Arizona Dressage Association

THE CENTERLINE

Fostering Respect & Understanding:
Competitors, Trainers, and Volunteers

~by Dr. Leslie Sherlin

Introduction

Imagine that at a recent dressage event, tensions were high as competitors prepared for their tests. Amidst the flurry of activity, a volunteer tripped while setting up an arena marker. Instantly, a nearby competitor and her trainer rushed over to help, offering kind words and assistance. This simple act of respect and understanding set the tone for the rest of the event, reminding everyone of the importance of mutual respect and support in the dressage community. In stark contrast, at another event, a volunteer acting as the ring steward was met with rudeness from a competitor. Due to some last-minute scratches, the steward asked the next rider if they wished to enter the arena early. The competitor responded assertively and rudely, creating a tense atmosphere that affected everyone present.

Mutual respect among competitors, trainers, and volunteers is crucial for creating a positive and supportive environment at dressage events. Respectful interactions not only enhance the overall experience for everyone involved but also contribute to better performance, cooperation, and enjoyment. Whether it's a competitor encouraging a fellow rider, a trainer offering constructive feedback, or a volunteer being appreciated for their hard work, these acts of respect and understanding form the foundation of a thriving dressage community.

The purpose of this article is to explore the importance of mutual respect among competitors, trainers, and volunteers, offering practical tips on how to manage stress and emotions constructively. By fostering a culture of respect and understanding, we can ensure that everyone involved in the event feels valued and respected. Creating a positive atmosphere not only increases the likelihood that staff and volunteers remain engaged with the organization, thus ensuring the continuation of events, but also contributes to a performance mindset that can enhance competitors' performance. Additionally, this article will highlight the critical role of volunteers and provide suggestions for maintaining a supportive and positive environment, emphasizing the contributions of all participants.

The Importance of Mutual Respect

Mutual respect is the cornerstone of a healthy and thriving dressage community. It fosters an environment where everyone can perform at their best and feel valued, from competitors and trainers to the essential volunteers who ensure events run smoothly.

Respect Among Competitors

Respect among competitors is essential for creating a positive and supportive atmosphere at events. When riders respect each other, it encourages sportsmanship and camaraderie, which can significantly enhance the overall experience for everyone involved. For example, competitors who offer words of encouragement or congratulate each other on a well-executed test (or effort) contribute to a friendly and motivating environment. Such positive interactions can boost morale and help riders focus on their performance rather

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Barn News:

Trainers would you like to let us know about the recent accomplishments of your clients or introduce new clients and horses? Would you like to update readers about barn improvements, or talk about any other news of interest to the membership. Send submissions to centerline@azdressage.org

Member Submissions to The Centerline:

Submit an article and photo of you and your horse on a topic of interest, a clinic or show experience. Submit your favorite barn and horse care tips, or review clinic. We'd love to hear from you! Send to centerline@azdressage.org
If the photo is a riding photo, a helmet is required.

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ARIZONA DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION

GRATEFUL-EXCITED-AND DETERMINED TO GIVE BACK!

Dear ADA members and supporters,

In response to your generous support, the above headline aptly describes the mantra of the **ADA Education Committee!**

We are so very excited to announce the re-emergence of educational symposiums for our club!
Soul searching for what's best for **OUR** dressage community produced the question of "what's the most important aspect that impacts Dressage performance"?

An important question that begs an answer!

We have all heard the clichés associated with Dressage that, "It's the journey", and "it's a partnership". The reason these clichés are so old and repeated so frequently, is because they are true.
In excellent horsemanship, balance of the rider and balance of the **horse** are paramount. Balance **between** the horse and rider is what determines the quality of the all important phrase, **"connection".** Without these functional relationships, the beauty, harmony, partnership, and yes, intimacy; aspects that the Dressage experience offers, can never be fully realized. One of every rider's spoken or unspoken goals, is to ride with confidence, achieving a sense of **satisfaction and completion!** Let's be honest, isn't that why we all ride?

CORE TRANSFORMATION

It is with tremendous excitement that the **ADA Education Committee** introduces this new concept, in a three part symposium series synergistically designed to enhance and invigorate your Dressage experience.

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER WITH CORE TRANSFORMATION!

SYMPOSIUM #1-THE BIOMECHANICS OF CORE TRANSFORMATION STARTS WITH YOU AND YOUR CORE!
September 28, 2024 at Bar A Registration opens August 28, 2024

The first symposium in the series is all about creating a better **YOU** by focusing on your core. Two excellent bio-mechanic clinicians, Jeremy Bridges, and Patrick Raby II, will focus on human core dynamics: what muscle groups to target to maximize core effectiveness for horsemanship. There will be three distinct sections of 45 minutes each with 30 minute breaks. Each section will have 3 segments with 6 movements apiece!

