

PLANNING YOUR TRAINING

Using a system to plan and track your work is invaluable if you wish to achieve good results. Creating a system can be compared to looking at a map to find the best route to a destination. In order to decide the best route two questions must be answered:

- Where am I now?
- Where am I going?

EVALUATION AND GOAL SETTING

STEP 1 - CREATE AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

Start by establishing an overview of the situation as it is today. Use the Status Analysis form in Section 4 (Setting Goals and Developing a system) for this purpose. I suggest that you start by filling out the form on your own, and then talk it through with your trainer or someone else you know and feel can be of help to you. It is a good idea to fill out the form quarterly and to compare it with the previous one to see if you and your horse have moved forward.

STEP 2 - SET A LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL GOAL FOR YOUR HORSE

Use the form in this section (Setting Goals and Developing a System) called Goals for Your Horse while you are learning the basics (until about 2nd level) to set realistic educational goals. If you are working with a trainer, verify that he/she agrees that your goal is realistic. Once you have reached 2nd level, you may find the Workplan (described below) to be a more appropriate way to plan your training.

Some examples might include:

- Improving my horse's understanding of the aids
- Successfully riding the horse on the aids
- Successfully riding the horse on the bit
- Improving transitions
- Moving up from First Level to Second Level
- Improving collection and self-carriage

- Increasing the stability of my horse's frame
- Becoming so skillful that I will be able to utilize all my horse's abilities

To fill out the form, make the following entries:

- Goal: Start by writing out your long-term goal at the top of the form.
- Column 1: Write down everything that comes to mind that would lead you to your goal.
- Column 2: Rewrite the subjects that you listed in the first column in order of priority and delete that subject from column 1. The result is an overview of the horse's education.
- Column 3: Document how you will go about creating or improving the particular subject written in column two. Use an extra sheet of paper if necessary.
- Column 4: Write down how to test whether you have reached the goal or are on the right track.

When you have completed the form you will have an overall work plan for the education of your horse. Discuss it with your trainer.

STEP 3 - SET A LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL GOAL FOR YOURSELF

Use the form in this section (Setting Goals and Developing a System) called Goals for the Rider to set goals for your own education as a rider. Fill this form out in exactly the same manner as the preceding form.

Some examples might include:

- Developing a better feeling for being in harmony with my horse
- Preparing to ride Third Level by spring
- Improving my position
- Developing a better feeling for half-halts

SIMPLIFICATION - THE PYRAMIDS

It is essential to simplify your plan. You cannot store the information from an entire book in your head, recall the necessary information and ride effectively at the same time. The system suggested in the chapter in this section (Setting Goals and Developing a System)

called The Pyramids is an example of how you can simplify, yet still remember the details. The four pyramids are intended to help you organize your plan into categories that follow in a logical order. The idea is to start with the 1st pyramid and work on it until you are satisfied before moving on to the next one.

The four pyramids represent four very important concepts: Receptiveness, Harmony, Understanding the Aids and Development. Phrases or words inside each pyramid describe the success criteria for each concept. An example has been provided for you, but it is important not only to know the words but to really understand what lies beneath them, so use your own words to fill the pyramids.

The pyramid system detailed in the chapter in this section (Setting Goals and Developing a System) called The Pyramids works as follows:

PYRAMID 1 - RECEPTIVENESS

If your horse is not receptive and mentally and physically relaxed, you should continue to work on these goals before moving on to the 2nd pyramid. It is not possible to work successfully on harmony until the horse is receptive. The first pyramid is often learned from the ground.

PYRAMID 2 - HARMONY

If you and your horse are not in harmony then the horse will have to compensate by using tension, which will prevent success with the goal of the 3rd pyramid, Understanding the Aids.

PYRAMID 3 - UNDERSTANDING THE AIDS

Obviously if the horse does not understand the language, he has no chance of giving the correct response and developing his training.

PYRAMID 4 - DEVELOPMENT

Once the horse understands the aids we can begin work to develop new skills and further develop those with which the horse is already familiar. That is when it starts to get really exciting.

