

UNDERSTANDING & BUILDING YOUR CONFIDENCE

CONFIDENCE SERIES

BY JOHN HAIME

IN THE FIRST OF OUR THREE-PART SERIES ON BUILDING CONFIDENCE, WORLD-CLASS HUMAN PERFORMANCE COACH AND SPORT PSYCHOLOGY CONSULTANT, JOHN HAIME, EXPLAINS WHY CONFIDENCE IS A KEY FACTOR FOR THE SUCCESS IN THE PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR HORSE.



"The mental and emotional muscle development that took all elite riders to the top, he says, is within your reach with the right mindset and some key steps."

Welcome to your 3-part series to help begin your understanding and building of your confidence.

Equestrian sport and life are about patterns and cycles. Sometimes you *"have it"* and other times you don't. No exceptions. So, a rider must work on important areas like confidence: first, understand it and second, learn how to build it. The mental and emotional aspect of your equestrian performance is like your physical training—prepare, do some work to build your skills and if your training is done well, it will translate to the show ring.

Working on your confidence is an investment in yourself as a rider, but this skillset is more than that. Confidence is a must and transferable to



© Philippe Lemire

everything you do in life—business, career, relationships and any other “performance” activity you engage in. Consider it an investment in your future. Confidence may be the single greatest asset for you as an equestrian athlete.

At every high-level show class we see wonderful displays of skill and grace—riders handling their partners with precision and efficiency, taking calculated risks to gain advantage and expressing their riding abilities and those of their horses. It’s part of what makes elite riders so good—making it look effortless and easy. Being courageous in this way takes confidence, which is something many amateur riders lack, but that doesn’t have to be the case. The good news is there’s plenty you can learn from these elite equestrian athletes to make yourself a better rider.

A key area for any rider—whatever their skill level—is confidence. Confidence is your bullet-proof vest. World-class riders know it. If you want to be like them, you have to understand it and learn how to develop it.

WHAT IS CONFIDENCE, ANYWAY?

Well . . . it really boils down to knowing. Knowing in your heart you can do it under the pressures of competition. You know the feeling: You’re riding well, your horse feels great and everything is going right for you. There is an easy belief in what you are doing, and you just know you can do it.

You undoubtedly also know the other feeling: You just don’t have it, you and your horse don’t feel “on,” and nothing is going right. There’s lowered belief in what you are doing, and you’re

not quite sure what’s wrong. That’s when you have to be able to trust and believe in your abilities and decisions, and express them in challenging circumstances.

“I’VE LOST MY CONFIDENCE”

When my phone rings, it’s often a rider, coach or parent on the other end, voice panicked, telling me a rider has “lost his confidence.” The rider may be struggling to perform when it counts, is very anxious before and during show ,and often not enjoying playing the experience of equestrian sport.

I always ask these riders or their supporters where they think their confidence has gone. Some may be up-and-coming riders and some have risen near the top of the sport. It’s funny that these riders don’t really know where their confidence has gone. Something small has triggered some initial doubts, and the spiral downwards begins from there. This scenario can seemingly happen overnight. One poor show or even show class and the rider declares that they have lost their confidence and the difficulties begin.

This is where riders get confused. Confidence requires some understanding—and some work.

UNDERSTANDING & BUILDING YOUR CONFIDENCE

CONFIDENCE SERIES

ARE YOU CHOOSING CONFIDENCE?

IN THE 2ND OF OUR THREE-PART SERIES ON BUILDING CONFIDENCE, WORLD-CLASS HUMAN PERFORMANCE COACH, SPORT PSYCHOLOGY CONSULTANT AND AUTHOR OF THE NEW, ACCLAIMED EQUESTRIAN BOOK “RIDE BIG”, JOHN HAIME, EXPLAINS WHY SOME RIDERS SUDDENLY LOSE CONFIDENCE AND WHY CHOOSING CONFIDENCE IS IMPORTANT IN YOUR RIDING EXPERIENCE.