The sections are:
1 Stability
2 Performance
3 Function

We know…this sounds like work! But, we promise it will be the MOST FUN you have ever had while exercising and learning. We're talking MUSIC, DANCING, and of course REFRESHMENTS!
With roughly 30 days in between symposium #'s 1 and 2, gift the **NEW YOU** the ability to participate (and be ready to fully experience)…

SYMPOSIUM # 2-THE BIOMECHANICS OF CORE TRANSFORMATION FROM YOU TO YOUR HORSE
December 7-8, 2024 at Bar A

What are the **commonalities shared by the world's best horsemen and horsewomen?** Horse after horse, how do they consistently produce excellent results? Our clinician for this next section, **Missy Gilliland**, has taken the deep dive into the biomechanics of excellent riding through training with **Mary Wanless**, the premier researcher of this niche, and her protégé **Heather Blitz!**
Let Missy guide you, through a two day in-depth experience, on a fact finding mission to evaluate both, your strengths and weaknesses within your physical riding form. From this analysis of your riding style, Missy will integrate within you, starting on day 1, **"the isolates of excellence";** the critical postures and ways of movement that **Mary Wanless has identified and isolated** as the commonalities shared by the world's best horsemen and horsewomen in today's dressage world.

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No Joke! These commonalities are “the difference that makes the difference” between average to good, and from good to excellent riding, world wide.
This 2 day experience will open a new path of development for your and your horse, in your journey to be the best that you both can be, and your quest to develop the partnership of a lifetime!
With roughly 60 days between symposium #’s 2 and 3, complete the deep dive into **CORE TRANSFORMATION** by participating in, or auditing…

SYMPOSIUM # 3 -THE COMPLETION OF CORE TRANSFORMATION - THE SYMBIOSIS OF YOUR CORE WITH YOUR HORSE’S CORE - PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER January 11-12, 2025 at Horseshoe Springs

Join us for the experience of a lifetime with the iconic **Hilda Gurney**, as she takes the concepts learned in the first two symposiums and critiques with a view from the judges box!
Hilda Gurney is a force of nature.
There aren’t enough accolades to truly describe what this incredible woman has done for the sport of Dressage. From becoming an Olympian to actually writing the tests that we have performed, Hilda has developed an unparalleled depth of knowledge about horses, how they function, both physically and emotionally, and about the riding/training skillsets necessary to compete at the very top!
Ride with Hilda, or simply audit and marvel at her eye, as she critiques form to function on how the rider impacts the performance of the horse, and how the performance of the horse impacts the rider. The phrase (and book) **“When two spines align”**, penned by **Beth Baumert,** aptly describes the goal of this symposium finale as **Hilda evaluates the newly transformed partnerships between horses and riders as they ride through the levels, with the eye of a judge!**

To our knowledge, the concept we are presenting, CORE TRANSFORMATION, within a series of three symposiums has never been conceived of, much less produced! It is with pride and gratitude (to you, our members and supporters), that the ADA education committee has been enabled to offer this incredible experience.

Thank you all!

ADA Education Committee

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than being distracted by negative emotions or rivalries. Additionally, experienced riders who share their knowledge and tips with newcomers foster a sense of community and support, helping everyone improve and succeed together.

Respect Between Trainers and Competitors

The relationship between trainers and competitors is pivotal in the development and success of riders. A respectful relationship builds trust and facilitates open communication, allowing for more effective training and learning. Trainers who listen to their competitors' concerns and feedback demonstrate respect and understanding, which encourages competitors to be open to guidance and constructive criticism. Providing constructive feedback that focuses on improvement rather than just pointing out mistakes helps build confidence and fosters a growth mindset. Similarly, competitors can show respect by appreciating their trainers' expertise and dedication, remaining receptive to advice, and working collaboratively towards their goals. Setting realistic and achievable goals together can also enhance this relationship, ensuring that both trainers and competitors are aligned in their expectations and efforts.

Equally important is the respect among trainers themselves. Trainers may employ different techniques and philosophies, and it is crucial to acknowledge and respect these differences. Speaking negatively about another trainer or their methods can create a destructive environment and distract riders from their focus. Instead, trainers should discuss any differences in techniques with their riders in an objective manner, emphasizing that various methods can be effective and that the goal is always the well-being and progress of the horse and rider. Unless a technique is abusive to the animal or person, it is best to avoid negative discussions during the show. By fostering a respectful and professional atmosphere among trainers, we help create a more supportive environment for everyone involved.

