

Sabotaging your self?

By Ellen Waukon

Well, it going to be spring soon. Another year of the same old, same old or is it time to examine why you aren't:

- ❖ Riding more
- ❖ Happier with your horse
- ❖ Enjoying your horse experience
- ❖ Trying new things
- ❖ Going new places

After years of listening and watching people interact with others, with their horses and with other horses, I feel compelled to share. Maybe it is because I'm older??

There seem to be a significant number of people who aren't having a good time. Now, there have been times when I didn't have a good time with my horse or some physical attribute contributed to me not enjoying my horse time, but when the problem was examined – a majority of the time it was me. I am blessed or cursed with having a friend that confronts this type of behavior with respect and love, but nonetheless confront is the right word. This has helped me learn to confront myself without the assistance of others or at least ask someone who will tell me the truth. So I'm going to pay it forward.

I've tried to condense this information in a question and response format because confronting ourselves seems to be the beginning. NOTE: Confronting doesn't mean beating yourself up!!! It means looking at yourself, your horse, and your situation realistically. I kind of liked the "good, the bad and the ugly".

If you do 3 or more of the behaviors, for the last 3 years you could be sabotaging your self?

1. Sent your horse to 3 or more trainers in the last 3 years, but the same behaviors start resurrecting themselves within a couple of months or less after training.
2. Buying a new horse every couple of years but the same behaviors start happening, honeymoon over.

3. Taken lessons from 3 or more instructors in the last 3 years because they didn't understand you, pushed you too hard, wouldn't listen to every feeling and emotion you feel.
4. Telling everyone you want to trail ride, game, drill, shows and never even trying any of these.
5. Continually giving reasons why your horse can't be ridden. My horse is to _____ (inexperienced, out of shape, afraid, spooky, just got feet done, don't want the other horse to be alone, horse won't load, horse doesn't like others, horse doesn't like being alone, etc.)
6. Continually talking about your horse's limitations, quirks and preferences not about your last trail ride, competition or adventure and unwilling to get a different horse?
7. Continually giving reasons why you can't ride. Example: I'm too _____ (tired, busy, heavy, kids, windy, muddy, slippery, cold (less than 70F), hot (higher than 70), your out of shape, don't have a trailer, truck doesn't work, etc.)
8. Injured at least once a year for the last 3 years and couldn't ride because of the injury.

Well, if you are still reading, I going to assume that you would like to figure out what is going on and you recognize some of the behaviors listed above.

Let's talk –

While there are some not so good instructors and not so good trainers, there are a majority of individuals who range from good to excellent instructors and good to excellent trainers – but not good coaches/therapists. This is where you need to step up to the plate and start being honest with yourself. Usually it isn't much fun. Here are some things to consider.

What is your commitment to changing the situation?

If you don't have the commitment, quite tormenting yourself, your friends and family and let your horse(s) go and use the money to do something you can have a commitment to.

Still reading?

If you are committed to changing here are some things I strongly suggest you start with.

Make sure there isn't any physical reason that you can't ride (other than the doctor doesn't like any patient to ride) – sometimes there are reasons not to ride – then deal with it. Weight usually isn't a great reason, nor is your strength (both can be improved). Now even bladders aren't a good reason not to ride. Being short isn't a good reason (mounting blocks, etc.) If people with severe disabilities can get on their horse, so can you.

HONESTLY examine how you emotionally feel about riding. Are you afraid, insecure, embarrassed, ashamed, and terrified, etc? Unfortunately, these are usually the beginning of the issues that keep us from having fun of any kind. Don't worry; this isn't the step to determine if there are reasons that you feel this way. This is just about being honest about what you do feel. Let's make sure that your horse isn't contributing to these fears first. Sometimes there are horses you should fear, if you aren't skilled in dealing with their issues.