© Philippe Lemire

Welcome to Part 2 of our series to help you understand and build your equestrian confidence.

Let's begin with a concept that might be unfamiliar to you.

Many riders believe that confidence is an exclusive idea reserved only for great riders with lots of talent and experience.

But, from my experience, that's not quite the truth.

I regularly have trainers saying to me *"it's easy to have confidence when you are a great rider, but, if you aren't a great rider, it's difficult to have confidence."*

There might be some degree of truth to this – but I emphatically express to you that every rider, at any level, can be confident. I work with riders at all levels and each one develops a level of confidence to find enjoyment in their equestrian experience.

Simply, finding and maintaining confidence is within your control and is more of a choice than you know. Accepting this reality helps you take responsibility for your own confidence and can change your riding experience.

Be proactive

Consistent riders are proactive with their confidence. Meaning, when they're riding well, you can be sure they remind themselves that they've

done it before and have built the fundamental foundation at each level of their development to handle any situation at their current level. They have built an ability to develop their riding in steps - and each step forward (*big or small*) is another little notch on their confidence belt.

This kind of proactive confidence is a decision that you choose to be confident from all of the great, positive experiences you've had in the sport (*and I'm sure YOU have had many in both training and showing*). It includes all the work you've done on your riding skills, the work to connect with your horse and the positive coaching and support you receive. This is the foundation of your belief in yourself as a rider. Proactive confidence is a choice to rely on a solid, fundamental foundation (*all of the work you've done on your riding*) and connecting with all the positive experience you've had in the sport. It means your confidence won't be shaken by small, unavoidable downward cycles when you're not riding or feeling your best.

Be careful of reactive confidence

It has been my experience that many riders don't give enough weight to all of their training and great experiences in the sport and unfortunately sabotage their belief in their abilities. Reactive confidence is a decision that one small collection of challenging circumstances or difficulties will prevail over your many successes and support. The rider allows this small down cycle to crack

their long-term riding foundation of confidence. In this scenario, the rider personally declares that his confidence is shaken by small downturns in performance.

Who's in control?

Does this sound familiar to you?

Do you forget about all the positive things you have done in the sport and allow little challenges to penetrate the foundation of your confidence?

I see it every day, even among the top riders in the world. For some reason, they aren't performing well on a certain day, a week or even a few weeks - and the foundation of confidence they've built over many years seems to suddenly disappear. A few mistakes become the basis for a crack in their foundation of confidence. They declare that their confidence has mysteriously disappeared. The public declaration that they have *"lost their confidence"* creates doubt and uncertainty.

The good news for these riders is that after being gently reminded that their confidence is about everything they've achieved, the skills they've developed, the obstacles they've overcome and all the work they've done over time, there's a realization that they really haven't lost their confidence. A small downward cycle

in performance has initiated some doubt that they may be losing their confidence. But, after a reminder that they have a thick foundation of confidence from training and successes in riding, they recognize they haven't lost it.

This is important for you to know. If you are creating the doubt and can feel your confidence slipping away, you have the choice to reel it in and not declare to yourself that you're losing it. Realize you are responsible for your confidence and have control over it. This is what the top riders do to ensure consistent, sustainable performance.

Confidence is your choice

Allow yourself to build confidence slowly over time. Each time you train or show you are developing your skills, growing a partnership and learning about the sport. These small developmental steps forward become the foundation of your confidence (*all the little pieces that grow on top of each other*) and must be your main focus. From experience, we all know that there will be difficult times. Riding goes in cycles – some days work well and others may not. But also remember that through these little down periods you haven't lost your confidence – you are still the same rider developing and growing. The only way you can truly lose it is if you choose to lose it and give it away.

So, when you do feel like you may want to give it away, sit a little taller in the saddle, tell yourself you have what you need to meet the current challenges of your riding, and bigger.

CREATE YOUR FOUNDATION OF CONFIDENCE!

