

## **Marriage Relationships in the Horse Industry**

Successful marriages in the horse industry seem to be hard to find. I have been asked to address the subject of successful marriage relationships at this symposium. The view points in this presentation come from both life experiences and studying the lives of others in the horse industry. I have been involved in the industry for over 38 of my 56 years.

I have seen some wonderfully successful marriages. Yet others that have ended in heart break and divorce. I can speak about both success and failure in marriage from my own life.

I have been married to two Hall of Fame cowboys in two different disciplines of the horse industry.

Both of these marriages ended in divorce. It is not my intent in any way to belittle, or criticize these two men. Like all people, they had their many strengths and weaknesses. And besides, when there is a divorce, there is plenty of blame to go around. I bear my own share of the responsibility for these failures. You could consider these divorces a failure or a great learning experience. I choose to view them as a great learning experience. Yet I believe that with some knowledge, and change of priorities and attitudes, either of these marriages could have been successful.

After my last divorce, I spent four years traveling off and on to Brazil and other countries. During that time of living alone, I spent quite a bit of time in counseling. I also spent hours studying marriage relationship courses. Perhaps sharing with you what I have learned both by experience and study, will give you some information to examine your marriage relationship. Hopefully it will help you avoid some of the traps that cause relationships to deteriorate. I realized certain principles, that if applied, would make for a healthy and fulfilled marriage.

Relationships begin when two people meet and are attracted to one another. In the horse industry, there are different types of people with different personalities and commitments to the industry. With these many differences in personalities can come varying combinations.

For example:

1. One person may be crazy about horses. They may be a trainer, or a serious competitor. That person may be attracted to a person with no knowledge or interest in horses at all.
2. Another combination may be one where both parties are trainers and have their sights on horse training as a career.
3. Still others marry another person in the horse industry, but from a different discipline within the industry.

There are many combinations of people who are attracted to each other. Yet most of them have one thing in common. They fall in love and marry with little knowledge of what can and often does happen to couples, when the rigors of training and competing become a reality.

In this presentation I want to share with you, ways to avoid a disaster in marriages. It is my intent to share with you some ideas on how to keep your marriage healthy and fulfilled.

## **I. Building a Strong Relationship From the Start**

One of the best ways you can avoid having a disaster in a marriage is to make sure you are marrying the right person. It's been said that some of the most important decisions that you will ever make in life includes:

- Who you choose as a life-time mate.
- What you choose as an occupation.

If it is your desire to marry someone who is involved in the horse industry, here are some issues for you to consider before entering into it.

### **1. Don't make the mistake of trying to live together before you get married.**

Couples who live together to "try out marriage" have a much higher divorce rate than those who make the commitment to get married. It will take a high commitment to make the relationship work. There is no way to prepare for all the things that may come up in a relationship. Commitment is far more valuable than feelings. Feelings come and go and change, but the

commitment you make together, must be unchangeable if the relationship is to survive. Talk about how strong your commitment is before you get married, not after when the problems arise.

**2. Consider the background of the one you are considering choosing.**

Be realistic about what each of you bring to the relationship. There are many spiritually and emotionally wounded people. This is a result of the breakdown of the family. It is also caused by the lack of nurturing and solid parenting. Many children have been raised by one parent or grandparents or have nearly raised themselves. This has produced a generation of people who have no examples of whole, balanced marriage relationships. Women who are angry at their fathers and have not dealt with their anger and sons who are angry at their mothers and have not dealt with it are bad choices for marriage partners. Talk about your backgrounds with your potential partner and be aware of any red flags.

**3. Pay attention to how your potential marriage partner communicates.**

When upset, does he/she give you the silent treatment, throw a fit, or run away. Does this person angrily strike out or become verbally abusive? This is a big key to the survival of your relationship. A person who is solid in working through situations is usually one who doesn't have to be right all the time, but can say, "I'm sorry, I may need to look at this differently."

**4. Discover what type of personality you are and what qualities you have that may later drive each other to anger.**

Remember, opposites attract. Learn the qualities that you have that are opposites. Workaholics are usually type A personalities. Also most serious competitors are type A. Two of these together can be very hard to balance.

**5. Realize that a potentially good marriage partner is one, who is mature.**

This person should have goals and have resolved and dealt with the past. This person should have healthy self-esteem. He/she should be a giving person who communicates honestly. It is very important that the person you marry value God, other people and self. If any of these qualities are missing, there is cause for taking your time and discussing what the missing qualities could do to the relationship.

