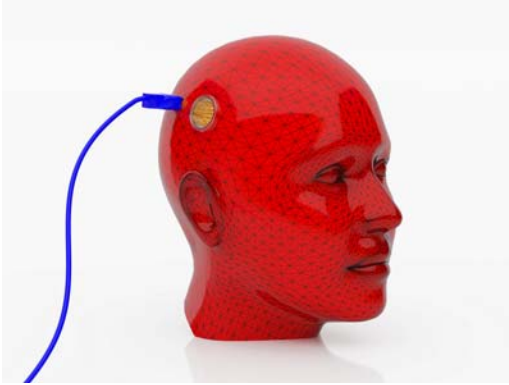


Mind Body Reboots

By April Clay, Psychologist



Your mind has performed
an illegal operation.

Please dismount.

Thankfully these messages don't really pop up, but most riders have experienced the equivalent feeling at one time or another.

When a computer freezes and ceases to listen to your commands, you know you're stuck. Still, many of us will try to persist in the vain hope something will suddenly change. We click and click and maybe indulge in a little swearing or praying to the computer gods for good measure. It's only when you relent and reboot that you get back on track.

The same kind of thing happens to us in sport. Every rider has had the experience of feeling as though their mind has either crashed or frozen. We get stuck and flounder. We stay in a struggle and end up using up precious time and energy, and our horses suffer in limbo with no direction.

A better approach is to learn the art of the mind or body reboot. Reboots are short mind altering strategies designed to pull your focus in productive directions. They assist in restarting the whole system, so you can carry on with a clean slate.

Not unlike the technological version, the first step is to recognize your system is down. Accept what is happening in the moment, whether it is a bad mood, fatigue or an error. Take Josie for example, a junior jumper rider with big aspirations for her future. Josie rides very consistently until her horse starts pushing her buttons. She is a hot and sensitive mare with penchant for stubbornness. "It can really unglue me when she starts spooking and carrying on. I get so frustrated I want to force the situation. I don't usually think it through, and in the end just give up". The best thing Josie could do the next time this happened would be to pause and just acknowledge to herself that she is experiencing a crash. This doesn't mean she has to give in to it and give up, just become aware of its presence as the first step.

The next step would be for Josie to redirect her operating system to the correct programming. It doesn't have to and shouldn't be too complicated, instead just keep it

simple and easy to execute. It only takes one cue to activate a whole new system. It can be said there are two different categories of reboots, one that works on the mind, the other starts from the body.

Body reboots:

When searching for the right kind of body reboot, there is no one better to consult than your own body. Inside, you contain all the keys to excellent performances; it's just a matter of tapping into them.

In the comfort of your own home, try the following exercise. Stand naturally and take a moment to relax with a few deep centered breaths. When you feel ready, close your eyes and begin to visualize a recent best ride. It can be a training ride or a performance. Spend time with this movie, immersing yourself as deeply as possible. After you feel confident you have really familiarized yourself with that ride, go ahead and open your eyes. Now, take some inventory about your body. How are you standing? How are you holding your arms, what expression are you wearing? How does your body feel in terms of tension, and where?

You will likely pick up on a few differences in your body from where you started. It might be a subtle change like standing a little taller, holding your shoulders back further or your chin is tilted up slightly. Now, repeat this exercise by visualizing a recent poor ride. That's right, really get into this one as well. Your body also stores and responds to these memories in very specific ways. Again, when you are done viewing your own personal horror movie, take a body scan. Examine your posture, breath rate and tension levels. What really stands out for you? You may have to repeat this exercise of imaging both best and worst rides several times until you can really make the distinction in your body. One of these differences can become a point around which to build your reboot. Your body can assist your mind in changing to a more positive direction.

For Josie, she discovered her stance was a little wider and her chin was up further. So she constructed a reboot for herself around these markers. If she was off her horse, she did both, and deliberately changed these two elements of her posture. If she was on her horse, she would lift her chin and sink her weight down into her stirrups. By positioning her body differently, she was connecting with a different part of her experience as a rider. One in which she felt in control, calm and saw herself as a real problem solver. Something she needed to get herself going in a different direction from that stuck, giving up place.

Other examples of body reboots include:

- Relaxing your facial muscles, perhaps inducing a smile
- The breath reboot: allow your breath to drop low, like you're sending it to your feet. Refreshing your oxygen store can do wonders for the muscles and the mind.
- Move yourself: literally move from the spot where you first noticed things were off. If you can't do this, change your position, stance or direction. Sometimes pointing the body in a different direction can allow the mind to follow.

- Increase your intensity level by running for a few meters (no one need know what you are doing, maybe you're just in a hurry) or stretching vigorously off horse or on (think lifting yourself out of the tack a few times and really sinking your weight back into your stirrups or raising your arms up high)

Mind reboots:

Just as you checked in with the wisdom of your own body to design your body reboots, your mind contains the keys to the same performance treasures, just through a different entrance.

Repeat your visualization exercises. But at the end of each round, ask yourself what words or phrases are best describing your best experiences. Maybe you find yourself using adjectives like smooth, cool, effortless or assertive. Also check into what kind of visual images come forward. Sometimes, you can really encapsulate that great ride in a snapshot of you finishing your round or being congratulated by someone.

Josie discovered her most powerful connections to her good rides were expressed through visual images. She had one vision of herself receiving a championship cooler. Another was a close up of herself after a round with an expression of pride and excitement. She also chose the word "attack" because to her, it best exemplified the approach she had when she rode her best.

Some other examples of mind reboots are:

- Name your next task with one word, repeat it like a mantra until you feel your mind begin to follow (forward, forward or connect, connect)
- Repeat the phrase "go to" and then follow it with a direction for your mind, like "go to your attack ride" or "go to your gentle ride", "go to your committed ride"
- Try the phrase "back to form" to direct your attention back to the basics.

Obviously, body and mind reboots do overlap. You are, after all, accessing the same memories and experiences. It is just helpful to sometimes separate and examine what may be cues to your best by approaching from different angles. All of us will have a preference for what entry way we choose, what will have the most power to turn us in the direction of our most effective performance states.