

When You Compete on Your Horse, It's About More Than Being on Top

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Eight Empowering Ways To Think About Competition



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Vicki LeBlanc

I can't remember a time when I didn't show horses.

My parents had around 400 horses. Showing was a big part of our family business. I, along with my four siblings, exhibited horses to market them. Dad had high expectations for our success in the show arena.

Throughout my lifetime of show ring experience, I have often thought about what competition means to me. I've never stopped studying exactly what makes high performers excel above the rest.

Here are eight empowering ways to think about competition. They have helped me. I hope they help you, too.

1.) Competing on your horse is a personal road. Decide why you show.

Do you want to conquer the challenge of being a world champion ... or ... do you think it's a blast to have fun on the weekend, with no thought of year-end standings? Do you show to insure you keep improving? Is it some combination of all these things?

All reasons are equally valid.

In order for you to have a real measuring stick of personal success, you must get in touch with your preferences.

Your choices have nothing to do with anyone else. It's your journey.

2.) Competition provides you with a personal self-evaluation mechanism.

Showing is always about riding your best, and presenting your horse's best at a specific time. Unlike practice, by the nature of a designated window of time to show, there are no "do-overs".

Laying your skills on the line "under pressure," forces you to focus, and take action.

When your ride is over, you have specific results. In almost all situations, both your strengths, and weaknesses become crystal clear.

Beyond the fun, and excitement of showing, think of competition as a customized personal feedback system. It provides you with a clear picture of what you are doing well, and a precise compass for things you need to improve.

3.) Competition is NEVER about beating other people. It's about you.

You can't control other people, the judge, the situation, the outcome, or beating anyone else.

You can control ... if you focus ... if you stay relaxed ... if you keep your eyes in the right spot ... if you stay connected to your horse, etc. That's it!

When you, and your horse reach skill levels necessary for the competition level in which you show, results take

care of themselves. When you ride your horse at that level, or above, you will place, or win. If you don't, you won't!

Strive to be focused, and consistent. Reach for the highest levels of your skills, and experience.

Do your job. Build from there. That's all there is.

4.) Comparing yourself to someone else is like shooting yourself in the foot when it comes to competition.

It's so easy to see yourself as less than someone else. Typically, this results in feeling "bad". That's surely not a source of internal strength!

And, it's definitely not empowering to see yourself as above others. That's a temporary attempt to feel good about yourself that falls flat sooner or later. It's a distraction, and has nothing to do with your job.

YOUR EDGE is how distinctive you are.

When you show, strive to exhibit what makes you ... you. What is your style? What are your preferences? How do you show your grit?

Anyone you truly admire always has their own presence, and their own way about them. They own it.

Express your unique gifts and characteristics. Own them. Love them. Be you.

5.) Love the challenges that inevitably come up in competition. When things get difficult, tell yourself, "I love it".

The person I strive to emulate the most in cutting regarding this idea is Buster Welch. I learned this from him early on in my career as a professional trainer.

I remember watching him enter a herd of cattle no one else could survive, and come out on top. I remember thinking, "If he can do it, I can do it!" Buster taught me to love the tough challenges, not back down, and go for it.

Thank you, Buster.

Find a hero who you know always rises to the occasion. When things get tough, know if they can do it, so can you.

6.) Great preparation ALWAYS precedes success.

Think of your preparation, and your horse's preparation individually. Divide all into time segments for both of you ... days before the show ... what you will do on the day of the show ... and, right before you ride.

If any of these areas are sub-par in superb preparation, you will ride your horse below your best. Systematize everything.

Preparation builds confidence, and competitive success.

7.) Don't let errors keep you from seeing yourself as a strong competitor.

Your ability to recover from errors, (whether it be a small one during your ride, or a big one that devastates your results) is THE biggest predictor of how quickly you will do well in the future.

Never identify with weaknesses, i.e., "That's what I always do." Instead, use them as customized feedback to improve, and move forward. Your errors make-up your personalized self-improvement roadmap.

Seek out errors, and shore them up! Make friends with them.

8.) Have FUN. Have FUN. Have FUN. Nothing is more important!

If you compete on your horse, I wish you all the best, and joy along the journey!

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