



# The Judgement Trap

*Laura King CHT, NLP, Life & Performance Coach*

We're judgmental. It's human nature. But when you look up the definition of judgmental, "having or displaying an excessively critical point of view," it's not a positive one. Face it, most definitions of judgement are not warm and fuzzy! Not only do we have a negative connotation of being judgmental, as equestrians we *pay* to go into the ring to be judged and being judged feels like criticism. No wonder it's hard to be our personal best when we enter a horse show. The critical factor of the brain goes on high alert and the nervous system creates fear and confu-

sion about being judged. Then, the negative feelings of being judged trigger a fear, flight of freeze response in 88% of the brain!

At a recent gathering of high-performance dressage riders, a discussion centered around how the word 'judge' has such a negative and demeaning connotation and how powerless the competitors felt while being judged. But are the judges really being overly critical, or are they assessing, evaluating, and forming an opinion about our levels of ability and learning? Isn't show-

ing supposed to be for enjoyment and for the inherent value of gauging our level of a learned skill versus a critical judgement?

When I wrote "Perfect Enough" in 2007, my goal was to help people achieve happiness and balance in their lives, and in "The Power to Win," which I wrote in 2004, I guide riders to deal with negative events including comments from fellow competitors, trainers, or horse-show judges. I assert that someone can achieve their personal best if they believe they are heading down the centerline

in the dressage arena or completing a reining pattern to be evaluated rather than being critically judged.

Fear of being judged by others is huge and right there with self-judgement. That's why I do not care for judgement all together! If we assess or evaluate ourselves, then we come at the process of improving ourselves or tweaking ourselves or our performance with a little more ease. So, let's think of going into the ring to have an assessment of where you are in your performance versus being judged! Being your personal best means attaining your individual effort to produce the greatest ability using your skills.

If we can look at our lives and evaluate judgement so that it doesn't create the same fear, flight, or freeze mechanism in the brain, it's easier to manage life and easier to stay healthy.

## Why Being Judgmental is Harmful to Your Health

Remember that the yardstick you use for yourself is how you measure others, and how you assume others measure you. Judging is relative and validates what we experience against what we believe. Our beliefs are made up of our personality traits, our societal, cultural, familial, or religious conditioning, and our life experiences. The world around us is our mirror, and judging someone does not define who they are—it defines who we are. The more you judge others, the more you judge yourself; besides, judging others focuses on the negative and trains our minds to seek negativity. This can lead to stress which, in turn, weakens immunity, increases blood pressure, and contributes to fatigue, depression and anxiety. It can also lead to people steering clear of you, thereby creating social isolation. People like being around positive people.

Another unwanted response to being judgmental is a physical change in the brain which is more severe than changes caused by other negative emotions. The amygdala is the part of the brain that controls your response to fear and anxiety as well as other

emotions and memories and the amygdala is smaller in people who are more judgmental than it is in those who aren't judgmental. I mean, who wants a smaller brain?

## It's All in How You Choose to Measure Success

As humans, we often get caught up in unnecessary status concerns and superficial comparisons. We must take care in how we measure success because the metrics we choose will determine our actions and beliefs.

Carl Jung said, "Thinking is difficult, that's why most people judge." Judging is easy to do on autopilot and doesn't require much thinking or reasoning. Our brains are wired to make automatic judgments about others' behaviors so we can move through the world without spending much time or energy understanding everything we see.

People also make all kinds of judgments about themselves, and one of the key ways that we do this is through social comparison. In the 1950s, a psychologist named Leon Festinger put forth the social comparison theory which suggests that humans are driven to compare ourselves to others to gain a better assessment of where we stand in relation to the group. Festinger believed that we engage in comparison as a way of establishing a benchmark by which we can make accurate evaluations of ourselves.

People compare themselves to those who are better when they want inspiration to improve, and they compare themselves to those who are worse when they want to feel better about themselves. And face it, social media holds up an inaccurate picture by which we judge others and ourselves.

When you engage in self-talk, most of the time it's mundane self-chatter, like telling yourself you are hungry or you need a haircut, but sometimes your internal monologue turns negative, and you end up judging yourself. When this type of negative self-talk becomes habitual, you create a limiting belief

system in your mind. Whether it's demanding your own perfection, believing you'll never be good enough until you lose those last 10 pounds or focusing on perceived weaknesses in your riding ability, these judgmental playbacks in your brain can become self-fulfilling prophecies. In "Perfect Enough," I go through the steps of changing your self-talk in detail, including building awareness, stopping the negative and replacing it with positive, and practicing the act of stopping negative thought in its tracks.

## Escaping the Judgement Trap

Now you know that being judgmental is something that you should do for your mental and physical health. So, how do you get out of the judgment trap? Try these eight tips to help you escape:

- Have an open mind and be curious. There is so much to learn; be open to it.
- Be kind. Remember the adage about not knowing someone until you walk a mile in their shoes? There is often more than meets the eye. Give others the benefit of the doubt for situations or circumstances beyond our awareness. Don't forget to be kind to yourself.
- Be Self-Aware. Forgive and accept yourself. The more you understand yourself, the more compassionate you become toward others.
- Be appreciative of your circumstances instead of trying to fit the world into the confines of your personal optics.
- Look at situations from a different perspective. When you are judging yourself, try to think about what it would be like if someone else were in your shoes and they were judging you. Would you want them to judge you the way that you are judging yourself? Probably not.
- Look for the good in people. We all make mistakes and are not perfect. The best



way to stop being judgmental is by realizing that everyone has flaws and imperfections, including ourselves.

- Practice using the magical words, “I am” so that your subconscious will assume the words that follow. Replace “I’ll try,” “I hope” and “I can’t” with “I am” and you’ll be surprised how the self-judgment is replaced by positive self-talk.
- Remember that mistakes are just feedback. A mistake simply tells you that there is something you need to do differently, and you must commit to making that change. In “Power to Win,” I go over the steps to change your relationship to those “mistakes” so you can quit judging yourself and edit those distractions.
- Put on your mirror and everywhere, “I AM Perfect Enough”. It is time to like yourself.

Be patient with yourself. Once you make the commitment to escape the judgement trap, stick with it. It has taken a long time for you to engrain the pattern of judging others and yourself and you will have to maintain awareness so that you don’t fall back it. Everyone does it at their own speed, but it can be done.

***“So many people focus too much on the outcome - the success rather than how to get there. I try to focus on how to get there, rather than the outcome.”***

**Jessica von Brendow-Werndl, No.1 FEI-ranked dressage rider in the world**

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### About the author:

**Laura King** is the Director and Founder of Summit Hypnosis and Wellness and is a Certified Hypnotist, NLP Practitioner, Life Coach, and Sports Performance Coach. Laura has written and published several books and workbooks, including “Power To Win” for equestrians and “Perfect Enough,” a guide to help you evaluate your perceptions and experiences around vital areas of your life.

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