

***Succeeding in the Sport of Kings involves many hard truths.***

*by Chris Irwin*

It is often said that the only sure way to make a small fortune in the horse business is to start with a large one. There is a great unspoken challenge in terms of “making it” in the “Sport of Kings.”

Simply put, whoever pays the mortgage on the acreage, the barn, the big trucks and trailers and the indoor arena, not to mention actually owning the horses and feeding and caring for them, will more than likely need to make their money “in real business” - somewhere other than with horses - and bring cash as disposable income to play with in the Sport of Kings.

I did not inherit an equestrian legacy. I started as a homeless, idealistic 19-year-old, mucking stalls at Longacres Race Track. And looking back now to when I was about 30, after more than 10 years as a “pro” horseman without medical insurance or a pension, I realized back then that I did not want to still be riding colts at 50. I was living in a dilapidated trailer, wondering when the owners of the facility I was leasing might sell out or get a divorce, only to leave me on the move again looking for another barn to train out of. So despite my passion for horses, this scenario of constant vulnerability, both physically and financially, did not offer much hope for giving my kids a leg up in life.

Now I am 54 and I do have my own ranch, barn and indoor arena. But yes, among so many other things, I am still starting young horses, cash flow is tricky at the best of times, and I have no pension or retirement plan. Of course, the truth is that the bank owns our ranch and I hustle more than ever to make the mortgage payments. So how have I made it this far?

Above all else, you must have the core competencies for whatever it is you offer as a service because nothing works for or against your success more than word of mouth. Stay focused on your goals while also flexible and open to change within the trends of the horse industry. It can help to find a mentor and it is imperative to learn how to clearly communicate and market yourself. Personally, I still struggle with marketing strategies because of the delicate balance needed for self-promotion. A little over the top and we are branded as an egomaniac. But not enough and people don't know what you have to offer.

So having said all of the above, I recommend that anyone considering a future in the horse business should ask themselves a few unequivocal questions.

First, how much physical risk does my interest in the horse industry require? A rodeo cowboy or Grand Prix jumper is far more dangerous than opening a feed and tack store, or becoming a saddle maker. A farrier or equine veterinarian is at far more physical risk on a daily basis than a show judge. And certified riding instructors are supposed to teach and not necessarily be expected to put first rides on young horses. This should seem obvious but I have seen so many people become disillusioned and give up on their career ambitions with horses the first time they get injured, or come extremely close to being hurt, and their confidence is shattered.

Do you have the seed money to buy and build whatever you need for your direction in the horse business? If not, is it feasible that someday you will be able to borrow to build what you need for your business and make the payments doing what you love to do?

To develop a successful career with horses first and foremost requires a very deep-rooted passion that simply will not accept doing anything else for a living. While it may take dedication to excel in any industry, the road to success with horses will require a great deal of commitment, tolerance and forgiveness. It's a delicate balance where the pro has a need to make a living doing something we passionately love, but our clients will most often want what they want for fun, excitement and sometimes even romantic illusions.

## April 2015 - Making It

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Ultimately, it takes a lot of patience, perseverance and a genuine sense of humor to succeed in the horse industry because no matter what path you take, your journey will be spiced with lots of drama from both people and horses. If you truly love horses, and you can find it in yourself to accept, tolerate and forgive people, including yourself as you learn along the way from your inevitable "mistakes," then there is an incredible amount of joy, excitement and heartfelt rewarding moments to be found in being of service to horses and the people they come with. If you have thick skin, a strong heart, a keen mind and a measure of courage, then by all means come join us equestrian entrepreneurs who serve in the Sport of Kings.

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*Author Chris Irwin is an internationally renowned horseman, best-selling author and a leading pioneer in the equine assisted movement. It was discovering how to transform BLM wild Mustangs into 18 calm and collected U.S. National Champions in english, western and driving competitions, that first showed Chris his greatest insights into learning how to learn. To connect with Chris Irwin visit his website at [www.chrisirwin.com](http://www.chrisirwin.com).*