CONFIDENCE SERIES

IN THE FINAL PART OF OUR THREE-PART SERIES; JOHN HAIME EXPLAINS HOW YOU CAN BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION OF CONFIDENCE AND SOME KEY COMPONENTS THAT WILL HELP BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE IN THE SADDLE.



Welcome to the final segment of our series to help you understand and build your equestrian confidence.

First, there is a wide range of factors that will impact your confidence. At every corner there are traps for you set to erode your confidence and make you question it. That's why having a solid foundation is key to your success. Create the foundation and you'll be more likely to sustain confidence over time.

So let's look at a few areas that are critical to you developing your confidence – and then keeping it.

Know who you are as an equestrian athlete. The most critical element in high performance is self-awareness. An equestrian who clearly understands strengths, limitations, triggers, purpose, values, vision and how emotion impacts them moment to moment is always ahead in the

game. Self-awareness precedes confidence and is the building block of it. Very simply, it's easier to maximize your abilities believing in something you understand vs. something you don't. Know yourself well in order to understand what you can and can't do when it counts.

Preparation & testing. Great equestrian athletes do the work and functionally train to *“know”* what they are doing when they are tested in a show class and pressure elevates. Great equestrians train each part of their performance and then test it in the training ring so they will be ready to take it into the ring when it counts. Great preparation (*working on the technical aspects, integrating them into real action and then testing under some pressure*) creates the truth that you know you can do it when it counts.

Own your narrative. What you tell yourself is the final gatekeeper to whether you will “do it” or not.



The most important voice in your life is talking to you **24/7**. It questions you, protects you from threats and keeps you safe. It has the ability to create doubt and shake your confidence—but only if you let it. If you don't have the foundation of steps 1 and 2, the voice may carry some weight and have a point when it suggests that *“you may not be able to do this.”* But if the truth is that you know yourself, have done the work, trained, prepared well and tested, you can challenge the voice and not accept the suggestions of doubt as the truth. Pushing back and challenging the voice is important. When the voice suggests doubt, push back and clearly state the facts that dispute the voice (*“I have done the training”, “my trainer trusts that I can handle this class”, I have a great partnership with my horse”, “I am a very capable rider”* etc.)

Here are a few more steps that will help you build your confidence:

Be proactive and allow all the great experiences you've had in your equestrian career to be the foundation of your confidence. Decide that temporary low points in your riding will pass quickly and will not shake the thick wall of confidence you have built over time.

Align with the right coach. You need complementary coaching matched up to your values and needs. The greatest thing a coach can do for a rider is believe in him and believe in his abilities - bolstering his own confidence. A coach's belief in you can matter.

Create a clear and defined goal plan. If you know where you are going and have the steps and actions in place to get there, there is a sense of security that you are on the right track. Knowing exactly where you are going and how you are going to get there builds confidence.

Focus on your good classes, not the bad ones. You'll have good classes and not so good ones from week to week. Evaluate why classes may

not have gone the way you wanted - after the class, but focus on your good classes and build on the energy from those strong performances. Allow these strong performances to become a part of your long-term confidence.

Focus on your development as a rider and the process to reach the next level of improvement. Step by step, target to become a little better each day through disciplined work in training. Falling in love with a very solid process will inevitably lead to desired results.

Finally—have fun! Great riders enjoy themselves in the ring and love the sport. When you enjoy something, it creates positive feelings and performance elevates – leading to enhanced confidence.

Remember that you are in control of your confidence. Create your foundation and follow the steps to build it. It will make a major difference in how you experience the sport.

*John Haime is President of John Haime Performance and a renowned global human performance coach who is trusted by some of the world's leading riders and coaches. His world-class approach to elevate equestrians is a winning formula from performance psychology, emotional intelligence, neuroscience, sport psychology, business planning, communication and executive coaching. He is the author of the acclaimed new book *Ride Big - The Ultimate Guide to Building Equestrian Confidence* published by Trafalgar Square Books (May 2021). John is based in Ottawa, Canada. See www.johnhaime.com.*