



Dear Dr. Carrie,

*I am a trainer with a thriving boutique hunter-jumper business. My horses and riders are successful at the shows. Recently, I went from having 15 sound, competitive horses to seven. I know variation is part of the business but I can't stop thinking that I have done something wrong. My vet keeps repeating that these lameness and health issues are specific to the horses' particular issues and randomly struck at the same time. I am having a really hard time with this. What do I do when my self worth as a trainer feels like a thunderstorm?*

Signed,  
Thunder

Dear Thunders,

Self worth is an ongoing challenge in life. If you base your self-worth on external material that is beyond your control, like the soundness of the horses in your care or even their results in the ring with their owners, you have given away your power.

Thunderstorms are always on the move and pass quickly with electrical charges similar to emotions. Getting triggered by a series of events like this is normal. Staying triggered, however, is not healthy or necessary.

Take some time to recall your values and even write them down. External values like how many horses you have in your barn or how many horses you have at a show can distract from your true philosophic values. Consider your integrity

with care for the horses, decisions you make on their behalf, and the relationships you have with them. Return to these truths about yourself to neutralize the triggers. Be intentional with your thoughts and actions. Decide what is important to you in this phase.

Once you have calmed the inner storm you can refocus on adjusting your program to efficiently provide care for the injured and potentially make space for new clients, new projects or other professional development that you have not had bandwidth to address. This industry is not only about numbers, rounds, results and shows but it is easy to get lost in this kind of data. Take a few days away from the barn and listen to your inner voices to allow the storm to pass. What happens next will come from your heart and feel inspired when you return!

Dear Dr. Carrie,

*The dreaded time has come for me to have to cut back on horse showing. I am graduating college in a couple of months and my parents have always said that when I am done with school I will have to greatly reduce or stop. I have been on a D1 team and have continued competing as an amateur all four years. I am so sad about not being on the circuit much anymore. It feels like a part of me is dying. How do I deal with these emotions and stay sane?*

Signed,  
Dealing with Fear

Dear Dealing with Fear,

The hardest thing about being passionate about horse showing is not being able to do it. However, getting off the traveling horse show wheel offers you access to the other parts of you. You are conditioned to structure your life around horses so it may feel quite disorienting at first. Talk to a career counselor at your university about your goals and dreams and be sure to help them understand that you have been weaving academics, the D1 team, and horse showing into your life for the better part of your life. This is important because it reveals your amazing capacity to do many things well at the same time.

Some people find work outside of horses that is a separate calling and others find a way to weave their education and work into the equestrian world. There is no right way and life tends to have many chapters. You can zoom out and think about your big picture goals and then break the steps into chunks. You only have to focus on the first piece now.

This is a time of transformation and change which usually requires that a part of you dies back so there is energy and room for other parts to bloom. That said, the die back is hard so please reach out to your support network because like horses, we are herd animals and need each other.

Additionally, get support from mentors, advisors, professors and other adults in the horse world as they will help you see what is possible. Ultimately, trust that the passion you have for horses is a drive deep within you that will help you open many doors in your life. **Hs**

Dr. Carrie Wicks divides her time between her private sport psychology consulting and family therapy practice, traveling with athletes, and writing. She completed her doctorate in psychology while researching the mental practices of equestrian athletes. Her passions include horses, yoga, mountain biking, skiing, and time in nature with animals. If you would like to ask a question for this column or ask about a complimentary Performance Strategy session, please contact Carrie.

Carrie Wicks, Ph.D. | [carrie@carriewicks.com](mailto:carrie@carriewicks.com) | [drcarriewicks.com](http://drcarriewicks.com)

