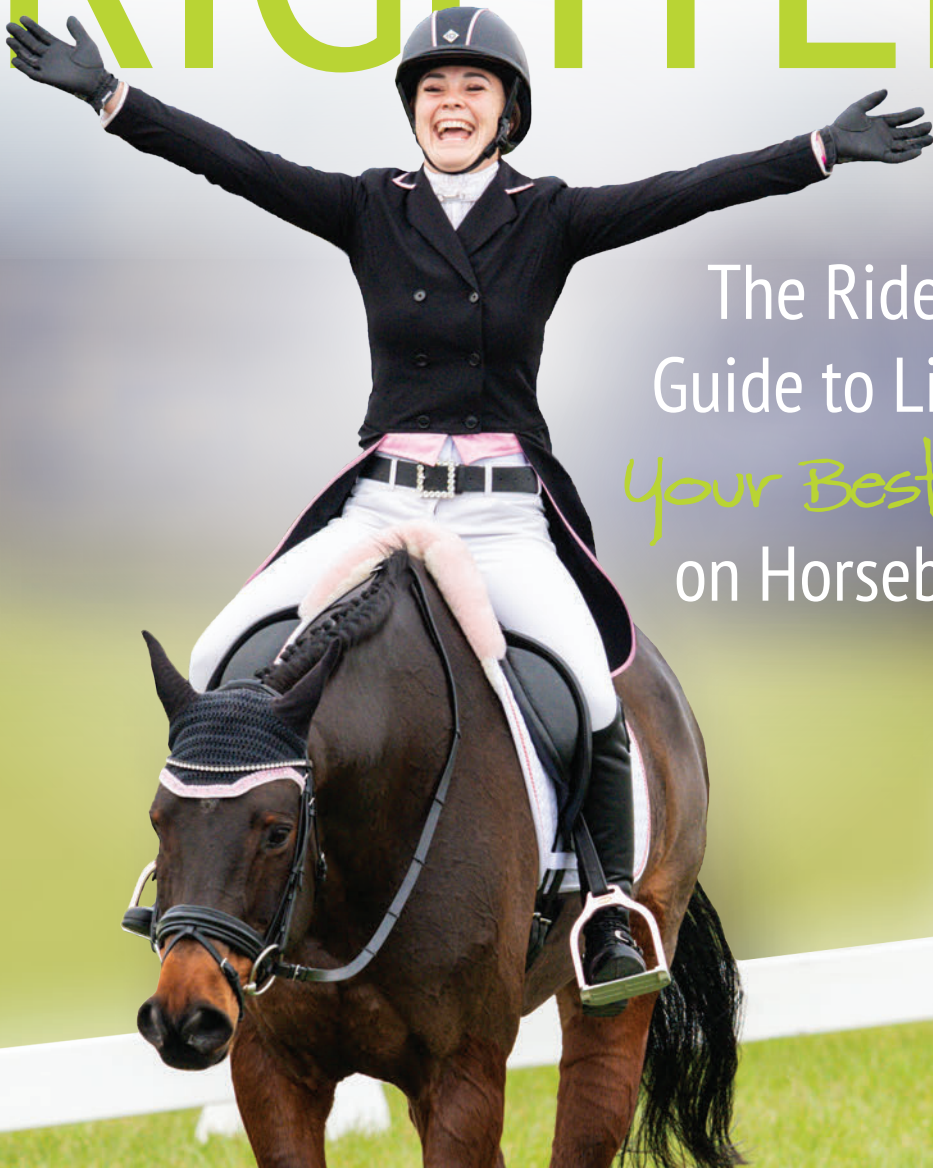


BOLDER, BRAVER BRIGHTER



The Rider's
Guide to Living
Your Best Life
on Horseback

— COACH DANIEL STEWART —

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*Be bold or italic,
never regular.*



As you can see, body envy and shame are caused by others, but only you can stop it. Learning to love yourself, appreciate what you have, value your strengths, and accept your weaknesses are the keys to stopping them. Learning to define yourself by your efforts rather than your appearance or outcomes is the only way to achieve fulfillment. Perhaps your body shape, equitation, or results are different than others, but you're an original, and originals are valuable!



● Being Belittled or Bullied

You might recall riding for a trainer who tried to teach you to be *tough* by teaching you in a *tough* manner. Instead of reinforcing persistence and rewarding effort, the teaching style might have made you feel more like you were being belittled and bullied. Unfortunately, overly critical teaching methods (*intimidation and humiliation* rather than *motivation*) have been proven to

cause riders to feel inadequate, shame, fearful of failure, worried about letting people down, and disappointed in themselves.

While the intention was good (to teach you something), the delivery was bad because your brain always responds the same way when you're feeling attacked (physically or *verbally*). You become tense, tight, and tentative as your brain prepares to flee or freeze. This is why so many riders struggle to perform for threatening coaches, and why many of those riders end up quitting the sport altogether. Verbal threats cause your brain to *freeze* (leading to frustration because you just can't seem



▲

In Buddhism, the word *Irshya* is defined as being envious and unable to accept the excellence of others. The word *Mudita* is defined as taking joy in the good fortune of others. *Mudita* is therefore the antidote to *Irshya* and the solution to envy and shame.

●



A good coach can change your position, but a great coach can change your life.

to do anything right), and *flee* (eventually giving up because riding is no longer satisfying, rewarding, or even enjoyable).