WORK PLANNING

Once you have the basics in place (you can ride your horse on the aids and on the bit) it's time for you to simplify your Now you are ready to formulate your training plan using the Work Plan form in this section (Setting Goals and Developing a System) as your template. Fill out the form as follows:

- Begin with the first circle in the lower left hand corner, labeled "Here Now". This is where you start your warm-up. Get to know your horse so well that you can make a plan for your warm-up.
- The next circle, "Correct", illustrates your end goal for the warm-up. Consequently, you should have a clearly defined goal for your warm-up. For example, the horse becomes supple, you and the horse are in harmony, and he seeks the bit and is under the aids. To make a long story short, you are well prepared within the horse's level to do anything. The horse feels super.
- On the line connecting these two circles there are a number of vertical lines where you can list the tasks or criteria that lead you to the first goal. How the warm-up should be prioritized varies from horse to horse, and also changes as the horse advances in his education. Experiment until you find a way to warm your horse up to get the best possible results. Once in a while, time your warm-up so that you will know how much time you will need for warm-up at competitions.
- Once you feel you have accomplished the goals for your warm-up, you have reached the circle labeled "Correct" in the Work Plan. Notice that there is a line leading to a circle labeled "Test". Before moving on, test the results of the warm-up. The chapter Self-test provides information on how to test to see if your horse is working correctly. If we are not able to test the work we are doing, it is worthless.
- You and your horse are now ready to move on by developing your current work or learning new exercises. In the circle "Move On" write your next goal. On the adjacent horizontal lines write the criteria or exercises that are required for your horse to achieve the goal.
- When you think that you have reached that goal, test that you have reached it, or are on the right track towards achieving it. You could for instance, take a lesson to see if you and your horse are on the right track, or ride a test to get feedback from a judge. Read the chapter in this section (Setting Goals and Developing a System) called Self-test.

It is a fact that many riders travel back and forth on that lower line and do not reach that point where they can begin to climb upward. Too many work sessions turn into one long warm-up. The horse and rider never really progress and there is too much wasted time. These situations can be avoided by using these forms and diagrams. By doing so, the training program becomes structured, organized and the whole picture becomes clear. It leads to better results, with the rider actively participating in the educational process. The work becomes more fun and much more exciting!

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO TRAINING

There is no question that to a high degree the outcome of our work is a result of how we think.

It is so easy, and very popular, to say “think positive”. But when a person for one reason or another is not in a positive frame of mind, it can be more irritating than helpful to hear this. No one really wants to be negative, so when someone is a bit negative one day, there is an underlying reason for it.

“Positive” is not a thing that you take, or touch, or move here and there, and consequently it is not always an easy concept to relate to. But we know that ***in order to create something good, we must be positive***. Picture the horse executing the movement correctly and imagine how it feels. Remember, the only thing you can influence is the next stride, the next corner, the next leg yielding. What has happened has happened and you cannot turn the clock back.

The reason we sometimes develop a negative mood when we ride is because we can get into a situation where we feel that things are not working correctly and we are unable to find a solution to the problem. We have lost our view of the big picture, become bogged down in details, and we feel frustrated.

What can we do to change this situation? Putting the horse back in the stable and going to the movies or playing golf instead is not the solution. Get help! Just because you are unable to see the big picture right now, or cannot think of a way to resolve the problem, does not mean that there is no solution. There are many approaches we can take to help ourselves regain an overview, resolve the problem, and continue our work. We can take lessons from a skilled trainer, read books, study videos that cover the subject we are struggling with, or talk with fellow riders. But we should never take our frustrations out on the horse!

It is important that our expectations are fulfilled and that there is a balance between what we put into our riding and what we get out of it. It takes up a lot of time and money. In addition to that, riding can be a very touchy subject. If it doesn't go well, our whole world can fall apart. But quite the opposite when we have a great ride, there is not a problem in the world! Sometimes our expectations cannot be met with the horse we are riding. It is possible that the best solution in some cases is the one that is the hardest for most people to accept, and that is to change to a horse that can live up to the rider's expectations more easily.

So to recap, the best ways to avoid negative situations that arise when we feel stuck or on a plateau are as follows:

- Familiarize ourselves thoroughly with the theory.
- Establish a clearly defined goal.

- Work according to a system that leads to the goal, a system that not only tells us when something is going wrong, but also tells us what should be corrected. Use the forms and diagrams included in this section for this purpose, with a special emphasis on the Goals forms.
- Seek help quickly when problems arise.

But always remember that if your horse suddenly feels wrong or different, or does not respond as usual to his normal work, there is surely something wrong. See the chapter in Section 3 (Understanding the Horse) called Excuses as Seen Through the Eyes of the Horse.