



The Art of Winning **By Gerrie Barnes**

With the show season gearing up, I had an interesting and timely conversation with Maren Manuello, a friend and experienced show person. Maren has been involved in showing horses and winning for almost 50 years. When Maren first started showing as a youth there was no separate youth division. Everyone showed together in one class... novice, amateurs, professionals. If you were not already at an experienced level with your horse, you knew that you were not going to win your class. Maren shared with me her philosophy for staying positive while preparing yourself to win. Here are her words...

"In those days as a youth competitor, it could be pretty discouraging knowing that you were going to lose to the professionals every time you stepped into the arena. I needed to develop my own philosophy of showing so that I felt good about my show experiences and wanted to continue competing. I would develop small, individual goals for each show. I might think, today I am going to pick up a correct lead or make a straight stop. When I accomplished that goal in the arena, I was pleased with myself and my horse and was motivated to continue showing. I was not discouraged by not winning.

Another show pitfall I had to overcome was the realization that the result of showing on a particular day was a team decision: my performance, my horse's performance and the judge's personal opinion. I came to the conclusion that I was not in control of the outcome. Believing that I could control the combination of variables was a fast way to set up for failure. And, no one likes failure. How did I find success in this parameter of variables? I found a goal that I could attain. By setting a personal goal, then no matter what happens in that class I was able to find the positive.

I found that by continuing to set personal goals and then reaching those goals that I went from not winning to getting a 6th place ribbon. I did not look at that 6th place ribbon and think: I did not win. I looked at that 6th place ribbon and saw hard work and achieving very specific goals. Put another way, I did not win the ribbon, but reached a series of specific goals!

My thought for others is: continue to improve and reach individual goals and you will see rewards in ribbons and placements. You will get your own performance up to a level where the wins become more frequent.

Another pitfall may present itself: starting to get "ribbon fever". You feel as though you have to win a ribbon. It becomes easy to lose track of how you won ribbons in the first place. You begin to let the win become the most important. With this attitude you will become frustrated. There is only one winner per class. Go back and reassess your goals. Strive to gain another skill.

Frequently at this point a person starts to feel pretty good about his or her performance. That person may go to the next show level, perhaps to a breed association show. The expected result... ending up on the bottom of the pile. Instant discouragement or bad attitude.

You were succeeding at a certain level. Suddenly, you are back at the bottom. You can choose to look at this failure in two ways. You will either realize that you need to go back, do more work, set more goals, and improve specific skills. Or you can retreat and return to being the big fish in the little pond. Retreating does not increase your skills. Take that loss... that resulted from your wins... and begin again. Identify a skill or goal that is attainable and start the process again.

If you continue focusing on attaining individual goals and not focus on winning, you will continue to grow. If the win becomes all-important the fun is gone.

Basic Tip: When you get to the top, whether at a local or national level, you need to be a gracious winner. Reach out to others with a friendly handshake. Make other feel good about themselves. Life is not fair. You need to find your own way in it by finding your own goals and helping others to find theirs."

Bio: Maren Manuello lives in Sterling, CO, was raised on a ranch, given a horse on the day she was born, and taken on her first ride at 3 months old. Her wide-ranging horse activities include English and western show events, roman riding jockey, outrider for chuck wagons, and most recently versatility ranch horse. She has made 8 AQHA/APHA Champions, a national Honor Roll APHA Champion, several futurity champions and has won state and regional championships.