



ANTs & The Fear Cycle

Module Three, Session Two

In this session, I'm going to describe the sneaky companions that conspire to keep you in the fear cycle.

When left unattended, our thoughts tend to veer toward the negative. Throughout human history we've needed to be vigilant about threats in order to survive. We are genetically programmed to notice danger so we can avoid it and stay alive. Have you ever had an experience where you had a whole bunch of good things happen but all you could focus on is the one bad thing? Once I got ninety nine positive evaluations after a seminar I taught and one critical one. Do you think I laid in bed all night thinking about the ninety nine positive responses? Hell no. I beat myself up for days over that one negative response.

When I ask rooms full of riders for all the thoughts that go through their minds when they're in the warmup ring or at the ingate, I get a cacophony of eager voices... "What if I make a fool of myself?" "I'm out of my league." "The rail birds think I'm a terrible rider." "I'm going to make a mistake." "I'm too old or too fat or not good enough to be here." "What if the judge doesn't like my horse?" And on and on. It always blows me away that they get so excited to get all this vitriol out! It's super cathartic and the room echoes with "me too"s.

We all have them- automatic negative thoughts or what I call, ANTs. These are the negative thoughts that enter your mind before you have a chance to fully evaluate a situation. They tend to make up the majority of our thoughts unless we make a conscious effort to override them. ANTs are the Inner Critic's faithful minions.

Even though we no longer need to be on the lookout for lions and tigers and bears in order to survive, ANTs still take up a whole lot of brain space. Focusing on them can

mess with our mojo- especially when our acoustical horses can mostly hear everything that we think.

ANTs keep our past negative experiences creeping into the present by reminding us of them constantly. It's natural for our thoughts to center around the past and the negative so it takes some effort to get them to center positively around the present.

In The Performance Project, the Strategic Planning process and the Mindset Mastery tools are designed to do just this. So keep going!