**6. Discuss together, whether or not you want children.**

If you decide to have children, will the responsibility be shared by both parents or only one? Who will make sure they get to school, extra activities, church, and special occasions? Jackie Kennedy Onassis once said, "No matter what success you reach in life, if you have failed to be a good parent, your success is of no importance."

**7. Discuss how you will handle finances and your business.**

Another issue you need to consider before marriage is who and how the family finances will be handled. As you probably know, many marriages have ended over this very important issue. Each side should carefully discuss the attitudes, goals and plans that each has for your future finances. When success starts to come to your business, how big do you want your horse operation to be? If you are not successful in the horse industry, what then will you do? When it is necessary to travel because of your business, will both go, or one stay behind? If there are children, what is the plan to watch over them? What plans do you have to take a break from the business? (planning leisure activities away from the horses can keep you much fresher and give longevity to your career) What family activities will take priority over the business? (birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, etc.) If you are going to live on family property or go into business with a family member, it is important to establish who has final decisions before entering into that situation.

**8. Talk about the disruptive emergencies that can upset your plans when you have animals.**

This is extremely important when a horse person is marrying someone who has little or no interest in horses. They will have a far more difficult time being flexible, when previous plans are ruined when a horse gets sick or gets loose. There will be many opportunities to learn to be flexible, but both parties must agree before hand as to how respond to horse emergencies.

**9. Talk about the house duties.**

I have seen women who work all day in the barn with her husband and then be expected to do all the cooking and housework. Meanwhile he sits in front of the TV all evening. This can cause all kinds of tension and stress in the marriage. House duties should be shared if both partners are working outside the home, or in the business together.

**10. Ask your parents, friends, or family members what they see in your relationship.**

The Bible says, “In the multitude of counselors, there is safety.” Proverbs 11:14b KJV. Friends, family, and other counselors can see things you cannot. (It is easier to see someone else’s strengths and weaknesses than it is to see your own.) It is critical that you receive pre-marital counseling. Some churches offer this service. There are also seminars and workshops that can give you the tools to help you have a healthy marriage.

It is disturbing when one thinks he/she is in love, to ask difficult and penetrating questions. No one really wants to look for red flags. We want to think that we simply fall in love and live happily ever after. But disasters can be avoided, if we are willing to ask difficult questions and make hard decisions before entering into marriage. Relationships are a lot like training horses. You can fix a spoiled horse, but it is much easier to train one right from the start.

## **II. How Disaster Can Strike a Marriage**

But what happens if people don’t ask and answer the right questions before getting married? What happens, if for what ever reason, they quit working hard at making their marriage a success? When that happens, disaster can strike. No one gets married to get divorced. But somehow resentment, bitterness, hurts, misunderstandings, creep into the marriage.

For example: Most trainers and competitors start out small. They get started in what is known as “ Ma-Pa” operations. Most that I have interviewed for this presentation have said that this was the best time in their marriage. This is because they did everything together. They did everything from handing the paperwork of their business to cleaning stalls together. But there are several factors that can change the dynamics of a small beginning. These factors, if not dealt with carefully, can have a negative effect on a marriage. I want to list some of the most common of these factors.

1. Children come along.
2. Success to the business comes along.
3. Work load increases with the growth of the operation.

4. The mismanagement of funds creates a need to work harder.

Children require a great deal of time not only as infants, but throughout their years at home. They have school and church activities as well as sports, and music lessons. They not only need a ride to all of their events, but need support and encouragement from their parents.

Success creates more business. This requires more book-work, more time spent on the phone, more horses to train, and more traveling. In fact it requires more of everything. This usually includes building more stalls and hiring more help.

When there is a lack of understanding on managing income, it is sometimes easier to work harder. It seems easier to take in more horses than it is to learn to manage the income. I see this a lot in the horse industry.

These stresses can cause one or both partners to begin to feel neglected and overwhelmed. If the expression of their feelings is not heard, they can begin to resent their partner, the horses, the business, and the customers. The root of this resentment is that they feel lonely, neglected, or used. It is then that they begin to resent the thing that is taking their partner away.

When counseling a couple that has reached this point, it is unbelievably sad to see how far apart their views and feelings are on what is happening to their relationship.

