

New Year Resolutions - A Recipe For Riding Success!

New Years Day is synonymous with New Year Resolutions and despite setting out with good intentions many of us fail to lose weight, to stop smoking or to eat better!

Research suggests that 75% of us will fail in the plans we set ourselves. So what can we do and how do we apply important life lessons to our riding aspirations?

It's important to learn how not to take ourselves too seriously in life! It rarely has a positive long term impact if we are quick to beat ourselves up especially when we had good intentions to change but then lost momentum along the way!

For many of us we start a new year with plans of all those things that we want to **start** doing perhaps because we've been neglecting them up until now. Or, we list out the activities and habits we plan to **stop** doing because it no longer serves us well. Sometimes, we simply want to promise to **continue** to do the things that have worked well for us – it is valuable to have clarity about what these are. At Jigsaw Equine we call this approach the “Start, Stop, Continue Plan of Action”. It is highly effective when seeking or giving feedback to a trainer or owner (more of this in a later article) and it can be especially helpful when setting our ridden performance goals.

Where does it go wrong and why?

Resolutions can be made on the fly! They are impulsive! Set perhaps in the heat of the moment of peer pressure, a few too many drinks or just because it's the 'done-thing' at this time of year. Without proper thought how can we expect them to be of value, relevant or hold a chance of succeeding? With our horses, we have one bad competition or schooling session and suddenly we change our goals, or invent a new one without proper consideration or time for reflection.

Key rule: set only goals that are really important to you – and two or three is ample!

How well do you listen to yourself?

Next time you set yourself a resolution or a riding goal pay attention to the language you use internally when talking it through with yourself, or when sharing it verbally with others. Many times we tend to focus on the **downside of not** achieving our goals. Clues in our language might be:-

“If I don't get him relaxed and coming through more, we'll never break out of Prelim level tests”

“If I don't lose ten pounds in weight I'll hate every minute of my summer holiday”

In both examples the person is expressing the problem they are trying to avoid and in so doing their energy and thoughts are reinforcing that problem's existence.

Key Rule: Set goals and resolutions that describe what you DO WANT not what you don't want!

Why do some people achieve their goals while others don't?

One of the main reasons we don't keep resolutions or achieve our riding goals is because we don't do what we said we would do! Recent research demonstrated that only 25% of us stick to our plans! So, although we may have found ways to minimise our bad habits, or cravings, and used strong visual images of how we want to walk, look, or ride – and we've worked on our powers of positive thinking....these steps alone simply aren't enough!

On the other hand, people who typically achieve their resolutions tend to do a number of things in common. Namely;

The 5 Point Plan

1. They break their goal into smaller steps (sub goals)
2. They reward themselves when they achieve one of these sub goals
3. They tell their friends about their goals so it's out there in the open
4. They focus their mind, intention and language on the benefits of succeeding in their goal
5. They keep a diary of their progress (in writing)

By following the above 5 point plan we can increase our rate of success in achieving our goal or resolution by up to 50%.

Most of us know the sinking feeling of not living up to our own expectations (or those of others). The intention behind the goal in the first place can backfire leading to further loss of confidence or feeling of self control. If you want to give yourself every chance of maximising your goal achievement then avoid a shopping list of goals – just stick to one or two important ones. Follow the above 5 point plan, and remember you are human, so is your horse, and occasional lapses in the plan are temporary setbacks nothing more!

To find out more, about setting performance goals, and achieving them, contact us at info@jigsawequine.com. We always welcome your questions.