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Don't Get Rode Hard and Put Away Wet

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Abstract: Back in the old days, some folks reckoned an equine was just a disposable tool to get their jobs done. They might ride a horse hard, so it was sweaty, panting, and broken down. When done they would throw it out to pasture without proper grooming. This is probably the origin of the expression to "get rode hard and put away wet." As Extension professionals, we have to take care of ourselves to gallop the whole race and don't let 'em ride us hard and put us away wet.

We're in the Race Now

Back in the old days, some folks reckoned an equine (horse, mule, or donkey) was just a disposable tool to get their jobs done. They might ride a horse hard, so it was sweaty, panting, and broken down. When done they would throw it out to pasture for flies to swarm and bite. Or they'd smack it on the butt and send it into the barn with saddle or harness marks plastering its stinky coat onto irritated skin. The animal would feel terrible and look horrible—it would be stiff and itchy, with sore spots. This is probably the origin of the expression to "get rode hard and put away wet". As Extension professionals, we can sure feel the same way sometimes.

Professionals in any field excel because they are dedicated to their jobs. As Extension professionals, we're intense about our desire to serve others. This willingness to run hard often comes at the expense of our own needs and personal lives. The cynicism, depression, and lethargy of burnout can occur when you're not in control of how you carry out your job, when you're working toward goals that don't resonate with you, and when you lack social support (*Psychology Today*, 2011). The pressure resulting from these demands can create a sense of physical and emotional exhaustion that often leads to burnout (Igodan & Newcomb, 1986). To survive this intense chosen profession, we have to take care of ourselves.

The reality is that our organizations are in survival mode, and they're gonna ride us hard and put us away wet if we let them. We sometimes have to bite or kick to defend ourselves. But more often we've just got to gallop for a while, then in self-defense slow down to a trot when we're winded. At the end of the day, we do have some control over how wet and sweaty we are when headed back to the barn.

Life's Short—Ride Hard

As Extension professionals we are often blessed by having control over much of our schedules and the contents of our work. That means we can grab the bit and slow down when work seems to be spurring us out of control. Racehorses have their tongues tied down so they don't swallow them and gag when running. This analogy is good advice, especially for 4-H educators at county fairs. It's better to get tongue-tied than start a stampede of annoyed volunteers.

Don't expect our universities to bathe and curry us when we're worn out. Extension mandates don't include coddling high-strung Thoroughbreds. And that's OK. We are smart enough to know how to work with our volunteers and constituents. Let's also be smart enough to take care of ourselves as work horses pulling hard as a single beast of burden, or in a team.

We all know current Extension staff with dried sweat and sore spots from being in the harness too long. They kick at anybody within range, out of frustration. Obviously this lack of taking care of themselves affects their relationships with others—and their work performance overall. We old gray mares may be long in the tooth, but we know our jobs. The younger fillies and colts are advised to get in line behind us when we lay our ears back at them. In wild horse herds all members have an established role in the hierarchy, and they are all important for the family to function. Our Extension herds also need to travel the trail together, finding safety with their peers. A horse herd will mosey to a water hole for the finish of their daily journey. Extension herd folks should also consider that analogy from nature for an occasional finish.

To Finish Is to Win

Extraordinary work performance is only possible when we're pulling hard at the harness. Whether working as a single or team, we have to stay focused on getting to the goal. Waking up with enthusiasm to start the tasks of the day is only possible when that carrot is still ahead. In competitive equine endurance riding, their slogan is "To Finish is to Win." We winners in Extension can finish with sound minds and sound bodies, when we don't let 'em ride us hard and put us away wet.

References

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