I hear statements like the following from the one who is “caught up” in the horses. (this can be a man or woman)

“I have to work to keep everything going.”

“What do you want me to do, retire?”

“I sit in front of the TV at night because I’ve worked hard all day. I deserve to.”

“Who do you think supports all we have?”

“I would like to have more time with my family, but I don’t know how to cut back and still pay the bills.”

“If you don’t like it leave-- you knew this is what I wanted to do when we met.”

These people are in denial about their feelings and unmet needs towards their children and spouse. They will often continue in their destructive ways even when confronted by friends and family. It usually takes a disaster to the one in denial, or a spouse leaving to begin to get their attention. This will usually cause them to see the tragedy of their situation.

But what about the neglected partner? Their feelings and viewpoint are far different. You will often hear them say,

“I am so lonely.”

“I just want my spouse to spend as much time with me as he/she do with one horse or customer.”

“All I want is a balanced life with my marriage partner.”

“I am willing to seek counseling or help to keep our relationship from ruin.”

“My partner has missed the children’s school functions and special occasions because their main priority is horses.”

“I am tired of trying to keep meals hot and/or waiting for him/her to eat with the family.”

“I feel hopeless and totally discouraged.”

“I feel trapped in this lifestyle.”

“I am going to leave if things don’t change.”

When a relationship reaches this point, usually the anger, resentment and bitterness all but overcome the relationship. What started out as a dream has become a nightmare. The downward spiral can produce even more pain.

The neglected mate may become vulnerable to the attention of another person which can result in an adulterous affair. The temptation to find someone else to meet his/her unmet needs is ever-present on the road. The mate who is traveling is also vulnerable.

If there are children, they can develop illnesses, depressions and related problems. They learn how to get attention by getting into trouble or trying to excel at sports, school, or other things. When the father or mother is present in the home, but absent in the nurturing process of the children, it causes disastrous effects on the children. This is known as abandon abuse. It may cause a daughter to seek male affirmation. It can cause a son to have no fathering skills.

This is not a new phenomenon. One of the American founding fathers, William Penn wrote, "Men are generally more careful of the breed of their horses and dogs than of their children."

Can these destructive problems be overcome? Can this downward spiral be reversed? Is it possible for a broken marriage to be healed? Absolutely. I believe that any marriage relationship can be healed. This can only happen when both parties are willing to work at it. The relationship is inevitably doomed if one or both partners are unwilling to change. When one partner is unwilling, the other one usually learns to exist unfulfilled (become numb) or chooses to leave. Either way, there is misery for them and disaster to the children involved.

### **III. Healing a Broken Marriage**

Suppose you have recognized yourself in some of the above scenarios or know a friend who is in this situation. You are wondering how the relationship can be saved or what needs to happen to start the process of healing.

The first step out of any problem is to realize there is a problem. Many people refuse to admit there is something wrong. To admit there is a problem is to give up the use of self-defeating techniques against change. Here are a few of the self defeating techniques.



1. denial
2. excuses
3. blame
4. rationalizing
5. justifying

Working through these issues may require the help of a counselor who is not involved personally with your situation. (family, friends, etc.) This counselor should be one who is not easily intimidated and will hold you accountable to work on the relationship. I have talked with people who have seen a counselor and did not like him/her. Shop for a counselor just as you would for a truck. Find one who meets your expectations, one who is professional, who gives you assignments and sends you forward. Avoid those who just want to keep you coming for the income. Some churches have a counseling ministry that is free of charge. Just remember, counseling is not a dirty word. Some people see, going to a counselor as a very humiliating experience. While it may be difficult, it is worth every minute of it, if your marriage and family will stay together.

I would like to share with you some principles that are very personal. They have changed my life and are helping me enjoy a very successful, and happy third marriage. In 1997 I agreed to come to this symposium. It is now 1999. I was asked to speak about relationships where one partner had no interest with the horse business. At that time, I had no experience along this line except for counseling people in that situation.

But in August of 1998, I married a man named George Kernek. George grew up in a great home with solid parents and a brother and sister who are both successful in what they do. He played baseball and basketball and went through Oklahoma University on a basketball scholarship. He played professional baseball with the Tulsa Oilers and later the St. Louis Cardinals. He has a business as an Independent Insurance Agent and is active in many business organizations. In his own words, he knows nothing about horses except that "they will step on you and hurt you."

