



Mark Johnston's

THE BHA has launched a Respect In Racing campaign aimed at encouraging a culture of respect and safeguarding against discrimination within the sport. The campaign, developed by a cross-industry working party headed up by BHA non-executive director Laura Whyte, brings us a code of conduct, six commandments, and an online-learning module to teach us the meaning of respect and how to respect others.

I was particularly taken by the choice of the word 'encouraging' in their aim of 'encouraging a culture of respect'. The BHA knows all about encouraging those who operate under their jurisdiction to do as they are told and, dare I say, 'respect' the BHA's rules and regulations. Breaking one of the six commandments might not get you struck down by a bolt of lightning or condemned to spending eternity surrounded by fire and brimstone, but it could result in a fine of up to £10,000 or exclusion from the sport for anything up to 10 years.

I must admit that it was me, not the BHA, who chose the word 'commandments' to describe the six key points from the code of conduct but, as they were presented, they immediately made me think, not of the 10 rules hammered into us with threats of damnation in British primary schools when I was a child, but of Orwell's seven commandments in *Animal Farm*. I was

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DO WE NEED A CODE TO SHOW SOME RESPECT?

immediately reminded that, two months ago, before I knew anything of this new code of conduct, I used the analogy of the animals taking over the farmhouse when describing the switch from the Jockey Club to the BHA. I said then, regarding the attitude towards trainers entering the weighing room: 'It all smacks of a total disrespect for those providing the racing product, whether they be trainers or owners'.

I have, of course, like a good boy, worked (maybe 'skipped' would be more truthful) through the online course and completed the quiz/test at the end. I have to say I found the whole thing, like the other BHA online learning modules, a little condescending but, above all, I was left wondering what there was here that wasn't covered by employment legislation and the law of the land. We must assume that, in listing a few things that would, understandably, be considered unacceptable, this is not, in any way, condoning other illegal practices. Maybe I have missed the other BHA codes which say you must not steal from, defraud, or murder your colleague or employee.

Part of me can understand why it was

considered necessary to produce such a code as, when I came into this industry, we were, to some extent, still in the dark ages. 'Lads' still called their employer 'Guvnor' or 'Sir' and his wife 'Madam' (apart from a couple of notable exceptions, trainers were male). But people like me had driven a bus through those out-dated practices years before anyone at the BHA thought of doing so, and reaped the benefits. Times they were a changin' and Racing along with them. We didn't need the BHA to tell us that.

I cannot help but wonder how much of the BHA budget is being spent on writing rules that don't need to be written. Should the BHA not concentrate on governing those unique aspects of our sport that are not covered by government legislation?

When it comes to promoting a culture of respect, the BHA would do well to first consider the old adages of 'practise what you preach' and 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'.

The Six 'Commandments'

1. Everyone must protect the dignity of others and treat each other with politeness, respect, and kindness.
2. Everyone must ensure that the sport of horseracing is safe for all and free of any form of bullying, harassment, or abuse.
3. No one shall engage in any form of sexual misconduct.
4. Everyone who uses social media and the online space must act responsibly and not engage in any form of online bullying, harassment, or abuse.
5. No one shall abuse positions of power or responsibility or take advantage of those in a vulnerable position.
6. No one shall discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, or sex and sexual orientation.

Straight Talking

Quantum leap required

LAST MONTH I considered how, in the current economic climate, it was possible for yearling prices to have risen by around 30% and I speculated that the increases could not simply be attributed to foreign demand and a weak pound. I suggested that, at least to some extent, money was moving in a circle with high yearling prices fuelling higher stud fees which, in turn, pushed the prices of breeding stock, foals, and yearlings upwards. As the sales went on and the high prices continued my enthusiasm for this theory increased.

I was particularly interested in the fact that I managed to buy three well-bred sons of the late superstar sire Galileo for a fraction of his last reported stud fee.

The purchase prices of the three colts ranged from 57,000 guineas to 115,000 guineas and I was under-bidder on another, at 75,000 guineas, which frustratingly was sold privately later for 60,000 guineas. These are still significant amounts of money when compared with the cost of an average family car but not when you consider that Galileo's yearling average in 2021 was £489,000 and £681,000 the previous year.

OF course, I have bought 'cheap' sons and daughters of Galileo in the past – very successfully I might add – but never so many in one year and never so easily. I started to wonder if it is always the case that a stallion's yearling average drops dramatically as soon as he dies or stops covering.

I thought, and still do, that it would be an interesting subject for James Willoughby to investigate but then along came Europe's biggest Horses-In-Training sales at Tattersalls and

prices there blew a few holes in my theory.

Turnover there was up around 15% with the average price up a similar amount, although the median remained the same as last year.

Our own I'm A Gambler topped the sale at a staggering 850,000 guineas and is off to race in California. It was very notable, and sad, to see that the vast majority of the top lots were bound for racing overseas where prize-money really can justify spending these vast sums.

The drain of quality horses from British racing was never more evident than in this sale and it confirmed that the crisis facing British racing is very real. The fact the price of yearlings increased even more than the price of proven horses, and that fewer yearlings are being bought to race abroad, might

suggest that there is some truth in my original theory and that there is an element of hype surrounding yearling prices and stud fees. But it can certainly be argued that it is the value of racehorses in other jurisdictions that allows breeders to maintain these high fees and that, if that were not the case, we would be losing stallions and breeding stock from Britain and Ireland as well as racehorses. That really would be a final nail in our coffin.

WE need a quantum leap in prize-money in Britain if these trends are to be slowed, never mind reversed, and that will require radical change to the financial structure of our industry. British racing's goose has been getting overcooked for so long that the meat is now falling off the bones.



Mark and Charlie purchased this son of Galileo for 57,000 gns at Tattersalls