The good news is that modern coaching programs are now certifying a new breed of trainer—a coach who's educated using the latest sport-performance and athlete-development data. One who knows that performance only goes up when a rider doesn't shut down. One who doesn't believe toughness comes from being able to hold back tears of shame, or return tomorrow after crying all day today. A coach who realizes that the social and emotional skills learned at the barn are just as important as the physical ones.

But...not everyone gets a trophy!



Modern coaches don't necessarily believe everything is about rainbows and unicorns. They understand the value of failure and mistakes, and help their students experience, accept, and learn from them. These trainers don't give *participation* awards. They know if you're winning every class, you're entered in the wrong



classes. They know if you're not failing or making mistakes, you're just not trying hard enough. But they'd never allow you to take these experiences personally, meaning they'd never allow you to feel like a mistake just because you made one, or feel like a failure because you failed. These trainers aren't necessarily

*Never pump yourself up
by putting someone else down...
... Never look down on others
unless you're helping them up.*

- Make insulting remarks about your ability.
- Make shaming comments about your body.
- Verbally abuse you in front of others.
- Compare you negatively to other riders (often in front of them).
- Question your commitment to our sport.
- Humiliate you by teasing, mocking, or making fun of you.
- Constantly remind you of your past mistakes and failures.
- Call you a failure or say that you'll never amount to anything.
- Talk bad about other coaches.
- Insult, gossip, or spread rumors about you, or other riders.

Most coaches who employ these tactics aren't usually aware they're doing it, but unfortunately some are incapable of changing (or even admitting that change is required). Many simply do it because their coaches did it, but it doesn't change the fact that learning can't occur when a student feels threatened or intimidated. The job of a coach is to mentor and motivate. Teaching through intimidation or humiliation is simply using the wrong tools for the right job.

●●● Why You Do What You Do

A very small percentage of riders make it to the national or international level. This means that the vast majority of equestrians simply ride for the love of the horse, to enjoy the experience, develop physical and social skills, be outdoors and athletic, and enjoy time spent with their friends and teachers. If you feel a coach is standing between you and any of this, remember that you have a choice. You can break the pattern, take back control, and regain your self-esteem by following these four tips:

1. *Remind yourself that coaches are doing their best (even though it's not very good). Perhaps they coach this way because they grew up with a trainer who intimidated or humiliated them. Doing this helps to put you in a position of control, and allows you to stop feeling responsible for their actions. Taking the high road by trying to see the best in the worst teachers, is what'll start you down the road toward regaining your confidence and control.*
2. *Have an honest conversation with the coach. Let him or her know exactly how you feel and be prepared to give examples of when you felt humiliated, insulted, bullied, or belittled. You might even want to prepare a written script and read from it during the meeting (it's so hard to remember things when you're nervous!). This will be difficult, but without the courageous effort, change won't occur (for you or any other rider).*





KIDS AND COACHES

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference between a tough coach and a bullying coach (especially since young riders are taught to respect authority) so here's a good rule to follow. If anyone ever insults you, makes fun of you, or makes you feel ashamed of being you, you can probably assume he or she is a bully. Since the effects of bullying can last from a *long time* to a *lifetime*, stand up for yourself by doing the four things above, and the four things below:

1. *Never blame yourself for someone else's bad behavior.* ●
2. *Tell yourself there's nothing wrong with you, only the way the message was delivered.* ●
3. *Remind yourself that bullying is never acceptable, regardless of where it happens.* ●
4. *Tell a parent who only wants the best for you—and you deserve it!* ●



3. *If coaches accept the conversation (many won't) offer to help them by scheduling additional meetings so you can offer them periodic updates. This will help them become more mindful of their actions (and become a better coach) while also helping you feel like you're no longer the problem, but a part of the solution.*



My son Luca teaching a team-building workshop to a group of equestrians enrolled in my Lake Placid equestrian athlete training camp. The promise of our sport's tomorrow lies in the hands of the promising young teachers of today!

4. *If your coach resists your attempts to help, find a new coach. The time spent with your horse, sport, and riding mates is just too valuable to allow anything (or anyone) to take it away from you. Maybe you'll have to drive a little farther to get to the new barn, but at least you'll be looking forward to getting there!*

Our sport is moving in a very positive *coaching* direction. Many of today's young riders are becoming the coaches of tomorrow and are doing so by participating in certification courses that employ modern sport-performance and athlete-development techniques that differ greatly from the *intimidation and humiliation* coaching styles that were so often taught in the past.



▲
When perfection
is driving you, shame
is riding beside you
and guilt is that annoying
backseat driver!

●
Brené Brown

●●● Fixing Body Envy, Shame, and Bullying

You're wonderful and worthy and deserve to believe it, but it doesn't come from hoping you'll get the traits, talents, and toys of someone else, and it doesn't come from being intimidated or humiliated. It comes from developing a strong *inner* sense of pride, self-respect, and self-satisfaction that says, *I'm enough*. Never try to be like someone else or impress someone else. You're too busy liking yourself.

●●● Self-Schemas and Self-Concept

You have ideas and beliefs about other people. You think your friend is kind, his brother is smart, and his sister is hard-working. Descriptive categories like these are called *schemas*. You also describe yourself using similar schemas, meaning you can also see yourself as kind, smart, and hardworking (or mean, dumb, and lazy). When all your *self-schemas* come together, they form your self-image or *self-concept*. Your vision of you.

Self-schemas begin forming in early childhood based on feedback from friends and family and continue developing throughout life as you meet new people, enter new groups, and experience new things. They're shaped by the roles you play (i.e. rider, competitor, spouse, or parent) and are influenced by your education, appearance, relationships, gender, and age. Successes,

*Stop trying
to always
fix your body.
It was never
broken....*