George has been married once before. When we met, we were in agreement on one thing, we would never marry again! We began to go to basketball games together and if one of us needed an escort, we would ask the other. In

short, we became best friends. We talked about everything from our children to our dreams to our jobs. It was a year before we decided to marry. I came from an alcoholic home with a background of suicides in my family. I have spent a big portion of my life seeking knowledge on healing old wounds. I was apprehensive in many ways about committing to another marriage. I had become very content to be alone. I was not lonely. The loneliest time in my life was when I was previously married. It seemed like such a risk to marry again. George was more certain than I that it could work. He was willing to work through any problems he and I would face. After much prayer, thought, counseling and discussion, I felt sure that our marriage would work.

Before we got married we discussed everything we could think of that might be a potential problem before marrying and committed to work through anything that comes up that we hadn't talked about.

We are living some principles that are helping make our marriage work. Remember he cares very little about horses but loves me deeply.

1. **We agreed to pray together each day.** We heard a statistic that couples that pray together are rarely, if ever found in the divorce court. We are committed to studying the Bible and praying together. We rarely miss a day unless one of us is gone.

2. **We tell each other constantly, "I love you" and go into detail about the specialness that we see in each other.** This is one way to cultivate and grow the love that we have for each other. (love = time shared. It is not words but actions.)

3. **We communicate on a daily basis to be sure our lives are well balanced.** This includes our children, our businesses, other family, friends, ball games, horse activities, Chamber of Commerce work, church, and all the aspects of our different lives. In short, we are finding that the big key is communication, dedication and commitment to keeping the relationship growing. Honesty is a big issue with both of us.

4. **He takes an interest in what I do and encourages me.** He agreed that I should not change my lifestyle in the horse industry, but continue doing what

I enjoy and visa versa. I wish he had more time to golf, because he enjoys that as much as I do horses.

5. **We keep a calendar on our wall.** When George has a function that he needs me to attend, He marks it down on the calendar and visa versa. We try to plan ahead so there are no conflicts. My business is out of our home, so I always check with him before bringing someone over for a two day lesson.

6. **We have become very sensitive and encouraging about each others activities.** We realize that each of us need time for our own space. He likes to golf as much as he has opportunities to do so. I try to plan my horse shows on the days he golfs.

7. **We discussed cooking and cleaning duties because this is something he also likes to do.** We have a great time cooking together or if I am working late, he will prepare something for us to eat. If time is short, he will sometimes go out and bring a meal home.

8. **We try to plan fun things into our days.** Taking time out to have fun and laughter is a priority. This will not always happen on its own. We have learned to plan ahead. George is good at keeping humor into every situation. I'm more serious and had to learn to "lighten up." We have learned to be spontaneous, flexible, and laugh at ourselves.

George and I are finding that anytime there is a priority out of balance, stress will arise. We have had plenty of opportunities to strive for balance. He had put his home up for sale, so we are moving out of it. I am writing a book and facing deadlines. He has his job and I have a barn full of horses. He has as many business commitments as I do and they are rarely in the same place. Balance is the key, but it takes planning to achieve balance. It just doesn't happen on its own--it must be developed on a continual basis and adjustments must be made as necessary.

One way that you can know how you are doing with your spouse and children is simply to ask the question, "How am I doing? Do we need to make any changes?" Be prepared to listen intently to the answer. Be willing to do what is necessary to improve your relationships.

Be aware that the words you speak either build up another person or tear them down. I see so many couples take "digs" at each other in front of other

people. This is like tearing your own house down. Teasing can be a subtle form of cruelty and sometime used to get back at your mate. Each time you verbalize something, think ahead as to whether you are tearing down or building up your partner and children.

Marriage is work and requires flexibility, unselfishness and a humble-giving attitude. It takes two to make a great marriage. It can be the closest thing to heaven or hell that you experience on this earth. I hope that the things I have shared out of my own life will help you to achieve what I am now experiencing.

In a nutshell, being happy can be hard work sometimes, it is like maintaining a nice home - you've got to hang on to your treasures and throw out the garbage. Being happy requires looking for good things. One person sees the beautiful view and the other sees the dirty window. You choose what you see and you choose what you think. Choose to be committed to one another. Choose to be happy!

My marriage today is not perfect. Everyday we work on it to make it better. But we are enjoying a fulfilled life together. My prayer is that you will too!!