Make sure there isn't any physical reason why your horse can't do the type of riding you want to do. Be HONEST and detailed enough with your vet so that the vet understands what you are expecting of this horse. Don't argue with them – arguing with professionals (vets, farriers, trainers, instructors, etc.) doesn't give you their HONEST answer. These guys are human and they don't want to sit there and debate your position, just because you don't like their answer. If you don't like the answer you get, get a second opinion. This doesn't mean search for someone who agrees with you. If this isn't the horse that will accomplish what you want to do, either change your goals or get another horse. Yes, I understand it isn't ever that easy, but that is what needs to be done if you are serious about reaching your goals. If the horse isn't going to be able to do what you want then quit whining and using this as an excuse not to move forward.

Make sure that this horse has the right temperament and skills for you to be successful in enjoying your riding experience? Ask a person whose judgment you respect to evaluate your horse and give you an HONEST assessment of the mental condition, temperament, skills of your horse against what you say YOU want to do with this horse. The watchword here is HONEST assessment. Be prepared to pay for this evaluation. The person doing the evaluation should include – temperament, manners, gaits, and tolerance of the environment that your goals would involve, etc. Again, don't argue with them – arguing with professionals (vets, farriers, trainers, instructors, etc.) doesn't give you their HONEST answer. These guys are human and they don't want to sit there and debate your position, just because you don't like their answer. If you don't like the answer you get, get a second opinion. This doesn't mean search for someone who agrees with you. If this isn't the horse that will accomplish what you want to do, either change your goals or get another horse. Yes, I understand it isn't ever that easy, but that is what needs to be done if you are serious about reaching your goals. If the horse isn't going to be able to do what you want, quite tormenting yourself and the horse, accept the fact and then quit whining. Sorry for the repeat – but this bears repeating.

So lets say you have gotten this far. You are committed to moving forward and your goals and your horse is a good match.

Supplies needed – Notebook, calendar, phone.

1. Write down your modest/small goal. (Let's start with one that will take no more than a month).

It could be as small as getting your horse to stop stepping on you. I recommend a crop or a little smack on the cannon bone. If he steps on you are unimportant to him/her.

2. Write down the steps you are willing to take and how long it could take for each step.

Example: go to the barn every day and do not allow him in your space, use tools if necessary.

3. Mark them down on the calendar (do this in pencil).

Example: spend 15 minutes every day on this exercise before feeding.

4. Call someone who is willing (adjust to their schedule whenever possible) to support this goal. If you feel there isn't someone to support you, hire a trainer that does have coaching skills and is willing to support and empower you to learn how to solve the problem and is willing to be blunt and honest.

Example: call someone who doesn't ask you to go anywhere anymore because of 'X' but you believe will help you if you are serious and keep up your side of the bargain. Respect their honesty, time and knowledge. If it isn't a good fit be honest with them – maybe they scare you (is it you or them)

5. Now comes the hard part. **JUST DO IT.** Start with baby steps if necessary, work to recognize when you are using old behavior to avoid moving forward.
6. After you have accomplished your goal start at 1 and repeat.

Special instructions:

1. If you need to change your goal because it isn't realistic **JUST DO IT.** Don't spend a whole bunch of time beating yourself up or rationalizing your behavior.
2. If you board your horse – take that into consideration when you mark up your calendar. Don't set up a stressful situation where you transfer your stress to your horse and expect your horse to be cooperative. They will usually say, "Who the hell are you".
3. If you can't control your horse on the ground – start there. If by the end of the season you could now control your horse on the ground and you couldn't before – declare victory and move on.
4. Always check to see what you are contributing to the problem – fear, anger, etc. But remember it might not be you; it might be that you have allowed behavior in the past and now you will have to convince your mighty steed that this behavior is no longer tolerated – **MEAN IT.**

Well if you got this far, thanks for reading my contribution. If you don't agree, that's ok – I'm having a great time. If you see something that might help, I wish you all the success in the world.

Note: this is a copy of an article written by Ellen Waukon and printed in Horse'n Around.

If you would like any help with your issues or your horses issues please contact [SRBA Farm](#). The only 3S Trainer.

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If you would like more information about rehabilitating a horse you have rescued please contact Chris@srbafarm.com or 715-928-0816.