



Your Big Why

Module One, Session Four

In this session of The Performance Project, I am going to talk to you about the power of knowing your BIG WHY. Jim Loher is a sports psychologist who studies human performance and works with elite athletes. He conducted long term studies of the habits of athletes and identified what distinguishes elite competitive athletes from just OK athletes. It was simple- a clear understanding of why they do what they do. Highly successful athletes are clear on what their sport means to them and why winning REALLY matters.

When you enter a competition or a stressful challenge, having your big why in the front of your mind, helps you rise above your Inner Critic chatter. It gives meaning to what you're doing and helps you stay above the fray. The high performance riders, professionals and amateurs I work with all get really good at connecting their competitive goal to their BIG WHY. This helps them enjoy their riding, while avoiding drama and politics as they work toward their goals. They become internally driven rather than externally motivated. Knowing your big why helps you overcome adversity and handle crisis with grace.

In his book, Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl writes about the idea that as long as a person has a purpose, they can overcome any adversity. Between 1942 and 1945, he spent time in four different Nazi concentration camps. His family died, he almost died, and he spent years watching everyone around him suffering. He wrote, "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning." And he quoted Nietzsche who said, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*."

Your Big Why is big. It's about more than winning a ribbon or moving up a level. It's about your passion for your sport or your partnership with a special animal. It's about your sense of purpose and connection. Your Big Why gives you backbone. It gives you a sense of meaning to persevere and thrive through all the things.

In order to really know your "big why" you need to be able to articulate it. Write it down. Share it. You might think you know why you do what you do. But if you find yourself getting caught up in judgement, what others think or self-doubt then you probably don't have it front and center.

You know you need to get clearer on your BIG WHY if any of the following are true:

You're more focused on outcome than process. In other words, you're so focused on your score or placing that you don't enjoy the show!

You're easily upset by things other people say or the opinions of others.

You become disappointed when things don't go well and this affects your riding, general attitude or life negatively.

You find it difficult to recover from setbacks.

You feel disenchanting, annoyed, burnt-out or lack enthusiasm for the sport you love.

You seem to have hit a glass ceiling in training or competition. No matter how hard you work, you cannot seem to break through to the next level or accomplish a particular goal.

You tend to focus on what other people think and this interferes with your ability to perform and enjoy your riding. For example, you might go to a clinic and are so concerned about what the clinician thinks that you have a crappy time and don't learn much.

You focus more on limitations and circumstances than on what you are capable of.

You get the idea. We've all been there!

Your BIG WHY is simpler than you think.

My client, Christine, who I told you wanted to qualify for the USDF national championships in Kentucky was really nervous about her goal. She felt like it was

unattainable and her Inner Critic kept telling her all the reasons why she shouldn't do it. She didn't know if she could afford it. She didn't know if her borrowed horse would be ready. She wasn't sure her marriage could withstand the demands on her time. She felt there were a lot of forces working against her. When she uncovered her big why, it helped her focus on the bigger picture rather than on all her concerns. Her BIG WHY was to live a regret-free life. She didn't want to feel like she was leaving things on the table just because she was scared or lacking confidence. Later, when she was diagnosed with cancer as she was preparing to go to Kentucky, that big why came to have even more power. She told me she just plain wasn't going to die regretting that she hadn't taken every opportunity she could. She said, "When she wants something, even if it seems out of her league, she just needs to know she's given it her all." Her big why has lifted her up and pushed her forward during some of the hardest and best times of her life.

To identify your "Big Why" answer these questions:

1. What would you miss the most if you could no longer ride?
2. What motivates you to make sacrifices for your riding?
3. Why does the sport matter to you?
4. Why does your horse matter to you?
5. Why do you take lessons/ train/ compete- why not just enjoy trail riding?
6. How do you want to feel when you're in the saddle?

Distill these answers down to a simple phrase or a couple sentences. And then OWN IT!

Have fun with this!