Valuing Volunteers

Volunteers play a critical role in the success of dressage events, often working behind the scenes to ensure everything runs smoothly. Their contributions are invaluable, and recognizing their efforts is essential for maintaining a positive and supportive environment. Showing appreciation for volunteers can take many forms, from a simple thank you to public recognition during events. Expressing gratitude not only makes volunteers feel valued but also encourages them to continue their involvement, which is crucial for the sustainability of events. Competitors and trainers can help by offering assistance when needed and by being patient and understanding, especially when things don't go as planned. Creating a culture where volunteers are appreciated and respected ensures that these vital contributors remain engaged and motivated, ultimately benefiting the entire dressage community.

By fostering mutual respect among competitors, trainers, and volunteers, we create a supportive and positive environment that enhances performance, cooperation, and enjoyment. Respectful interactions not only improve individual experiences but also strengthen the community, ensuring the continued success and growth of dressage events.

Managing Stress and Emotions Constructively

Managing stress and emotions constructively is crucial for maintaining a positive atmosphere at dressage events. By employing practical strategies, competitors, trainers, and volunteers can ensure that their interactions remain respectful and supportive, enhancing the overall experience for everyone involved.

Techniques for Competitors

Competitors often face high levels of stress and pressure during events. Managing these emotions constructively is essential for maintaining focus and performing well. In our previous Centerline article from last month (Volume 24, Issue 7), we discussed several effective techniques in great detail, including controlled breathing, visualization, and mindfulness practices. We encourage readers to refer to that article for specific instructions on how to implement these strategies, https://tinyurl.com/5779rcuf.

One such technique is controlled breathing, such as the 4-7-8 breathing method. This approach involves inhaling quietly through the nose for four seconds, holding the breath for seven seconds, and exhaling completely through the mouth for eight seconds. Repeating this cycle several times can help calm the nervous system and reduce anxiety.

Visualization is another powerful tool for competitors. By vividly imagining a successful performance, riders can build confidence and mentally rehearse their tests. This practice helps reinforce positive expectations and reduce anxiety, making the

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actual performance feel more familiar and achievable. For instance, competitors can visualize themselves executing each movement flawlessly, focusing on the positive emotions associated with a successful ride.

Mindfulness practices can also help riders stay present and fully engage with the current moment. Techniques such as grounding oneself before mounting, performing a body scan to identify and relax areas of tension, and focusing on the rhythm of the breath and horse's movements can significantly reduce anxiety and improve focus. These mindfulness exercises not only help riders manage their emotions but also enhance their connection with their horses, promoting a more harmonious and effective partnership.

By implementing these techniques, competitors can better manage their stress and emotions, leading to improved performance and a more enjoyable experience at dressage events. For more detailed instructions on these methods, please refer to our July 2024 Centerline article.

Techniques for Trainers

Trainers play a critical role in managing the emotional climate of their competitors. By maintaining composure and offering positive support, trainers can help their riders perform at their best. One key aspect is staying calm and composed, even in stressful situations. A trainer's demeanor can greatly influence their competitor's emotional state, and a calm trainer can help instill a sense of confidence and stability.

Providing constructive feedback is essential for fostering a positive and productive training environment. Trainers should focus on offering feedback that is specific, actionable, and aimed at improvement. Avoiding negative or overly critical comments helps build confidence and encourages continuous growth. For example, instead of pointing out a rider's mistakes, trainers can highlight areas for improvement and offer practical suggestions for achieving better results.

Encouragement and motivation are also vital components of effective training. Using positive reinforcement to acknowledge strengths and achievements helps competitors stay motivated and focused on their progress. Reminding riders of their successes and potential can boost their confidence and resilience, enabling them to handle the pressures of competition more effectively.

Supporting Volunteers

Creating a supportive environment for volunteers is crucial for ensuring their continued engagement and motivation. Volunteers often work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure events run smoothly, and their contributions are invaluable. Clear communication is key to preventing confusion and reducing stress. Volunteers should receive clear instructions about their roles and responsibilities, and any questions or concerns should be addressed promptly and respectfully.

Expressing appreciation for volunteers' efforts is another important strategy. Regularly thanking volunteers, both privately and publicly, helps them feel valued and recognized for their contributions. Public recognition during events, such as announcements or award ceremonies, can highlight their hard work and dedication, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.

