

# EQUIDO – ZERO TOLERANCE

I would like you to picture this scenario for a moment: Your first day at work in your dream job. You have studied hard, qualified and have left school or college to begin your career in the only industry you have ever been interested in. The interview was hard but the managers were friendly and now you are keen to show everyone how hard you can work and how good an employee you are.

You appear at work on time and at first everything seems ok. The managers seem quite cold and strict with their instructions but you think nothing of it. The work is hard and fast and you struggle to keep up to speed, trying your best to do everything that is required. Suddenly, one of the managers turns on you and begins to shout and scream because you forgot to do some small insignificant task. You want to cry, because you have done so many things that day really well and no one seemed to have noticed or praised you in any way.

Finally it is the end of the day, the time when you had been told you were to leave, you gather your things and finish up then you hear “Boy/Girl!” shouted at you in front of clients and other staff, “Where do you think you are going, you will finish when I say you can finish!” You are humiliated and ashamed but really afraid not to do as you are told because you want this job so much.

As the days progress you begin to accept the way the managers shout at you, how they deliberately make you feel small and humiliate you in front of others. Perhaps one of the other staff members pushes you around or strikes you. When you complain you are sent back out to work and given into trouble for making up stories. Nothing you do well or correctly is ever praised and the slightest mistake will result in a screaming fit by the manager who calls you “useless, lazy, stupid and worthless.” Eventually you begin to dread going into work, you feel ill and don’t want to eat. You can’t talk about anything to your friends or parents because you really want this job but suddenly your dream career does not seem as attractive as you once thought.

You have been taught at college or during your studies how to do your job correctly but you see violence and improper practise every day. When you question why things are not done according to the book you are laughed at and told to “stop being such a soft touch and stupid”. Finally you snap and shout back, you are dragged into the office and disciplined. You complain about your treatment and they just laugh at you saying, “That is how things are done around here. I don’t want to see any of your bad attitude, get used to it or get out.” You are devastated, all your dreams are shattered and you have a simple choice. Stay and continue to be bullied and humiliated or go and everyone will think you a failure.

How many readers are outraged, what if this person was your son or daughter? There is no question that such treatment is clearly abuse, both physical and psychological. There is no place for this type of treatment in any industry and most professional institutions have rules and guidelines in place to protect their employees from this sort of behaviour. However, how many readers recall exactly the same treatment from their employers when they first started out in the equestrian industry?

Most of the older generation of professional horsemen or women will have been subject to such treatment at some point as they progressed through their lives. Most however, would never dream of treating anyone else in such a way as they know how it feels to be on the receiving end. They know how de-motivating it is to be treated in such a way and that you will never get the best from anyone if you do not give them respect.

It may well shock you however to hear that this sort of treatment of staff still goes on in many areas of the equestrian industry and quite frankly there is simply no excuse for it. Many of the worst offenders will say “that is how I was treated and it didn’t do me any harm!” and my response is simply this, it made you into what you once hated, a weak minded bully with no real courage and who preys on the young and naive.

There are many, many good quality establishments out there who have happy and motivated staff where everyone works as a team and the staff turnover is very low as no one wants to leave. On the flip

side there seems to be more yards where staff are unhappy, of poor quality, are poorly treated and poorly motivated. Turnover is high as most employees cannot stand it for long. They are abused mentally and physically and become depressed or angry and when this happens the ones that really suffer are the horses. An angry, exhausted disillusioned staff member will lose their temper with their charges, despite their best efforts they will find themselves becoming irrationally emotional at the slightest mis-demeanour and will retaliate. At the end of the day, workplace bullying creates a bad atmosphere where ultimately it is the horses that are the losers.

The excuse of "I had to go through it" is a no-brainer as far as I'm concerned if this was the case then we would still be shoving small children up chimneys! This is the 21st century, deal with it! We must no longer tolerate such treatment of young and perhaps talented staff. How many potentially really good young people became sickened of the industry and left before they could show how good they really were? We all "tut" and make noises of disapproval at the "idiots" who ruin perfectly good young horses and either cripple them in their ignorance or turn them into "problem" horses, yet no one seems to notice or care about the "idiots" who ruin perfectly good young people, driving them away from the industry or turning them into parodies of themselves and their bitterness.

Our mission statement must then be "Zero Tolerance", it is up to us as employers and employees to make a stand and stamp out this type of treatment and abuse. If you find yourself in a situation like this then please seek help before it is too late. I advise you to contact "Citizens Advice" who can give you impartial advice on such matters. If you really need the job then look for another, there are good places out there who are only too willing to take on well motivated staff. It will soon become known who are "good" employers and who are "bad", the reputation of the establishments will be tarnished and they will find it harder and harder to keep staff and will eventually close. For those of you reading this who regularly treat staff in this unacceptable manner, watch out, your days are numbered.