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Success!

How do you define success? Is that horse show ribbon, that completed competitive trail challenge placing, or that relaxing trail ride considered your success? We may even think of success as a ride without any unintentional dismounts! Certainly the definition of success can be as varied as the individuals reading this. For me, success can be as simple as my horse leaning in the direction of an obstacle he had previously refused to approach. That 'lean' represents effort and effort is one of the basic building blocks I can focus on to achieve more incremental success.

I believe success is inextricably related to expectations. If I go out to ride and have a specific goal to achieve an obstacle, for example mounted shooting, I may very well have unrealistic expectations if my goal is my first step. Expecting to accomplish the complete goal in one riding session may be setting myself up for failure. But, if I go out with the objective of working towards that goal over a flexible time period, I have a better chance of achieving my goal. I also need to have a plan. How will I teach my horse so that I can make the right thing easy and the wrong thing difficult, as Clinton Anderson likes to say?



My plan needs to have tiny, achievable steps so that I can reward the success at each stage. In my example of mounted shooting, I would set my horse up for failure if I got on and just started shooting; in fact I might even have an unintentional dismount with that approach! So my success plan might go something like this: click a toy gun while my horse is in his stall, ask a friend to help fire the toy gun in the arena at a distance from me unmounted or mounted on my horse, decrease the distance, shoot the toy gun from horseback, repeat the process with a cap gun, and



finally repeat the entire process with my revolver shooting blanks (primer first, then half loads which are louder), all the while watching my horse's reaction and maintaining his comfort zone. My expectation is to train slowly to develop trust. My attitude is the slower I go the faster I'll get there. I personally don't learn well when I'm anxious and I don't believe my horse does either. Letting him be relaxed at each step before I progress to the next step helps to encourage our accomplishments.

Success is the feeling that makes us happy and satisfied. Expectations and attitude have a lot to do with success. Having our horses remain calm in the face of adversity certainly qualifies for success. I am so grateful for the

successes I have had, both with horses and throughout my life. I hope you too have great success with your horse and in your personal life! Relish the small steps of success! Come join us at a Gentle Dove Farm Mounted Police Style training to build on your individual success and join in the fun at one of our upcoming clinics! Happy and safe riding! Joann