

Riding Lessons From Albert Einstein!

Whichever equestrian discipline you participate in you will find a wealth of new techniques, modern approaches and technology assisted performance breakthroughs. So, you might wonder what you can learn from a Scientist from the late 19th Century that is applicable today. Taking seven of his quotes this article examines their relevance to horse riding today.

"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction." – Albert Einstein

From Albert Einstein to the modern day Horse Whisperer Monty Roberts! Like him or not, Monty and his teachings have had a huge and positive impact on the Equine world since the 1990s. Monty caught our attention with his honest, frank and forthright accounts of the violence he witnessed and received as a young boy by his father and other men, while 'breaking horses'. Despite the methods he witnessed being as old as the hills and widely accepted as 'the way to do things' as a young boy he had the instinct and bravery to seek out a different and better way. From Einstein we are encouraged to find a more simple, elegant and humane way of working with horses. To break with old thinking to find a new path forward. Thanks to Monty's bravery or genius, riders and trainers today have a totally different way of working with horses and the results appear to be proof enough that there is certainly room for more than one way of doing it.

In our JigsawEquine coaching workshops we encourage riders to be reflective and ask themselves some important questions in order to see things differently and to simplify a specific problem. Some of these questions include;

- What are you making bigger or harder than necessary with your horse?
- What is your motivation for finding a fix?
- What do you want to achieve? What do you want, or need to avoid?

"Imagination is more important than knowledge." – Albert Einstein

Nothing is created without first being imagined! This is true for the laptop I'm typing on, the kettle boiling in the background or the clothes I'm wearing. We are born with an automatic ability to imagine and it formed a focal point in our childhood play and discovery. The importance of imagination is undeniable.

Think about how many times you have come across young riders who have the future so clearly mapped out in their minds: 'I'm going to ride at Badminton', or 'I want to be an Olympic rider'. As they talk they 'light up' as they imagine the experience, the sights, sounds and how it feels. Many have no idea **how** they will make it there but they want it, believe it, and expect it. They, like Einstein understand the power of imagination.

There are many reasons why dreams come true for some and not for others. Our coaching style builds on Einstein's principle of imagination as well as knowledge and guides people through three important principles to get more of what you want:-

We have to practice all three in order to get mind and body into alignment. This is important so we re-train ourselves to think over and over about what we DO WANT (in

- 1) **Know exactly WHAT you DESIRE**
- 2) **IMAGINE IT (in full glory as if you already have it)**
- 3) **EXPECT to get it!**

detail) and to SEE life as if we already have it. This allows us to EXPECT it to happen! With such reinforcement and consistency of 'being' it is clear to see how some people's dreams appear to come true relatively easily.

"A person starts to live when he can live outside himself" – Albert Einstein

In our seminars on How to Focus and Handling Anxiety, we work on learning how to step outside of ourselves to notice our behaviours, thoughts, feelings and the decisions we make. It is critical while riding to be alert, awake and riding consciously so that **we** (not our auto pilot) are more in charge of how we are riding rather than feeling helpless beneath a myriad of worries or self doubt.

This sounds obvious but for many of us it isn't easy: we are so busy going through daily life preoccupied with our 'to do list' and obligations that we operate, from a mental perspective on 'automatic pilot': not consciously choosing how we experience the world. Instead we react to everyday situations or relationships, out of habit. This goes some way to explain why when we drop the toast butter side down on the floor it can seem like the end of the world! When on closer examination it could be amusing, food for the dog, or a chance to make something more wholesome for ourselves to eat.

Living outside of ourselves entails a deep understanding of how we operate and the reasons behind why. When coaching clients we spend time identifying our patterns of behaviour and trigger points to understand (and prevent) why we can so easily 'fly off the handle' at our horse, or feel like 'giving up'!

Horses live very much 'outside of themselves' – they are 'in the moment' people with wonderful stimulus and response systems -always providing us with feedback – if we know what to look for and can see beyond our own emotions and worries! We need to be in a similar frame of mind if we are to create harmony in the saddle.

"Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character"

"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new" – Albert Einstein

What is attitude and where does it come from? We all give off clues about our attitude through mannerisms, tone of voice, facial expressions, the words we use and other physical gestures. Others can often 'size us up quickly' sensing our positive or negative attitude.

Attitudes are a reflection of our beliefs but often we don't realise what beliefs we are holding onto or how they impact our riding. For example: It is show day! You are about to enter the dressage ring for a test. It starts to rain – heavily. This is the moment where your beliefs are likely to kick in:...you believe your horse doesn't go well in the rain, guess what – you tense up, start to feel angry, may even feel 'it's not fair' 'why now, why me'? Your horse – with all his sensitivity - tunes in to you. He in turn tenses up, stiffens, becomes highly anticipatory or sensing your raw anger, misbehaves to give you something to be angry about!

To break this chain of events requires a little bit of mental work. As a starting point, next time something happens to cause you to dive into a spiral of worry, or doom and gloom, take a quick 'attitude check' – look at what is going on with you right now? Then consider the following:-

- What thoughts are you having right?
- How is your attitude impacting your feelings?
- What do you normally decide to do at this point?
- What other, new choices could you explore?

As a mental sports coach it is not my role to judge a person's attitude as being either weak or strong as suggested by Einstein. However, I continue to see people transform their riding (and their lives) by understanding their attitudes and beliefs and how they help or of hinder effectiveness in the saddle.

In the same, way, making mistakes can trigger an attitude and belief; 'simply what happens in the process of learning', or 'useful feedback' right through to 'I'm a failure and never going to get it right'. Which ones do you suppose are helpful to staying calm, relaxed and focused as a rider? Which add to or reduce pressure on the rider? I'm sure the answer is obvious. Yet, in the heat of the moment of a fence down, or a missed transition, it can be easy to fail to remember to keep a healthy perspective. When working with for example a show jumper it is important to help them turn thoughts of 'why did he knock that fence down' into 'why didn't he jump it'? This change of question allows rider and trainer to approach the problem from a completely different perspective. The morale of this story as with many stories about our riding is to keep an eye on what you want and never run out of ways of getting there!

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing." - Albert Einstein

This article has looked at riding from a different and I hope unusual perspective. It is often by taking an unusual view of our riding that we can see more clearly what we have been doing, or what we need to do next. If by using Albert Einstein as a way of bringing our attention towards a new approach, then I'm sure he will rest happier in the knowledge that his work has extended beyond Physics and theories of relativity.

"The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education." - Albert Einstein

The key is not to let too much theory and know how get in the way of ability! If you're ready to take your riding to that next level and maximise your potential, contact JigsawEquine for help. To find out more contact us at info@jigsawequine.com or go to the website www.jigsawequine.com