# **Bonus Chapter: Are You Riding a Dead Horse?**

## **When Your Money Strategy Stops Working**

"When you discover that you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount." — Dakota tribal wisdom

"But what if you've been riding it for so long, you've forgotten what walking feels like?" — MK

#### Page 1: The Multi-Million Dollar Dead Horse

I was sitting across from Marcus, a brilliant entrepreneur who'd built a €15 million company, watching him describe his latest "innovation strategy" with the enthusiasm of someone trying to convince himself more than me.

"We're going to rebrand the entire platform," he said, sliding a glossy presentation across the table.

"New logo, new messaging, new sales approach. This will definitely turn things around."

I looked at the numbers he'd shared earlier. Revenue down 40% over two years. Customer satisfaction at an all-time low. Key employees leaving monthly. The product itself—a software platform that had been revolutionary five years ago—was now obsolete, surpassed by newer technologies his competitors had adopted while he'd been polishing features nobody wanted.

Marcus was spending €200,000 on rebranding a dead horse.

"When did you last talk to your customers about what they actually need?" I asked gently.

His face tightened. "We did a survey last year. But customers don't always know what they want until you show them."

**There it was—the dead horse delusion.** Marcus wasn't stupid. He wasn't incompetent. He was a victim of something that destroys more wealth than market crashes and economic downturns combined: the inability to recognize when something that once worked has stopped working.

The Dead Horse Theory in the context of wealth isn't just about failed businesses—it's about any money strategy, investment approach, career path, or financial behavior that's no longer serving you but that you keep funding with time, energy, and resources.

#### **Common financial dead horses:**

**Career Dead Horses**: Staying in jobs or industries that are dying while spending money on skills that are becoming irrelevant

**Investment Dead Horses**: Continuing to pour money into declining assets because "they'll come back" or because of emotional attachment

**Business Dead Horses**: Keeping failed business models alive through increasingly desperate measures instead of pivoting or closing

**Lifestyle Dead Horses**: Maintaining expensive lifestyles that no longer align with your income or values

**Relationship Dead Horses**: Continuing to financially support situations (businesses, people, projects) that drain resources without creating value

**Strategy Dead Horses**: Using financial approaches that worked in the past but are ineffective in current circumstances

Marcus's dead horse was his attachment to being "the guy who built the revolutionary platform." His identity was so intertwined with that past success that he couldn't see the present reality: the market had moved on, and so should he.

But instead of dismounting, he was buying a stronger whip.

**6** Reflection Exercise: Your Financial Horses

Look at your current financial situation and identify:

- Where are you spending money on strategies that aren't working?
- What investments or approaches are you funding out of habit rather than results?
- Where might you be polishing the saddle instead of finding a new horse?

### Page 2: The Consultant Who Couldn't Stop Consulting

Elena had been a successful management consultant for fifteen years. She'd built a thriving practice, commanded premium rates, and worked with Fortune 500 companies across Europe.

But the industry had changed. Companies were hiring younger, cheaper consultants. They wanted digital transformation expertise she didn't have. Her network was aging out of decision-making roles. Her phone had stopped ringing six months ago.

Instead of recognizing that her particular style of consulting was becoming obsolete, Elena doubled down:

Year 1 of the decline: She spent €25,000 on a new website and branding Year 2: She hired a sales coach for €15,000 to improve her pitch Year 3: She took expensive courses in digital marketing for €20,000 Year 4: She lowered her rates by 50% to compete with younger consultants Year 5: She was considering getting an MBA to "update her credentials"

## Elena was systematically implementing every item on the Dead Horse Theory's satirical list:

- 1. ✓ **Buying a stronger whip** (better marketing)
- 2. ✓ **Changing riders** (hiring coaches to fix her approach)
- 3. ✓ **Providing additional funding** (investing more money in the failing strategy)
- 4. ✓ **Lowering standards** (reducing rates to include herself in cheaper categories)
- 5. ✓ **Arranging visits to other countries** (studying what other consultants were doing)

What Elena couldn't see—because her identity was so tied to being "a consultant"—was that her skills were incredibly valuable in a different context. Her strategic thinking, business acumen, and relationship abilities would have made her an excellent internal executive, board advisor, or entrepreneur.

But she was so focused on reviving the dead horse of traditional consulting that she couldn't see the living horses all around her.

The breakthrough came during a conversation with her accountant.

"Elena," he said, looking at her financial statements, "you've spent €75,000 over three years trying to fix a consulting practice that's generating €30,000 annually. If you'd put that money into almost any other investment, you'd be better off financially."

The math was brutal and undeniable. She was paying to work.

**The pattern became clear:** Elena had fallen into what I call "Strategy Addiction"—the compulsive need to fix something that's fundamentally broken rather than starting fresh.

Six months later, Elena accepted a Chief Strategy Officer role at a growing tech company. Her compensation was double what she'd been making as a consultant, and she was using the same skills in a more relevant context.

