



FREE Excerpt

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

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## **Excerpt 2: Riding Styles: The Guide to Getting a Breakthrough Relationship with Your Horse**



### **Chapter 1: Understanding the Riding Styles Model**

Your horse knows a lot about you; you would not need the Riding Styles assessment or book if your horse could tell you all the things that you do that discourage or encourage, delight or bother them. The Riding Styles Assessment allows you to consider your own natural style and its inherent strengths and challenges. Most importantly, you can zero-in on your unique “blind spots”—those behaviors you don’t even think about.

Imagine what it could mean to your horse to be more aware of these traits—and to work on improving your impact to improve your relationship with your horse.

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*Jenny can't get to the barn often enough. She often thinks about her horse during work hours or when she is busy helping her family and friends. Jenny starts feeling guilty about her absences. She knows that she needs to make some decisions about her horse, and puts them off. When she does finally arrive at the barn, Jenny spends a lot of time "grazing and praising" instead of riding her horse. It's just easier to forego getting out that big, heavy saddle. Her horse has been gaining weight and seems bored standing around all day in his stall and small turnout area. Jenny is certain that she needs to put more effort into riding like she used to—but where to find the time?*

*If Jenny could take The Riding Styles Assessment, she might discover that her profile is one that values empathy, agreeableness and support. At the same time, she may find it difficult to make tough decisions, set long-term direction or put her needs to see her horse first. Jenny's Riding Styles is an "I" Influential, Persuasive and Friendly Style. Her style can both assist as well as hinder her as she faces an uncertain future with her horse. Knowing her profile could help Jenny identify the actions she could take to resolve her current dilemma.*

The Riding Styles Assessment can help increase your self-awareness faster by revealing your preferred approach to horses and how you over-or-under-use alternative approaches. The Riding Styles Assessment is based on DISC theory, and can quickly give you information on your strengths, challenges, and blind spots. There is no "best style," instead, think of the styles as being preferences. Then consider how each preference can add value and create challenges at the same time.

The Riding Styles Assessment encompasses four main styles:

### **The Four Riding Styles**

***The Dominant, Direct and Confident Preference "What's our next challenge?"***

If you fall into the Dominant area, then you perceive yourself as more powerful than your horse. You may also see the need to take charge of situations that seem unfavorable, being decisive and acting when needed.

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***The Influential, Persuasive and Friendly Preference “Let’s create harmony together.”***

If you fall into the Influential area, then you perceive yourself as more powerful than your horse, and being an optimist and hoping to see things favorably, you employ friendliness, persuasion and compassion to engage your horse.

***The Steady, Calm and Consistent Preference “It’s important to create calmness and consistency.”***

If you fall into the Steady area, then you see yourself as less powerful than your horse, but you also view your relationship as favorable. Your focus on details and consistency help maintain a steady approach that won’t disrupt a consistent approach.

***The Conscientious, Precise and Detailed Preference “Let’s improve this and get it right!”***

If you fall into the Conscientious area, then you perceive yourself as less powerful than your horse, and you often see a need to improve unfavorable conditions. Your priorities are channeling your energy into carefully improving problems and challenges with your horse.

**Your Style Preferences: A Reflection of your Perception, Values and Preferences**

Your Riding Styles profile is a result of your personal and individual skills, values and preferences. There is no one “best” style. Your style has carried you through some rough water—it has been your best friend and sometimes your worst enemy. For example, if your style is *S-Steady, Calm and Consistent*, you may excel at calming an anxious horse, be exceptionally patient during the training process or notice details that others may miss. On the other hand, you may be slow to change an approach you feel comfortable with, even when it is in your horse’s best interest to do so.

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## Excerpt 3: Riding Styles: The Guide to Getting a Breakthrough Relationship with Your Horse

### The Four Riding Styles: Guess Your Style!

Take a look at the four Riding Styles and their corresponding strengths and challenges. What do you think your style is? Possibly, you have two styles, a main style and a back-up:

STYLE TYPE	STYLE CHARACTERICS
<p><b>D</b></p> <p><b>DOMINANT</b> Direct &amp; Confident</p>	<p><b>STYLE STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a bold risk taker with horses</li> <li>• Is firm with horses</li> <li>• Uses and value unique and creative approaches with horses</li> <li>• Can be motivated by competitions and success</li> </ul> <p><b>STYLE CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be somewhat impatient and expect too much too quickly</li> <li>• Focus on results at the expense of the relationship</li> <li>• Can be harsh when a light touch is needed</li> <li>• Can forget about small details that are important</li> </ul>
<p><b>I</b></p> <p><b>INFLUENTIAL</b> Persuasive &amp; Friendly</p>	<p><b>STYLE STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is enthusiastic and lively around horses</li> <li>• Places a high value on their relationship and communication with horses</li> <li>• Is helpful to others and their horses</li> <li>• Is an excellent care giver</li> </ul> <p><b>STYLE CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be overly concerned with pleasing horses and humans</li> <li>• Can forget to take care of their own needs</li> <li>• May have a hard time holding bottom lines; may give in too often</li> <li>• Can be inconsistent when training horses</li> </ul>
<p><b>S</b></p> <p><b>STEADY</b> Calm &amp; Consistent</p>	<p><b>STYLE STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works as a collaborator with horses</li> <li>• Is loyal to their horse</li> <li>• Goes out of their way to help their horse</li> <li>• Can be described as calm and patient with horses</li> <li>• Is aware of important and needed details when working with horses</li> </ul> <p><b>STYLE CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May resist change even when it is needed</li> <li>• Can have a hard time taking short-cuts</li> <li>• May struggle to speak up and assert themselves</li> <li>• May have difficulty standing their ground</li> </ul>
<p><b>C</b></p> <p><b>CONSCIENTIOUS</b> Precise &amp; Detailed</p>	<p><b>STYLE STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is very systematic and accurate with horses</li> <li>• Can be very observant of their horse and their surroundings</li> <li>• Tends to be intentional and careful around horses</li> <li>• Likes to get it right-as-perfect-as-possible</li> </ul> <p><b>STYLE CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can resist doing things any way other than their "own way"</li> <li>• Tends to see the flaws in themselves and their horse</li> <li>• Struggles with voicing their concerns</li> <li>• May be fearful when things are perfect enough</li> </ul>



## **Questions to Consider**

When you consider your own style, what are your strengths when it comes to working with and riding your horse? How have they helped your horse, and your developing relationship?

How can you give yourself credit due for this strength? Let's look at the styles that you did not choose. How can you be more mindful of the need for these styles when the occasion arrives?

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