In addition to these general strategies, there are specific ways in which riders and trainers can positively impact staff and volunteers:

1. **Personal Thank You Notes:** Taking the time to write a personal thank you note to a volunteer can make a significant difference. This small gesture shows that you appreciate their individual efforts and contributions.
2. **Offering Assistance:** When possible, offer to help volunteers with their tasks, whether it's setting up equipment or distributing materials. This not only eases their workload but also shows that you value their role in the event.
3. **Positive Interactions:** Make a point to greet and thank volunteers throughout the event. A smile and a few kind words can go a long way in making volunteers feel appreciated and motivated.
4. **Acknowledging Their Role:** During team meetings or in public addresses, acknowledge the vital role that volunteers play in the success of the event. This recognition can boost their morale and encourage continued participation.

We encourage riders and trainers to find the time to implement one of these easy strategies in a very intentional way at the next event. Observe how this impacts the overall mood and atmosphere. By fostering a positive culture and showing appreciation for volunteers, riders and trainers directly benefit from a more engaged and motivated support team, which ultimately enhances the success and enjoyment of dressage events.

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By creating a supportive environment for volunteers, competitors and trainers ensure that these essential contributors remain engaged and motivated. This not only benefits the volunteers but also enhances the overall experience for everyone involved in the dressage community.

Maintaining a Supportive and Positive Environment

Creating and maintaining a supportive and positive environment at dressage events is essential for fostering mutual respect and ensuring the well-being of all participants. A culture of respect and understanding enhances the overall experience, promotes effective collaboration, and contributes to the long-term success of events.

Creating a Culture of Respect

Fostering a culture of respect requires intentional actions and consistent behavior from all participants. Respect should be demonstrated through every interaction, whether between competitors, trainers, or volunteers. For example, competitors can lead by example by treating each other with kindness and courtesy, even in the heat of competition. Acknowledging a fellow rider's efforts and achievements, regardless of the outcome, sets a positive tone and encourages sportsmanship.

Trainers also play a critical role in creating a culture of respect. By modeling respectful behavior and promoting positive interactions, trainers can influence their competitors to do the same. This includes offering constructive feedback in a supportive manner, avoiding negative comments about others and addressing any conflicts or concerns privately and respectfully. When trainers respect each other and acknowledge the diversity of approaches, it creates a more collaborative and less contentious environment.

Encouraging Open Communication

Open communication is a cornerstone of a supportive environment. Encouraging dialogue among competitors, trainers, and volunteers helps resolve conflicts, address concerns, and promote understanding. Competitors can foster open communication by being approachable and willing to listen to others' perspectives. Sharing experiences and insights can help build a sense of camaraderie and mutual support. Trainers can facilitate open communication by encouraging their riders to voice their concerns and by providing a safe space for them to do so. Volunteers should also feel comfortable communicating their needs and feedback, knowing that their contributions are valued and respected.

Celebrating Contributions

Recognizing and celebrating the contributions of all participants is vital for maintaining a positive and supportive environment. Celebrations can take many forms, from formal recognition ceremonies such as our year end awards to informal expressions of gratitude.

Competitors and trainers can also celebrate each other's achievements, both big and small. Acknowledging personal bests, successful performances, and improvements, regardless of the final standings, helps create a culture of encouragement and motivation. This recognition fosters a sense of accomplishment and encourages continued effort and dedication.

Analogously, consider a well-coordinated orchestra where each musician, regardless of their instrument, is essential for creating a harmonious performance. Just as the conductor acknowledges the contributions of each section, recognizing the efforts of all participants in a dressage event ensures that everyone feels valued and motivated to perform at their best. This collective acknowledgment strengthens the community and promotes a positive and supportive atmosphere.

Conclusion

Fostering respect and understanding among competitors, trainers, and volunteers is essential for creating a positive and supportive environment at dressage events. We explored the importance of mutual respect, discussing how it enhances the overall experience and promotes effective collaboration. By managing stress and emotions constructively, we can ensure that interactions remain respectful and supportive, benefiting everyone involved.

