



FREE Excerpt
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WHAT'S YOUR RIDING STYLE?

Riding
STYLES



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Excerpt 1: Riding Styles: The Guide to Getting a Breakthrough Relationship with Your Horse

Foreword

Why I Created the Riding Styles Assessment: Never Waste a Good Setback

I created the Riding Styles Assessments because of a setback I experienced with my horse. I board my horses at an urban barn—a barn confined to seven acres, boxed in by apartments, houses, roads and even a car wash. The horses are rotated into allotted turnout times. One horse caught my attention. His name was Whiskey.

Whiskey was deemed “too hot and unpredictable to ride,” “crazy” and finally deemed by most in the barn to be just plain mean. His owner had bought him to ride in parades with other horses in a troop.

In between troop parades and training, Whiskey’s owner rode him on trail at breakneck speed. He was removed from his stall, saddled, ridden and returned. After several years of this, Whiskey did what any young, energetic horse might do with too little turnout and too much work. He had had enough. He threw his owner while out on a trail ride. The injured owner put him up for sale.

Now he had no exercise and no turnout. He resorted to kicking at his stall door until it bulged into the aisle. I could feel his pain. He wanted out. I asked the owner if I could turn him out, brush him down, graze him. Anything. I was told that I had to sign a release. Others in the barn told me I was crazy, that the horse could hurt me. The owner finally agreed when I suggested that maybe I would buy Whiskey. With the price tag too high, there was no way I could afford this horse.

I started turning him out, and the kicking diminished. Then Christmas came. My husband gave me an elegantly wrapped gift. It was an expensive bottle of Whiskey with a note attached. He had bought Whiskey the horse, and the owner had agreed to an affordable price.

I remember getting in the car with my daughter Grace, and going to the barn immediately Christmas morning to turn Whiskey out in the fresh snow. Freedom. It was a great feeling for all of us.

The feeling did not last. I was an older rider and was given a lot of advice about being cautious. As Whiskey got out more, was groomed and fussed over, interacted with other horses and ridden frequently, he became more calm and predictable. It helped my nerves that soon I could depend on him for a no-surprises ride.

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Then one day we entered the outdoor arena and there was an unusually large group of younger riders and their mothers. My own young daughter asked to ride Whiskey, and knowing how calm Whiskey had become I agreed. As she circled the ring at a walk and trot I thought how far Whiskey had come.

Here he was carrying a young passenger with confidence. Then the worst happened. One of the other young riders had been attempting to canter and succeeded and the mon's all gave a cheering round of applause. As their voices escalated into cheers, Whiskey startled and took off around the arena at a full gallop, my daughter's feet caught in the stirrups and her head thumping helplessly against his back.

Finally, she was flung to the ground, writhing in pain. My natural *Riding Style* under pressure sprang into action, every fiber of my body focused on stopping—and schooling that horse. I caught up with him and backed him into a corner, eyes-on-eyes. I was so angry I forgot about my daughter. I was fueled by panic and anger, convinced that I had to take charge and do something.

From my years of studying Monty Roberts and his trust-based approach, I knew that Whiskey was afraid. As a flight animal, his startle reflex had been engaged, and he raced around the arena in an all-out panic. He needed calm reassurance, but instead was met by my fight response. I was operating within my blind spot, using too much of the *Riding Style* I preferred known as D, Dominant, Direct and Confident.

For years, I had been training and facilitating DISC workstyle training, helping professionals understand how their unique work styles worked for-and against them. Here I was in my blind spot, over-using my D style profile, and it did not serve me, or Whiskey well.

That day, after I had apologized to Whiskey and ensured that my daughter wasn't hurt, I decide to help others understand their own unique DISC Riding Styles. With a team of Business Psychology graduate student interns, I started work developing the DISC for the equine world. Several years of testing and development have resulted in the Riding Styles assessment. I have found people from every state I have visited to embrace the Riding Styles Assessment as a way of being more aware of their strengths, challenges and blind spots.

And I have saved the best for last. I knew Whiskey was not satisfied with being in a box stall. Even though he had benefitted from all the increased activity and love we were giving him, he was still kicking his stall door. He needed more.

We arranged for him to be transferred to a young and talented trainer who had recently moved from our area to central Michigan to marry and start her own training, sales and lesson business. Sarah and Nick Kuz of *No Boundaries Horsemanship* had acres of pasture, and most importantly loved Whiskey's high energy, curiosity and forward-go attitude. He had a new home and a new job.

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Knowing your own Riding Style profile can help you, like it did me, make better decisions about your horse. It can help guide you in everyday actions you take. You can and will claim your strengths, and challenge your blind spots as you grow and develop into the rider or owner you want to become.

Dr. Susan Cain

scain@corplearning.com

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