

# VALUING YOUR TEAM: MORE THAN A 'THANK YOU'

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For Laura Connaway, recognizing the value of her teams—including those that work with her horses and those at Connaway & Associates Equine Insurance Services, Inc.—is a critical piece to creating a positive and productive work environment.



**A**S AN owner, trainer, or manager of an equestrian operation, your team extends beyond your day-to-day staff. Veterinarians, farriers, bodyworkers, and part-time help all play an integral part in making sure everything goes smoothly—whether at a horse show or at home. Days spent working in this industry are often long and laborious, and expressing gratitude is important.

For Laura Connaway, founder and president of Connaway & Associates Equine Insurance Services, Inc. as well as the breeder of her own grand prix mounts, it's about more than saying "thank you."

"I think about what makes me feel excited to be part of a team," says Connaway. "It's being around people who value each role or 'part of the whole' and don't value one type of contribution more than another." It's this mentality that has shaped the way Connaway expresses gratitude on a day-to-day basis.

#### NOTICING THE SMALL THINGS

Connaway, who keeps her horses at home, says noticing the little things that each "segment" or team member is doing goes a long way. "I take notice of the people that spend the extra time with the horses," says Connaway. "For example, without being asked, someone may take

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—LAURA CONNAWAY

time to hand walk the horses in the paddock after they’ve just come home from a day of travel and they’re feeling a little fractious. It may not even be their job specifically, but they’re looking out for the team as a whole—that’s extremely valuable.”

Connaway recalls a recent situation in which her farrier noticed that one of her horses was dragging its hind feet and he suggested she have her veterinarian come take a look. Because she had planned to leave for a show just days later, the veterinarian rearranged his schedule to come out to the farm as quickly as possible. “When my vet examined the horse, he didn’t just ask to see my horse to jog,” said Connaway. “He used the lameness detector and flexed the horse. He knew how important this horse was to me and so he was thorough and did his job well.”

In the end, the horse was healthy, sound, and able to compete. According to Connaway, this illustrated the whole team working together and recognizing value in each part. The farrier and the veterinarian both took steps to make sure that the horse was in top form.

Sure, the farrier and the vet may have been “doing their jobs,” but the jobs were done well, and it enabled everything else Connaway had planned to run smoothly.

“In addition to saying ‘thank you,’” she says, “I like to celebrate my team’s hard work by showing them how their efforts have paid off. When my horse in question jumped clear in the grand prix that weekend, I sent my vet a video of the class and let him know his evaluation was correct; there wasn’t a problem. When things are going well, you can acknowledge that a team member’s hard work is paying off.”

#### APPRECIATING EVERY JOB

Connaway also believes you can demonstrate gratitude by respecting the importance of every single role. “A large part of showing how grateful you are is ensuring that you are not demeaning anybody,” says Connaway. “What I mean by this is that each job is of the same importance and no job is beneath anyone.”



As an amateur grand prix show jumper, Laura Connaway knows that keeping her horses in top form takes a village and she recognizes the importance of expressing gratitude for every job.



As the owner of a farm and in her professional career, Connaway makes time to do every single part of each job at some point, including taking on all of the barn work on weekends, and tacking on the occasional thrown shoe when her farrier is out of town. “I like to do the work,” she says. “It helps me understand—and ultimately appreciate—the effort that goes into each job, and the processes that have been put in place.”

In her professional career, when a team member goes on vacation, Connaway will typically take over that employee’s responsibilities. “Doing this helps me to figure out the workload of each person. If it’s overwhelming, I can assist in fine tuning processes or reallocating pieces of the position.” Connaway contends that, as an owner, trainer, or manager, by showing interest in and recognizing the importance of each job—in and out of the office—your team will take note and it’s a boost to morale.

With greater understanding and appreciation for everyone’s jobs, we are better equipped to connect, support, and show gratitude for each part of the whole.

“At the end of the day, I think one reason team members try hard is because they see others around them are invested in and dedicated to their individual role as well as the bigger picture,” Connaway adds. “I try to lead by example in this way and I’m very fortunate to work with people that love the horses and the work just as much as I do.”