

THE INSTRUCTOR'S TASKS

I want to tell you how I feel about the enormous responsibility we have as trainers. We are supposed to be the experts who best understand the horses. In that role, we should always be an advocate for the horse and keep his needs and well-being in mind. We must do this even at the risk of offending owners and riders when we tell them something is wrong with their horse, or that their horse needs more time before he can start more advanced work or compete at a higher level.

Since the demands on our dressage horses today are very high, and because there are few riders who are able to ride their horses in balance, we see many lame or muscle-sore horses. Though horses can't speak English, they have a language of their own. It is our responsibility to learn their language and to listen in order to help them.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN INSTRUCTOR

We must set a good example. Many students look up to us because we are trainers. Therefore we must always set a good example. This applies to the language we use when teaching, our dress and perhaps most importantly, the manner in which we treat the horse.

We must inspire, and create a safe and positive atmosphere. You can say many wise and helpful things, but they will never come to pass if we do not create an appropriate environment in which the rider can learn.

We must make decisions regarding horse and rider's education, recognizing that we may not see the results for several years. And we must not be afraid to quickly change those decisions if we discover that they are not the best solution. Of course, there are situations that require us to try various methods before we can make the final decision on a solution. Just be careful not to continue on for too long in a direction that isn't working – think about the consequences.

As trainers, it is our duty to recognize the student's needs and abilities. Each student should be respected and given the very best chance to reach their full potential. This means we must take time to listen. If we want good results, it must be created by working together with the student.

We should set logical goals for the student and create self-confidence.

We must never ask the student to do something that is beyond his ability. The student needs

to feel that he is successful. Of course, many of our educational goals can't be reached in a short time. However, the training can still go well, even if what we are working on isn't finished in one lesson, or perhaps even many. The most important thing is to be on the right track while working toward the goal, and for the student to recognize this.

We must always explain the goal and the reason behind it to the student. The rider on the horse is as much a trainer as the instructor on the ground. If the student doesn't clearly understand the purpose of the training, he won't be able to clearly focus on the goal and communicate it to the horse.

We must motivate the student. By motivating your student you are half way to the goal. There is no bigger waste of time than to teach someone who is not motivated!

We must allow ourselves to be creative. Trainers as a group tend to be conservative and can sometimes forget to think outside the box. Of course, we should have a philosophy and an opinion, but try not to be too rigid. We don't have the answers to everything, but that doesn't mean that the answers do not exist.

We must at all times have the situation under control. This is very important. Be well prepared. Have a goal for the lesson and a system that leads to the goal. When you ask your student to do an exercise, there must be a reason for it. It should lead to achieving something bigger than just the movement itself.

PREPARATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

It is a good idea for a young trainer who doesn't have much experience to write down, ahead of time, what to look for when a horse and rider are working on a specific exercise. Visualizing a picture of the exercise executed perfectly, and comparing the student's performance of the exercise to the written list will help the young trainer to analyze the student's performance and provide valuable feedback.

Teaching material must be prioritized; it's important to decide what is needed in order to make the work possible, and to document it in a lesson plan. See the chapter, Lesson Plan.

In order to achieve good results, we have to be able to sell our knowledge and ourselves. If the students don't trust us or our methods, they won't work wholeheartedly toward the goals, and as a result, both rider and trainer will be disappointed with the outcome.

Finally, it is important for the trainer to make demands on himself. This is probably how I have learned the most. By making demands on myself, such as the following, I am continually forced

to keep developing.

- The horse may not leave the arena with questions in his mind. He must have answers and an understanding of what we are asking and how to correctly respond. Just as we have those “Aha!” moments when we learn, so does the horse.
- If I can’t come up with a simple and logical explanation, I know that I haven’t found the best answer. The right answer is always simple and logical.
- There must be continuity in the work for all three of us.
- When I see the student doing something wrong, I know he is thinking incorrectly because I believe that we ride as we think. So, instead of correcting the student, I will stop him and explain to help him understand.
- It must go well.
- Have a goal, follow a system and prioritize.

We must not forget that as trainers we must take on a large part of the responsibility of the horse’s and rider’s success.