



"A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself".

- Oprah Winfrey

Do you have a role model or mentor?

Probably the thing that affected me most in my childhood was the lack of a real role model or mentor. It was not till I was 17 that I met a man who actually showed interest in what I did; he took me under his wing and encouraged me to excel with horses. Do not get me wrong my family and others were involved in my life but in a more detached or negative way. My father's idea of encouragement after any particular failure or success was the same; not good enough do better! (I am sure he is proud of my achievements but he never let it be known). This on a young mind has such an impact on self-esteem and confidence. I guess this is why I have such an interest in this topic and now use this passion to teach others to overcome what they believe are their limitations but are actually ideas implanted in their brains by other people. I once heard that you teach what you have to learn and certainly in my case this is truth.

Even though my first mentor, Walter was his name, was only in my life for around 6 months he taught me so much about myself and the importance of learning from others. He encouraged me to watch others who were successful and emulate or copy them to the best of my ability, decide what fitted in with what I believed to be true about myself and throw the other stuff away. The aspect of perfection never came into our conversations, anytime I would head in that direction he always deflected it by saying things like "Pfft perfection is for people who want to give up" or "excellence is achievable, perfection is the slippery slope to defeat". I did not understand fully what he was saying at the time but it was food for thought. That was one thing Walter brought out in me and encouraged; to think!

This aspect of thinking has been an issue throughout my life and many people have said I think too much; these people all have one thing in common however, no outstanding success of their own. All good people mind you but in my opinion they have no real direction or aspirations, which again is fine; but not for this "little black duck". I have always needed a goal, a dream to work towards or I find I stagnate and become inert. Scientists tell us every individual thinks between 30,000 to 50,000 thoughts per day; that is staggering figure! These

thoughts come and go without most of us realising it but they are there effecting us and setting up our destinies. I work at choosing which thoughts I want to work with, or take a "swing at" and let the negative ones pass through to the wicketkeeper so to speak. Another mentor of mine when I asked him how he fought the negative thoughts asked me "When you walk into a dark room do you fight the darkness?" I replied "Of course not, I turn the light on", it was then I realised the wisdom of his statement. We need not fight negative thoughts we just "turn the light on" and replace them with more positive ones. This is a fundamental skill I practice every single day!

Back to the subject of however: through the years I have had many successes and failings, (I will not use the word failure as I have not given up yet and that is the only time we are a failure; if we do not give up, each failing is just a lesson towards our goals), I continue to apply the wisdom Walter and now many other mentors have taught me. In my time as a rider I have also chosen several role models to aspire to, all with certain aspects of their riding and/or character traits that I thought would benefit me; of the most influential were Andrew Hoy, Mark Todd, Reiner Klimke and Heath Ryan. These people had riding skills and character traits I chose to input into the philosophy of how I saw myself as a rider and competitor. Two other people who influenced my riding and philosophy to a great degree were Beth Turner and then later Julie Pigott who both helped me develop an attitude towards "the bigger picture" of my sport. Not just a win at all costs attitude but training and riding for me and my horse's future which would allow for bigger wins.

There were many other people I learnt various riding skills from who were invaluable to me as coaches but as mentors and role models I did not see them in that way.

When choosing a role model I look for characteristics and traits that I feel are qualities that will help me achieve what I want. This does not mean we become carbon copies of these people as we are all individuals but you take these traits and characteristics and put them into your philosophy and give them your own slant. I remember one conversation with Heath Ryan where he remarked that he had stolen everything he knows from other people and just made it better! That is para-phrasing Heath but it certainly stuck in the mind of a young and up-and-coming eventer.

Choosing our role models and mentors is not the only people we need to choose in our life, it is also very important we surround ourselves with people who will help us grow, whether as riders or as a human being, we need people who encourage and believe that we can achieve. The great thing about truly successful human beings is they all have that trait; they encourage. Psychologists tell us we become the average of the 5 people we spend the most time with. What are the people you spend your time with averaging you out to be? What are these people teaching you?

Everyone processes the information they learn through their own individual perspective, the best way I heard this described was: if I had blue tinted glasses on I would see everything blue and if you had yellow tinted glasses you would see the world a lovely shade of yellow. We could argue all day long over which colour the world is but the world would still be just what it is – the world; it is how we see it that impacts us. This lesson has helped me maintain an open mind when it comes to learning, the information can seem so different to what I know and understand, but I take off my tinted glasses and then fit the information into my philosophy the best I can.

It is so important people learn this especially pertaining to their riding as every coach can teach you *something* yet as humans we tend to shut out the information that does not “fit” with our tinted perspective. An open mind allows us to absorb the information and anything that does not fit can be either let go or put aside for future experimentation. To close our minds totally and say “no this is not how I understand it” does not allow for true learning and growth.

Everything I have learnt is through the experience of what has happened to me or what I have learnt from other people’s experiences; I have invented nothing yet I have never heard anyone teach or say what I do, exactly the same as me. We are all individuals and to try to be exactly the same as someone else is not living your own true destiny. We take bits and pieces and fit them into our own unique jigsaw puzzles and from that is where true self-worth and authentic confidence is born.

So who are your role models and mentors? Who influences how you want to ride? If you do not have a firm picture of how you want to ride then these people who could influence you so profoundly will never truly be there as they will chop and change with each new whim you have about your riding.

I have also been blessed to be a role model to many riders and even a life example for several people; in truth it has been an absolute honour and privilege but also seemed like a burden at times, for I am human and make mistakes and there have been times in my life where I did not “walk my talk” and punished myself unfairly for those mistakes. That choice created a downward cycle in my life; having now broken that cycle and now definitely walking my talk the upward cycle continues. I read somewhere “as in riding, as in life”, everything we do impacts our life as well as our riding, choose carefully who you allow to affect you and aspire to those who show qualities that you authentically desire.

“Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing”.

- Albert Schweitzer