

## Two Steps to Overcoming Performance Anxiety

Most riders experience performance anxiety in show riding in one way or the other. It can be debilitating and can prevent the harmony and connection you and your horse are capable of.

The first step to start addressing performance anxiety is to ask yourself honestly: **"Why am I performing?"** When answering this question on the surface we might say: to have fun, to show my horse's progress, or I like competition. However, when you allow yourself to look below that surface the answer might be very different: I need the attention, controlling the horse makes me feel powerful, I feel like I am somebody, I need the money from the sale of my horses...

Questioning yourself on a deeper level is **not about judgment**. It is about **being honest with yourself** so that you can be **congruent** when you are in a show. If you ride in shows so that you can feel important, then do it and identify yourself fully with this goal, instead of muddling it up with what **show riding should be all about**. When you are congruent, meaning aligned with your inner truth, your horse can perform better. Horses read your emotions and incongruence is confusing to them.

When I learned how to jump small obstacles with a school horse, I remember that I didn't want to show my fear, and put on a courageous face instead. Underneath the courage I showed on the outside, I was afraid of the speed with which the school horses approached the jump. This incongruence confused my horse so that he refused the jump at the last moment. Instead of flying together elegantly over the small obstacle, I ended up on the ground in the middle of it. It was a great lesson that I needed to address my fears before I got on my horse and asked it to jump.

If your current truth about show riding doesn't feel very good to you, then you could look a little bit deeper and ask yourself: **What intention would I like to have for riding in shows?** If you decide to adopt a new view, then there are fun and powerful tools you can use to help you.

The second step in overcoming your performance anxiety is to **identify and release your negative thoughts and emotions**. EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques™) is a simple and highly effective mind-body balancing technique that can help you identify and release unwanted emotions such as insecurities, fears, worries, frustration, or

anger. Using this technique you can shift your focus/intention completely, if this is what you desire.

EFT can also help you to overcome anxieties and stress connected with performing in public. When I visit shows, I like to observe the happenings in the warm up area. I watch how riders go through the moves of the two-minute event over and over for up to an hour or longer. The horse obviously knows how to perform the moves; otherwise you wouldn't enter the competition. So I assume that in many cases the deeper reason for the continuous repetition is an insecurity, fear, and/or worry in the horse handler.

How would you feel if your trainer would run you through the same exercise over and over and over again? Instead of taking the risk of boring your horse out of its wits or frustrating it because it doesn't understand why it has to do the same thing over and over, you could consider using EFT and other mind-body balancing tools to release your fears and worries, and establish calmness and focus in yourself. Then maybe next time, you could just warm up your horse and enter the fun. Wouldn't that be cool?

Another variation of performance anxiety occurs when a rider has previously experienced a horse related accident or other traumatic experience[s]. **EFT can release the web of emotions, self-sabotaging talks and beliefs that hold that trauma in place.**

The IaDCTA invited me to present a **workshop on *Overcoming Performance Anxiety on Saturday, February 18, at 1 pm.*** We will explore EFT as a gentle, highly effective mind-body balancing technique that quickly and easily removes mental and emotional blocks. EFT often works where nothing else does.

I will also introduce you to other quick and yet powerful tools that allow you to be more centered, detach from the chaos around you and strengthen your focus. This will allow you to connect more deeply with your horse and experience the deep partnership you desire.

If you are interested in attending the workshop, go to [www.iadcta.org](http://www.iadcta.org) and click on Upcoming Events. If you have questions about registration call 515-221-9725 or email Vicki Gatter ([vgatter@networkiowa.com](mailto:vgatter@networkiowa.com)).

I look forward to having fun with you in February.

Freya

Dr. Freya Q. Schafer, PhD is an internationally active Motivational Coach and advanced EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) Practitioner with clients worldwide. She uses proven leadership and mind-body balancing techniques to empower riders and their horses to become a truly authentic team.

Visit her website [www.EssentialClarity.com](http://www.EssentialClarity.com) for more information on individual sessions and workshops or call Freya at 319-645-1372 to ask questions.

