



Courage to Confidence

Module Three, Session Five

The definition of confidence is “a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities.” We all want that- to move around in our lives with certainty. We want to feel able to take risks, do hard things and have new experiences. Horses like to feel safe and we know they respond more positively to people who have confidence. Most riders who come to me for coaching say they want to increase their confidence so they can do a, b or c. They think they need to build their confidence first, so they will then be able to ride well, jump bigger fences or get their bronze medal.

Most of us have an unconscious misconception. We think a person who seems confident is able to achieve all they achieve because of that confidence. We tend to compare our insides to others' outside appearances. We think confidence precedes courage rather than the other way around.

I always hate to be the bearer of bad news. But in this case I always am. Courage doesn't come from confidence. You don't get to feel confident before you do the hard things. Unfortunately, confidence comes from doing the hard things despite being afraid, feeling uncomfortable or not feeling ready. Cultivating the courage to do things when you are not yet feeling confident is what breeds confidence.

You might recognize this in yourself if you ever feel reluctant to do things that others seem to know you are capable of. You might feel reluctant to move up a level, sign up for a show or try a particular movement because you think you should feel confident and ready first.

The definition of courage is “the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to have strength in the face of difficulty, uncertainty, or fear.” The word comes from the Latin word, “Coeur”, which means heart.

In my experience, there are different ways we can all access courage:

One is by **shifting from judgment to curiosity**. Judgement tends to breed fear and shut down willingness. It can cause perfectly capable riders to feel confused or frustrated when they think there is only one right thing to do. If you believe there is only right and wrong you might be afraid to experiment, you might be unwilling to take risks and live in fear of doing something wrong. You might have trouble designing your own rides without an instructor present or have chronic, low grade anxiety that you can't get to the bottom of.

If any of these are familiar to you, I'd like to share with you, the concept of having a trainer's mind. If you have a trainer's mind, you're curious. You're willing to try different things. You're willing to mess up now and then for the sake of learning and getting better. When a trainer gets on a new horse, they immediately start asking questions and experimenting with what works and doesn't work for a particular horse. From the ground, it can appear that a trainer knows exactly what to do to make the horse look fabulous. The truth is, trainers feel the horse out. They gather information and start a conversation with that horse. They are curious about the degrees to which different aids are needed and they play with the tools their tool kit. For all riders, no matter your level or discipline, it can be a game changer to adopt a trainer's mind! This does not mean you go out and jump huge fences or do risky things on your own. It just means you give yourself permission to experiment, to mess up and be messy if that's what it takes. Learning curves can be uncomfortable- if you have a trainer's mind, you are willing to ride up the curve, to embrace the messy middle and get through the hard stuff that comes before mastery. Confidence comes from understanding that it is ok to mess up. And from developing trust in your ability to figure things out and apply knowledge over time.

Another way to access courage is to **keep your "Big Why" in the front of your mind**. Motivation comes from knowing there is something really juicy on the other side of something hard. The most confident people, care much less about what others think of them and are dedicated to their own sense of purpose and fulfillment. If you go down the centerline thinking about how much you love your horse and how passionate you are about your sport, you'll have a very different ride than you will if you're worrying about what the judge thinks and what score you'll get.

If you have anxiety or chronic fear, it can feel really challenging to access courage! One of the most powerful practices you can have is to **acknowledge your fear and redirect your thoughts**. My definition of anxiety is a lack of self-trust. If we struggle with anxiety,

we are not actually afraid of the bad things that might happen. We are afraid of how we're going to feel. We're worried that we won't be able to handle how we'll feel if the bad things happen. A hallmark of anxiety is worry. Worry can be defined as the tendency to dwell on things that we have no control over. In riders, that often shows up as "what if" thoughts and second guessing. "What if my horse spooks?" "What if I fall off?" "What if I make a fool of myself?" "What if I injure my horse?" "What if I made the wrong decision?" and on and on.

The key to overcoming anxiety is not to chill out, stop caring or believe nothing bad is going to happen. The key to overcoming anxiety is to develop a deep down belief that you can handle whatever does happen. That you have the strength and the emotional suppleness to be OK no matter what. Your worries are not unfounded- they just usually represent things you have no control over. Acknowledge your worries and then redirect your "what if" thoughts toward what you want to create in the moment. The Mindset Mastery tools coming up in Module four will help you be able to do this.

For now, understand that confidence does not come from believing nothing bad is going to happen. It comes from believing in your own ability to deal with whatever happens. The Performance Project is all about creating this sense of certainty in yourself- throughout the course, you'll be developing both the mindset mastery and emotional suppleness to be able to do this!

In review, there are three ways to access courage: Learn to shift from judgement to curiosity, keep your "big why" in the front of your mind, and acknowledge your fear and redirect your thoughts. Start playing with these when you feel self-doubt, fear or anxiety start to steer your ship.