Mojo

PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS™

Understand • Regulate • Perform



The 5 BIGGEST MISTAKES Riding Coaches Make

And how to turn them into powerful opportunities for you and your riders.

Potential is often hidden beneath pressure.

The Mojo Queen

A Mojo Discovery Guide to Peak Performance.

A view from the ringside

As a ring steward, I have had the opportunity to watch riders, coaches and families from a different vantage point. As The Mojo Queen, attending competitions to coach my own clients, I have also seen what happens before a rider enters the ring, during a difficult round and in those important moments afterwards.

I have watched capable riders lose access to skills they demonstrate easily at home. I have seen coaches searching for the right words, parents desperate to help, and talented young people judging themselves by a few minutes in the arena.

These observations have reinforced something I believe deeply: good technical coaching matters enormously, but it is not always enough to help a rider access their ability under pressure.

Calling this guide ‘The 5 Biggest Mistakes’ may feel a little controversial. After all, most coaches are working hard, care deeply about their riders and want the very best for them. I am not suggesting otherwise.

But honest inspection creates growth. We cannot improve what we are unwilling to notice.

This is an invitation, not a criticism. As you read, consider what you recognise in your own coaching. Keep what works, question what may be missing and choose one small adjustment to try at your next training session or show.



MISTAKE 01

Treating confidence as a personality trait instead of a skill

It is easy to describe one rider as ‘naturally confident’ and another as ‘a worrier’. But labels can make confidence sound fixed. Riders can learn ways to prepare, recover from setbacks and act effectively even when they feel nervous.

IN THE ARENA

A rider hesitates before a bigger track. Rather than deciding they lack confidence, explore what specifically changes: their breathing, attention, self-talk or willingness to commit.

COACH’S DISCOVERY

Which rider have I described with a confidence label? What is one observable skill I could help them practise instead?

My observation

One adjustment I could try

MISTAKE 02

Focusing only on technical riding instead of peak performance

Position, rhythm, balance and accurate distances are essential. Yet a rider who executes these skills in training may struggle to access them when the stakes feel higher. Peak performance coaching adds preparation, attention and recovery to technical instruction; it does not replace it.

IN THE ARENA

A rider repeatedly jumps a line well at home but rushes it in competition. Rather than adding more technical instructions, notice what changes in their body and focus as they approach the line.

COACH'S DISCOVERY

Where do I see the largest gap between what a rider can do at home and what they do at a show?

My observation

One adjustment I could try

MISTAKE 03

Assuming every rider responds to pressure in the same way

Pressure can show up as rushing, freezing, overthinking, withdrawing or trying harder to please. Similar-looking mistakes may have different causes. A useful coaching response starts with the individual rider, not a one-size-fits-all instruction.

IN THE ARENA

Two riders stop at a fence. One becomes hurried and tense; the other goes quiet and hesitant. The same instruction may not help both.

COACH'S DISCOVERY

When pressure rises, what are the first visible changes in each of my riders?

My observation

One adjustment I could try

MISTAKE 04

Giving advice that accidentally increases pressure

Well-meant reminders can become another demand for a rider whose attention is already overloaded. A stream of instructions immediately before entering the ring may compete with the simple focus the rider needs. Under pressure, clarity often helps more than volume.

IN THE ARENA

Before a round, replace a list of last-minute corrections with one agreed, actionable cue that the rider has already practised.

COACH'S DISCOVERY

What do I usually say in the final minute before a rider enters the ring? Does it simplify their task?

My observation

One adjustment I could try

MISTAKE 05

Trying to change behaviour without understanding the nervous system

A rider who rushes, shuts down or becomes tearful may be responding to perceived threat or overload. Behaviour is important information, but it is not a complete explanation. Before correcting it, look for the conditions in which it appears and what helps the rider feel steady enough to learn.

IN THE ARENA

A rider becomes silent after a disappointing round. Instead of demanding an immediate analysis, offer a little space, then agree when and how to review it.

COACH'S DISCOVERY

Which behaviour frustrates me most? What might I learn by noticing when it starts and what helps it settle?

My observation

One adjustment I could try

Mojo principle: Notice the pattern. Support regulation. Then coach the skill.

Your ringside reflection

The purpose of this guide is not to find fault. It is to notice a pattern you can influence.

Which mistake felt most familiar?

Think of one specific rider and one recent competition moment. What did you observe, without judgement?

What might you do differently next time?

Choose one change. Practise it. Notice what happens. Reflect and refine.

From awareness to action

Great Coaching Deserves Great Competition Performance.

You have explored five common coaching assumptions. The next step is to recognise what is already working in your practice and where a more consistent approach could help your riders.

THE MOJO PERFORMANCE SCORECARD™

A developmental discovery tool for riding coaches — designed to reveal strengths and opportunities, not to judge your ability.

DISCOVER YOUR MOJO PERFORMANCE SCORE

Click here to complete your Scorecard

or scan the QR code with your phone.

Mary
The Mojo Queen
XXX

© 2026 Mojo Performance Systems Ltd. All rights reserved. This guide is for personal educational reflection. It is not a clinical assessment or substitute for medical or psychological advice. Reproduction or commercial use requires written permission.