

Performance Edge Sport Technology

Riding is a demanding sport. It can also be a frustrating sport, whether you are competing at top levels or just riding at your local stable. When riders run into problems in the ring or on the trail, their tendency is to solve them by working harder or taking more lessons, or both. Sometimes that works. When it does-



Doris Worcester creates programs that are personalized for each rider.

n't, it may just be time to bring in someone like Doris Worcester, MSW, LICSW, CCBT.

Advanced degrees, certifications and licenses tell you that Doris is a highly trained therapist. More than 25 years in clinical practice and her work with equestrians ranging from nationally-ranked competitors to pleasure riders tell you she is also very successful in the field of sport psychology.

What you won't learn by looking at her credentials is that she is a rider herself. In fact, Doris was once a competitive rider who dropped out at the age of 24. "At that point I was working and showing in an 'A' hunter/jumper barn. I was riding a lot and learning a lot, but it just wasn't fun anymore." Doris pauses then adds quietly, "I walked away from riding. I regretted that for

many years."

It wasn't until Doris was studying at the Hendricks Institute and was asked to go back to riding to complete an assignment that she got back in the saddle. "When I returned to riding, I had to start all over again as a beginner. That was a shock." Doris laughs now but the anxiety and fear she felt on returning to riding made for a lot of "...body tension." When she realized she wasn't having any fun, she decided to try some of her own medicine to help herself

relax and enjoy riding again. "I knew what it took to relax mind and body and decided to apply these principles to myself - [to] teach myself everything I teach others."

When Doris's program put her firmly back in the saddle and the show ring, she realized she had something



PHOTO: WINTHROP STUDIOS
Doris Worcester, MSW, LICSW, CCBT, works with equestrians ranging from nationally-ranked competitors to pleasure riders.

that could help riders help themselves. "I started looking at people at my barn who were spending time, money and emotional energy trying to learn how to ride well but weren't succeeding," explains Doris. "I spent time with them, tried some of my techniques and it worked."

It worked so well, in fact, that today, the sole focus of Doris's practice is helping riders solve problems, expand their skills and win more consistently. Riders like Maureen Vanderstad, a long-time competitor in dressage, says Doris is the real thing. "Doris is out there, doing it - riding. She shares her own experiences and lives your reality. It's not therapy; it's the best thing I ever did," she explains.

Geoff Teall, 2006 Show Hunter Horseman of the Year, agrees that Doris is special. "She asks all the right questions and lets you answer them so you can resolve your problems yourself." Teall enjoys the

results of Doris's counsel so much that, "I've recommended a lot of people to her and without exception all have come back to thank me."

Doris's intimate knowledge of both psychology and riding helps her offer practical ways for riders to relax and focus their minds. Unlike traditional therapy, her method is quick. "Riders want to get going. They don't want to hang around and talk about things," states Doris whose program is, "...individualized, action-oriented and real time."

She starts with an assessment. "I get the basics – a history of their riding, if they have had or have witnessed any traumatic experiences," she explains. "But what I am very interested in is their thinking, which creates their reality. My goal is to quickly find and challenge faulty beliefs."

She also looks for the recording that plays in riders' heads that tells them, "This is not working; it's not going to happen. I can't ride." Doris instructs riders not to get rid of these emotions but to modulate them. "Fear is their friend. It is paradoxical but I don't want to get rid of it; I want them to capitalize on being anxious."



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Doris, who shows regularly in the hunter-jumper ring, knows fear. She uses it to create programs that are personalized for each rider. "Some riders are good in two to four sessions and they are off and running. Others want a longer change process and a partner over time," she explains. "It is really specific to the rider." Doris works with riders by telephone as well as in her office and sometimes on site at shows.

She also teaches riders that, "Mastery is a process. You go ahead two steps, back a step, ahead three steps back

one then, suddenly, consolidation. Muscle memory, cognitive behaviors and neurology develop underneath and suddenly, the skill emerges."

That's what Doris wants and works for – the magic that happens when riders realize that changing their thoughts, actions and riding ultimately changes their lives. For her, that's good medicine.

To get more information on Doris Worcester and her practical approach to sport psychology, visit www.equestriansuccess.com. ■