

Advice on being a TOP working student

By Eventing, MMC Style

Want to be a working student? Want to know what it takes to excel at it. Read the following advice. It is all important.

The decision. First you must decide if being a working student is something you are even interested in. KNOW it is going to be the toughest thing you have ever done in your life. You will get out of it, what you put in. Are you a timid person/rider? Do you hate asking questions? Will a person yelling at you bother you? Do you learn easily? Does criticism upset you? Do you have a boyfriend? Any one of those, alone, can make it tough. If you add them together, it makes it very tough. After you have made the decision... think of what you want in a working student position, then write down what you need. Remember, there are lots out there who want to do the same thing. The top riders only have so many openings.

You have made the decision that you can afford to do this, and want to do this. Now how do you go about getting the BEST possible match? Decide what you think you need to work on, then start asking around. Do you need to know how to manage a huge barn? Are you good enough, and already at a level that working with an Olympic rider is top priority? Would you be better starting with someone smaller, who has more time to devote to you?

Make a list, and make a call. Don't send an EMAIL. Pick up a phone, and call. If you are serious about this, you have to come across as being someone of VALUE. That you CAN do this. THAT you will ADD to that person's atmosphere.

The interview. LEAVE THE PHONE AT HOME. Don't go broadcasting you are trying so and so and having an interview. Watch what is on your FB page. Lot of pics of you partying...clean it up. We LOOK. Dress appropriately. Be prompt. Bring the required items. Send a video ahead. No point in wasting anyone's time. IF you cannot ride Preliminary, and they need that skill, don't waste their time. Say yes ma'am, no sir, etc. Have them tell you to not do so. Remember, this person is very busy. Answer HONESTLY. MORE on Honesty later.

You are going to be a working student. YAY. Now for the pointers on HOW TO BE INDISPENSABLE to the rider.

1. Every single time that a working student works on the day they arrive, voluntarily, they have been a fairly decent Working Student. When you get there, don't expect someone to roll out red carpets. Believe me, you are on a "SHOW ME you are VALUABLE" stage. Jumping in, even fresh out of an 18 hour road trip, shows me you mean business.
2. WRITE IT DOWN. At night, write down the things you learned during the day. I don't just mean things to help you, but things to help them. Write down the horses, their names, anything of value you were told. The person who can come on the second day of their stint, and say names of the horses, usually gets a lot out of the experience. There is nothing more irritating than having someone asking ten times the same question. Or "forgetting" they were asked to do this or that.
3. Pay attention to detail. YES, detail. Do not leave the supplements at the bottom of the bucket you just emptied, get them out. Do make sure that the feed buckets are clean after you scrub them out. Take that rag, and wipe out the bucket before dumping water...These little things, mean a lot, and show me you care, and take pride in your work.

4. **WORK SMART, and FAST.** Don't walk from point A to point B with nothing in your hand. Have you ever NOT seen something that could be put away? Walk fast. I have had back surgery, and if I can out walk a working student, they usually don't make it more than a week. Don't just carry a single bucket of grain if you can carry 6, or use a cart. Walking back and forth is tiring. It's also especially time consuming.
5. **STAY OFF YOUR PHONE.** I have had to institute a no-phone policy during the day at my facility. This is due to one young lady and her Mom who texted the entire day to one another. Explain to friends and family that you love them, but if you are on a phone the entire day, it is immensely time consuming, and disrespectful.
6. **BE RESPECTFUL.** Why bother coming otherwise. No one enjoys being disrespected. **KEEP** your **OPINIONS** to yourself. You aren't there to tell the rider what you think of their riding, training methods, etc. You are there to learn theirs. You can take what you learn home and use it, or not. That is your choice. But don't go into someone's barn, and tell someone they are doing it wrong. When you have gotten to where they are, and they come to your place, go for it. Until then....
7. Get up early, stay late, and volunteer. I love the student who says, **I CAN HANDLE THIS**, I got it. And then has it.
8. Put in what you want out. Running a facility is **NOT** an easy thing. It's not easy for the owners, the riders, the grooms. I guarantee you....you give your best, you will take something home with you. Learn. I had a student recently come in, and she left riding exactly like she came in. It wasn't that she didn't get lessons. It wasn't that she didn't sometimes do it during the lesson. It had to do with, she thought she knew more than everyone else. **IF** you are taking the time to be a working student, and going thru all the crap....try to learn.
9. Stay. Yes, that is right, **STAY**. If you have committed to someone that you will stay for a month, a year, whatever. **DO SO**. The only person you are hurting if you leave is you. The rider has more coming down the pipeline. But you are the one hurt the most. Not only can that rider no longer give you a reference...but you just became a quitter.
10. Be responsible, and honest. I recently asked my students if they were brushing our horses' tails. We only brush when at a show, other times we use our fingers to pull out bedding, and leave it at that. 2 of the 3 working students admitted they had been brushing tails, and promised to not do it again. They had forgotten this. The last one, in front of the other two said she had been using her fingers and show sheen. Unknown to me, she was lying. When she left, I found out she had lied. Once you are known as a liar, it will be very very tough to get that trust back. This young lady left early, but had I found out and she had still been there, my respect for her would have been nil. Along with those same lines....admit to your mistakes. Guess what, we all make them. I have always said, it isn't if you make a mistake, it is how you handle it, and fixing it that matters. I have one young lady who put boots on our stallion. They grew very wet, and fell down as she was riding. She was unaware, and when pics were viewed later, there they were, down around the ankles. Instead of making excuses, she simply said, I am sorry, I should have been more aware. As did the photographer. Fortunately there wasn't any damage, and instead of trying to make excuses, they earned a lot of respect for being so honest. Last. Don't expect everything. That's right. Don't expect everything. Some days just go to crap...other days you may get the world. Expect to be treated with respect. Nicely. Don't expect it to happen all the time. Don't expect to ride the top horse in the barn. I don't care if you are the best rider I have ever met. It's risky putting someone on one of the best horses we own. If you are blessed to get to walk that horse for it's morning hacks, take that for the compliment it is. There is nothing worse, than for a trainer to find out, that a student is upset they aren't getting to ride the top horses. Years and years of work go into the making of a top level event horse. One small step can ruin that horse....but if you stop expecting...then you will find lots of surprises in store!!! These are some great pointers.... run with them. And go be the next big working student.