Creating a culture of respect requires intentional actions and consistent behavior. Encouraging open communication and celebrating the contributions of all participants helps maintain a positive atmosphere. I encourage all participants to find the

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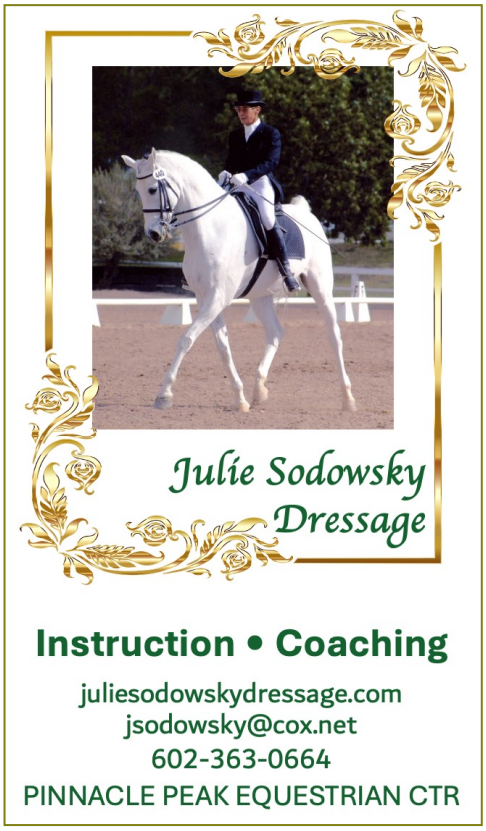
time to implement one of the strategies discussed in this article at the next event. Whether it's writing a personal thank you note to a volunteer, offering assistance, or fostering open communication, these actions can significantly impact the overall mood and success of the event. By creating a culture of respect, encouraging open communication, and celebrating contributions, we can ensure that Arizona Dressage Association events are not only successful but also enjoyable for everyone involved. Implementing these strategies requires intentional effort and consistent behavior, but the rewards are significant. A supportive and positive environment enhances performance, fosters collaboration, and ensures the long-term success and growth of the dressage community.



About the Author: Leslie Sherlin, PhD, PhD, MAC, MSc, MAPH, LPC, CMPC, NCC, BCC, BCN, BCB, ECP, QEEGDL, CTP, is a dedicated dressage rider, Certified Sport Psychology Consultant, and Licensed Professional Counselor with years of experience in sport and performance psychology. Having helped elite athletes across the world, he is passionate about helping other riders manage fear and anxiety to achieve their full potential. Dr. Sherlin combines his expertise in mental performance with his love for dressage to provide practical advice and support to the riding community.

Contact Information: For more tips and guidance, you can reach Dr. Sherlin at leslie@drsherlin.com or by visiting https://sherlinconsultinggroup.com.







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2024 Schooling Show & Clinic Dates

March 16th – Clinic- Kerry Picken- Equestrian Pilates –Williamson Valley

May 18th – Schooling Show- Dori Vlatten-Schmitz – Chino Valley Eq Park

June 1st – Clinic- Michell Combs – American Ranch, Prescott

July 20th – Schooling Show- Krista Peek – American Ranch, Prescott

Sept 7th – Schooling Show- Michell Combs – Chino Valley Eq Park

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www.nacofada.com

2024 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY 2025

11-12: ADA Symposium #3, Horseshoe Springs

FEBRUARY

3-4: ADA Spring Celebration: WestWorld, Scottsdale

MARCH

9-10: TDC March Madness: Pima Country Fairgrounds, Tucson

16: NAC Clinic Equestrian Pilates with Kerry Picken: Williamson Valley

APRIL

20-21: Dressage at Bar A

24: ADA Western Dressage in The Desert: WestWorld, Scottsdale

MAY

18: NAC Schooling Show: Chino Valley Equestrian Park

JUNE

1: Clinic with Michell Combs: American Ranch, Prescott

7-9: Roadrunner I: Pima Country Fairgrounds, Tucson

15-16: ADA Summer Heat: WestWorld, Scottsdale

JULY

20: NAC Schooling Show: American Ranch, Prescott

AUGUST

16-17: Roadrunner II: Pima County Fairgrounds, Tucson

SEPTEMBER

7: NAC Schooling Show: Chino Valley Equestrian Park, Michell Combs

28: ADA Symposium #1, Bar A

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

2-3: ADA Fall Fiesta: WestWorld, Scottsdale

9-10: TDC Fall Festival I & II: Pima Country Fairgrounds, Tucson

DECEMBER

7-8: ADA Symposium #2, Bar A

Our Mission:

The Arizona Dressage Association is a not-for-profit organization whose goal is to promote the advancement of classical dressage through educational opportunities and programs, and the rigorous evaluations received at recognized and schooling dressage shows.

ARIZONA DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION
PO Box 31602
Phoenix, AZ 85046-1602