



Mantra Magic

Module Four, Session One

Welcome to Module Four, Mindset Mastery: The Tools. Finally! The reason it's taken a while to get to the actual mindset strategies is because they will be so much more effective for you when they're connected to a body of knowledge and an understanding of why they work. This is what makes The Performance Project different from other mental skills resources. I want you to get maximum results from the strategies I give you and to be able to integrate them into all areas of your life.

This session is called mantra magic because mantras can totally change your experience- and change your horse's experience of you.

Mantras traditionally help people focus their thoughts during meditation or religious rituals. For our purposes, a mantra is a word, phrase or line from a song, said repeatedly in order to help you shift from one emotional state to another. A mantra should inspire emotions that help you access courage, joy, a sense of calm, a competitive fire- whatever you need. It does not need to be said out loud.

A mantra is not directive. It does not remind you about what to do. "Heels down" or "relax" or "more inside leg" are not good mantras. They don't inspire. In fact, as riders, we often have a running soundtrack in our heads reminding us of all the things we should be working on. This is necessary as a part of the learning process. At some point, though, we want to trust our education and knowledge and be able to hold thoughts that will take us to a higher-level emotional state. Some examples of mantras that my clients have had are... "I am the storm." "Let it be." "It's just you and me, rock star." "Stride by stride." And "Let's dance."

I worked with a trainer once who was feeling really frustrated with herself in warm up. She kept thinking about what all the people around must be thinking about

her and she consistently had the thought that she was making a fool of herself. (Of course, it's beside the point but she is a highly respected and very capable trainer!) She was so distracted by her ANTs, that she was riding ineffectively in the warm up.

I had her first describe how she wanted to feel in the warm up- which was confident and supported. She played around with words and phrases and landed on "The people that matter want me to succeed." She replaced her ANTs with "The people that matter want me to succeed." The old thoughts still tried to sneak in but she was prepared. She practiced catching and correcting the habit- Once her mantra became the primary focus of her brain, instead of feeling judged, she felt supported- and super clear about what did not matter. The Itty Bitty Shitty Committee in her head got real quiet, real fast.

I have another client who had a hot Andalusian gelding. She called him her popcorn horse. She would get reactive when she was riding him and they would ping off one another. She needed a mantra to break that cycle. Her mantra became, "Like a duck." Every time she said it to herself, she could feel stress and nerves wash away like water off a duck's back. She practiced using this mantra to break the popcorn pattern. At the first show she went to, she had people coming up to her asking what she'd done because they'd never seen her ride him so well. That mantra took her to a place of calm and equanimity that had been elusive. She even had it engraved on a bracelet!

I recently worked with a rider who was frustrated that she was riding very conservatively in the show ring. She knew that this was due to the fact she knew her horses' previous owner might show up at any time to watch. She felt tight and restricted when she was competing in a way that she did not at home. Her horse show mantra became "Watch us!" This inspired a feeling of pride and ignited her big why which was to prove to herself that she could ride her horse as well as or better than anyone else. Her horse's previous owner showed up at her last show. She didn't think about it once and was able to go in the ring and show off for the first time.

After you've used a mantra for a while, you may decide you need a new one. It's OK! New challenges show up all the time. You may need different mantras for different horses or different situations. Practice using mantras to help you focus your thoughts and get into the zone in a variety of scenarios. Mantras allow you to be ready to catch and correct old thought habits so you can develop new, constructive patterns.

When I teach mental skills clinics that include riding, a really cool thing happens. Once a rider starts using a mantra, it makes an obvious difference in the way they ride almost immediately. I don't have to "teach" or make corrections. I simply support them in remembering to use their mantra. A mantra puts you in a state of focus that allows you to remember the things you know without having to think about them. Certain position problems and training issues go away because you're mentally and emotionally present. Using mantras can help you learn to trust your training.

ANTs often create a barrier between you and your horse. They place your focus everywhere but on the present moment. This can create anxiety for some horses. Mantras, directed to the horse, are a really powerful way to strengthen the connection between horse and rider. When my AA client, Lynne, used her mantra, "It's you and me, Rock Star!" she was able to forget about all the things that might happen and focus fully on her horse. She said she felt a sense of camaraderie with her horse rather than the sense of separation that was happening when she was thinking about all the bad things her mare might do. They've both become less spooky and are able to enjoy their rides.

Similarly, I'm working with a high performance rider who was plagued by perfectionism. She recently went into the ring for the first time at Grand Prix and thought for sure her nerves would take over. But she'd decided on a mantra she said to her horse as they were headed in the ring- "We've got this old man!" She said his ears started to flop back at her and he went into show off mode instead of fight or flight. After several years of struggling with nerves, they rocked their first Grand Prix, at the next show she earned her gold medal and they are headed to the CDI ring sooner than planned!

I have a young event rider who struggles with getting nervous and over-riding in the show jumping phase. She felt she was not fully allowing her horse to do her job and it was costing them rails. Her mantra became, "Stride by stride. Be the canter." She repeated that over and over to herself during her show jumping rounds. It helped her slow down her mind and regulate her breathing. It helped her wait for the fences to come to her and stay out of her horses' way. She completed her first intermediate level event with no faults in the show jumping!

In order to get into the zone using a mantra, you need to create one. Follow these steps:

1. Identify your ANTs. What, specifically are you thinking that is creating the

- pressure, nerves or anxiety? You might be more aware of your feelings than the thoughts that trigger them. Thoughts trigger emotions, not the other way around. You might have to dig a little.
2. Identify the emotion those thoughts cause. It might be anxiety, nerves, pressure or, in some cases, an exaggerated, compensatory calm.
 3. Identify the emotional state you'd like to be in. The majority of riders desire to feel things like calm, energized, inspired, confident, and focused. Whatever it is for you is good!
 4. Use as many descriptive words as you can to describe how you want your ride to feel.
 5. Look around: What songs do you sing along with in the car? Is there a phrase or line from a movie or a poem that resonates with you? What would you like to say to your horse?

It may take a few days for you to find it. That's OK! Once you have it, repeat it to yourself during your rides and ask your instructor or friends to remind you of it when you need reinforcement.

Keep in mind that there are some riders who need to get into a higher activation state rather than a calmer one. I have an upper level event rider whose mantra is, "Ride like tiger!" Her habitual fear cycle response is to get quiet with her energy, to get too relaxed. She uses her mantra to access a more fired-up energy state so she can be assertive enough to support her tricky horse when he gets backed off on cross country.

I'm giving you so many examples because people often draw a blank when they're first trying to come up with a mantra. It can be anything that makes you feel happy, calm, or inspired.

One objective of a mantra is for there to be no room left in your mind for ANTs or your Itty Bitt Shitty Committee. Using a mantra is like building a new super highway in your brain. It can take time to fully change a habit but most people get positive results right away. Change the way you think in order to change the way you ride.