

How Two Young Riders Became National Champions, p. 46:

Dressage

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November 2008

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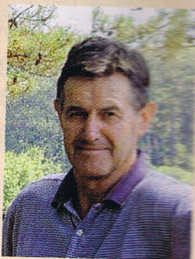
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is certified by the Dutch Royal Riding School and the Cadre Noir in Saumur, France. He is a USDF Certified Instructor through Fourth Level and a USEF and American Holsteiner Horse Association breed judge. A native of the Netherlands, he has trained and competed since 1967 and has coached the Belgian eventing team. Based in Newnan, Georgia, he trains out of Hidden View Farm. His Web site is ferro-kwpm.com.



Have a question about dressage? E-mail it to Dressage.Today@EquiNetwork.com or send to Dressage Today, 656 Quince Orchard Rd., Suite 600, Gaithersburg, MD 20878—Ask the Experts is compiled by **Reina Abelshausen**.



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ation with the 10-meter circles, you can add them part way through a line of twos to maintain relaxation.

To help address straightness issues, try riding your flying changes straight down the long side on the quarterline, starting with single changes and progressing to fours and threes. Be diligent in not allowing your horse to get closer to the track or closer to the centerline as you proceed down the quarterline. If possible, train this exercise toward a mirror so you can develop your feel for what is truly straight. To achieve an unwavering line, you must channel your horse through the imaginary chute of both legs and both reins, using your core muscles to maintain your own alignment in the saddle.

If your horse becomes crooked in the fours or threes, interrupt your count and only ask for the next change when you have the straightness re-established. When you can successfully ride your fours and threes on a completely straight line, the twos should come more easily. Once he consistently maintains his throughness and balance, is straight, relaxed and responsive to your aids and you are applying your aids at the correct time, you should have much more success achieving the two-tempi changes.

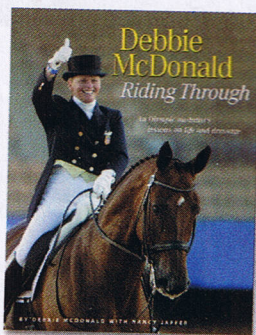
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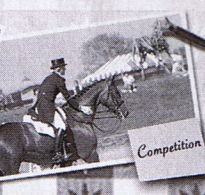
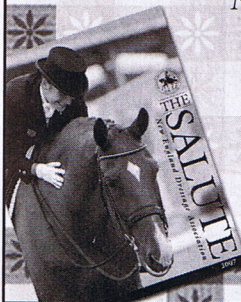
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slavery" to describe the conditions under which many people have to work: long hours, low pay, few or no benefits and no time off. But, when a good salary and benefits are offered, the problems may instead lie in unmet expectations. In this sense, most of the complaints we hear from both employers and employees are about a lack of clarity on the experience needed, the job requirements and performance expectations.

Presenting a professional operation is important. Do this by requiring a formal resume and telephone and personal interviews. Although certification of some kind is not required in this country, it is important because it shows willingness to prove proficiency at the tasks required. Don't forget to check references.

By asking each candidate to pass every stage of the employment process, you can set the stage for finding those candidates that are looking for a professional environment, can follow directions and are willing to be team players.

When the candidate arrives for the personal interview, first explain the job in full. Does the job include flexibility and growth, such as the ability to do some accounting or client management as the program advances? Will the barn manager also have to perform other tasks such as trainer or instructor? If some personal assistance is required, then it must be disclosed and discussed. Hiring someone to perform horse care and then requiring them to baby-sit children or use their car to run errands will lead to employee dissatisfaction and disengagement. In the end, expectations will not have been met on either side, and the employee will have been set up to fail. So, emphasize all job requirements from the beginning.

Now ask questions. Tailor them to the needs of the job and the market. If staffing a dressage barn, then questions about dressage horse care and training are para-

mount. If the job is for a barn manager in the northeast, ask about horse care experience with extreme winter conditions. Job requirements may change and so may your market, so flexibility and an interest in continuing education are ideal, but adding unspecified tasks to the job later on is inappropriate.

Ask about ethics, values, interests and customer service. We do what we do because we love the horses, but without customers there is no business.

Ask about lessons learned during the candidate's professional development. Look for answers that speak not only to their performance but also to their experience managing staff or getting along with supervisors and colleagues.

Ask about professional goals. Someone who is too experienced for a job may move on too fast if growth opportunities do not exist.

Ask concise questions and let candidates expand on the answers, because you learn more by listening. Learn about their interests. Find out if the job being offered is in a location that will enable him or her to stay happy outside the expected barn work.

Ask the candidate to describe the meaning of "professionalism," "respect" and "work ethic." Ask each to describe the ideal job and lifestyle. If the ideal job is working alone and only with horses, then a job managing a staff of 10, as well as client relations, is not a good fit.

Ask for specific examples of how a candidate has managed challenges in the past. As a follow-up, ask each to describe their strengths and weaknesses. Candidates who offer lessons learned from something they did wrong in the past frequently are stronger than those who cannot find any weakness in themselves at all.

During the interview process, continuously address the experience needed to perform the job. List the requirements,

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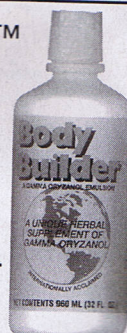
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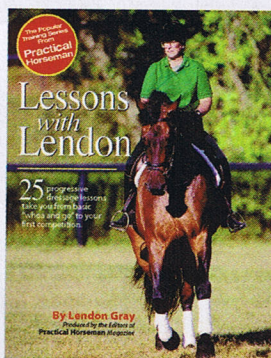
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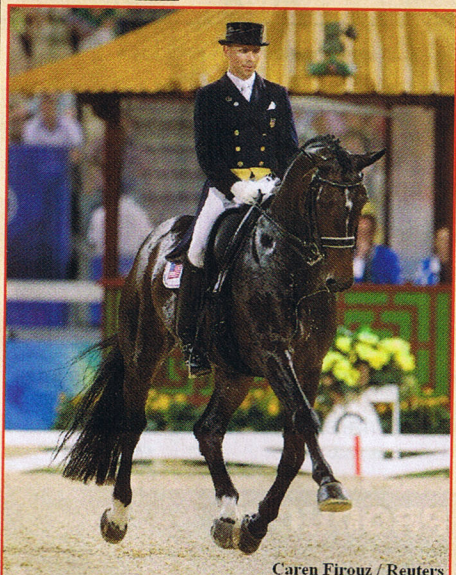
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Q&A

and when you offer the job, provide a job description in writing to enable candidates to make an informed decision. Creating clear position descriptions that are true to the position being posted can help employers create an outline of questions that will lead to positive answers. The more the answers diverge from what is needed to make the job a success, the less of a chance for a match.

To continue setting the stage for professionalism, send formal employment offers or rejection letters. Once the employee is on the job, follow through with formal and scheduled staff meetings, employee evaluations and any assurances or promises made. Keeping good employees means meeting their expectations as well as requiring that they meet yours.

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