

A Rider's Guide to Sports Psychology

By Dr. Margot Nacey

Test Your Performance Attitude

With the advent of the show season just around the corner it is appropriate that you consider your goals and objectives for the show season. In order to improve your performance, it is necessary that you assess your needs. If you can accurately define your needs then you can direct your energy towards specific goals.

The following is a mini-survey of your performance attitude with this objective in mind. Without the

insight that comes from self-knowledge we lack a full picture of our performance weaknesses and strengths. Answer these questions spontaneously; do not labor over any question. Your first response is usually your best.

Place a check mark by your answer to each question. Please mark only one answer for each question, then total your score.

1. I believe psychology can help my performance.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

2. I get angry at my horse during competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

3. I get distracted and forget the course, pattern or test during competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

4. Prior to competition I can visualize my ride perfectly.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

5. I want to ride my very best.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

6. It is easy for me to keep my emotions positive during competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

7. I feel good about myself and my horse in competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

8. I believe that I am a good rider.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

9. I feel that my mind is racing, spinning during important moments of competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

10. I am fearful during competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

11. I mentally practice what I learn in clinics and lessons.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

12. I feel good about the goals which I have set for myself and my horse.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

13. I love to compete, even when my horse is difficult during competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

14. I put myself and my horse down during competition.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

15. I can become unsure very swiftly and doubt my decisions.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

16. Mistakes I made in competition devastate me.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

17. I can settle myself and my horse down in order to regain our concentration.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

18. Mentally seeing myself and my horse in motion is easy for me.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

19. I have trouble with both making myself practice and conditioning my horse.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

20. I withdraw into myself when I receive a little bad luck.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

21. I give a total effort during competition, no matter the circumstances.

(1) ___ Almost Always (2) ___ Often (3) ___ Sometimes (4) ___ Seldom (5) ___ Almost Never

Now let's see what your score is. You will note that there was a number value given to each of the five choices you checked. For example: "Almost Never" equals a number value of five. Take the number and put it next to the question number in the following groups. This will help you make a profile of strong and weak areas.

| Category | Questions | Scores | Totals |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------|--------|
| Self-Confidence | Questions 1, 8, 15: | _____ | _____ |
| Negative Energy | Questions 2, 9, 16: | _____ | _____ |
| Attention Control | Questions 3, 10, 17: | _____ | _____ |
| Visual & Imagery Control | Questions 4, 11, 18: | _____ | _____ |
| Motivational Energy | Questions 5, 12, 19: | _____ | _____ |
| Positive Energy | Questions 6, 13, 20: | _____ | _____ |
| Attitude Control | Questions 7, 14, 21: | _____ | _____ |

If any of your scores fall below ten that is a clue that this area needs strengthening. If your score is between 13 and 15 your skills are fine; if your score is between 10 and 12 you need to improve, and, if your score is between 3 and 9 you need to grow, especially in this area.

Hopefully, you will have established areas of growth and development, as well as areas of strong skills. The format and questioning for this mini-survey is borrowed from James E. Loehr's book, *Mental Toughness Training for Sports*. For a more complete performance inventory, please consult pages 161 through 167 or Dr. Loehr's excellent book.

If you have any questions or concerns, please address them to Dr. Margot P. Nacey, 1630 25th Avenue, Greeley, CO 80631.

Dr. Nacey was an A.H.S.A. steward and dressage technical delegate for 15 years; she came from a family of professional horse people and started competing when she was nine. Margot is a licensed clinical psychologist and has been in private practice for 15 years. She is the director of The Northern Colorado Center for Learning Disorders and on the faculties of The University of Northern Colorado and Lesley College.