sign that you are ready to compete
		Use the added intensity from your pre-show butterflies to help you focus
		Take deep breaths as you walk into the ring