



Perfection Versus Progress, Prove Versus Improve

By Glenn Stewart

Perfection or Progress?

If you had to pick one of these, which one do you think is probably the most beneficial to focus on?

Prove or Improve?

Which of these would likely be most valuable?

Which two of these four words might slow you down or possibly keep you from even beginning a task, competition or learning something new? Which two words might be more fun and seem less difficult or daunting? Which two would be easier to accomplish or more achievable? Which two words could you do or be every day? What does it look like or feel like when we or someone else is trying to prove compared to when we or they are trying to improve? Which person would you rather be around Mr. or Mrs. Perfect or Mr. or Mrs. Progressive. Who is more fun?

Who does your horse want to deal with? Which would be more fun for your horse, to be perfect or progressing? What is perfect anyway and according to whom?

I believe that when we try to be perfect it's actually unachievable and puts unrealistic goals for us and our horse. I don't think it feels good to try to be perfect. Being progressive feels much more achievable with way less stress. Doing something for the purpose of improving rather than proving feels much more relaxing.

As we gain knowledge and skills what we might have referred to as perfect in the beginning will absolutely change as our awareness grows. We could spend an

unreasonable amount of time trying to achieve perfection just to find out what we thought was perfection was actually the opposite of what we should have done. For example, we might put great value at getting our horse to backup really fast and he achieves this but his nose is sticking out. What would be more important and valuable is softness. Another example might be putting great value on getting our horse to circle at a canter and he does, but he's pulling on the rope and looking outside the circle. Again, softness would be much more valuable. Not pulling on the rope and looking in, arched towards the handler would be better. Having a responsive backup and a horse that will circle at the canter are both valuable things to have but our idea of what that should look like can vary greatly. So "perfect", if there is such a thing, is very different depending our depth of knowledge and understanding.

If we spent all our time and energy trying to improve and progress we will be much farther ahead than wasting time trying to prove or be perfect. Perfect is a moving target depending how much we know. It is especially true when working with horses.

Anytime I enter into a competition or fly to another country to teach I remind myself that I'm there to improve and be progressive. The horses I handle and the people I teach can feel the difference. I know for myself it makes the event a completely different experience. If I enter a competition with the plan to improve and I win that's just an added bonus, but I want to put value on the thing that I believe is most important and that is to improve. If I go somewhere to learn something and I stick to improving rather than ever falling into the trap of trying to prove I will get much more from that learning opportunity.

What can a proving way of thinking look like or how might it be disguised? An example of this might be when we won't enter into a learning opportunity because we are worried about being in front of other people. We don't want to look stupid, incompetent or be embarrassed in some way.

Why? We really can't be any of those things unless we are trying to prove - prove something that we are not.

If we are truly there to improve we have nothing to prove to anyone. We are only there to improve and we never planned on trying to be perfect in anyway so what others might think doesn't matter.

Being perfectly ok with where we are with our skills and knowledge. Wanting to find out what we don't know. It doesn't matter how many people are watching or hear about it. That is generally a person very comfortable with progress and improving.

Many years ago I was PERFECT at saying no to things that I wasn't good at. If it made me uncomfortable, if I hadn't done that exact thing before, if I was worried about what someone might say. Every time I said no and avoided an opportunity I completely stopped progress and a chance to improve. Now when I say yes to things that make me feel the same way I'm excited to see how much I can improve. I have to prepare for the event, learn more at the event and then look back at what I did and didn't do and learn more again after the event. Much to be gained and much to be lost depending on what we choose.

Over the years I developed this way of thinking (I'm not exactly sure where it came from) and it has really made a huge difference in what I've done and my perspective on opportunities that have come along. I hope you might be able to use or benefit from a thought or two and apply it to your next opportunity.

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