"I realized I wasn't attached to consulting," she told me. "I was attached to being needed for my strategic thinking. I just had to find a new way to be needed."

#### Elena's transformation required three shifts:

- 1. Identity Flexibility: Separating who she was from what she did
- 2. Sunk Cost Acceptance: Letting go of the money already invested in the failing strategy
- 3. Opportunity Vision: Seeing possibilities beyond the current struggling approach
- **6** Reflection Exercise: Your Professional Dead Horse

Consider your current career or business approach:

- How much time and money have you invested in trying to fix something that might be fundamentally broken?
- What would need to be true for you to consider a completely different approach?
- What skills or qualities do you have that could be valuable in other contexts?

## **Page 3: The Anatomy of Wealth Dead Horses**

After working with hundreds of people caught in dead horse patterns, I've identified the common elements that keep us riding long after we should have dismounted:

The Sunk Cost Trap: "I've already invested so much, I can't stop now."

This is the most common dead horse trap. The more you've invested in something—time, money, identity, reputation—the harder it becomes to abandon it, even when all evidence shows it's not working.

**Example**: Continuing to fund a failing business because you've already invested your life savings, even when market research shows there's no viable path forward.

The Identity Fusion: "If this fails, who am I?"

When your sense of self becomes inseparable from a particular financial strategy or career path, you can't see other options. Your worth becomes tied to making this specific thing work.

**Example**: An entrepreneur who can't pivot from a failing startup because their entire identity is built around being "the founder of this company."

The Competence Illusion: "I'm good at this, so it must work eventually."

Just because you're skilled at something doesn't mean there's still a market for it. Being the best maker of horse-drawn carriages didn't help when cars became mainstream.

**Example**: A talented newspaper journalist who keeps perfecting print writing skills while the industry moves to digital-first, video-centric content.

The Historical Success Bias: "This worked before, so it will work again."

Past success can blind you to present reality. The strategy that made you wealthy in one market condition might destroy wealth in different conditions.

**Example**: A real estate investor who keeps using 2005 strategies in a 2025 market, wondering why deals aren't working.

The Comparison Trap: "Others are still doing this successfully."

Just because someone else is making money with a strategy doesn't mean it's right for you. Their context, timing, resources, or skills might be different.

**Example**: Continuing to pursue network marketing because you see others succeeding, without acknowledging that your personality and network aren't suited for that approach.

The Hope Addiction: "Things will turn around if I just try harder."

Hope becomes toxic when it prevents you from facing reality. Optimism is valuable, but not when it's detached from evidence.

**Example**: A retail store owner who keeps hoping foot traffic will return to pre-pandemic levels instead of adapting to e-commerce reality.

#### **Recognition Signs You're Riding a Financial Dead Horse:**

- You're working harder but earning less
- You're spending more money to maintain the same income level
- You're making excuses for why your strategy isn't working instead of questioning the strategy itself
- You feel defensive when people suggest alternatives
- You're tired all the time but can't explain why
- You're borrowing money or using savings to fund current operations
- You avoid looking at the actual numbers because they're depressing
- You're spending more time trying to fix the strategy than implementing it

The liberation comes from understanding: You are not your strategy. Your worth doesn't depend on making any particular approach work. You can honor what got you here while choosing something different for what takes you forward.

## **6** Reflection Exercise: Dead Horse Diagnosis

For each major area of your financial life (career, investments, business, major expenses), honestly assess:

- Is this working better, the same, or worse than it was two years ago?
- How much time and money am I spending trying to fix problems versus exploring alternatives?
- If I were starting fresh today, would I choose this same approach?

• What am I afraid will happen if I stop funding this strategy?

#### Page 4: The Dismounting Process - How to Get Off Gracefully

Recognizing you're riding a dead horse is painful. Actually dismounting is terrifying. But there's an art to letting go gracefully that can save you years of suffering and thousands of dollars in wasted resources.

### **The Four-Stage Dismounting Process:**

## **Stage 1: Honest Assessment (The Reality Check)**

Before you can dismount, you need to see clearly what you're actually riding. This requires brutal honesty about results, not intentions.

#### **Questions for honest assessment:**

- What are the actual financial results of this strategy over the past 12 months?
- How much time and money am I investing versus the returns I'm receiving?
- If a stranger looked at my situation, what would they recommend?
- What evidence would I need to see to convince me this isn't working?

**Elena's reality check**: Tracking showed she was earning €30,000 while spending €35,000 on business expenses. She was literally paying to work.

**Marcus's reality check**: Customer surveys revealed that 80% found his software outdated compared to competitors. His "revolutionary platform" was now industry standard, and newer solutions were surpassing it.

### **Stage 2: Mourning the Loss (The Grief Work)**

Letting go of a financial strategy often means grieving multiple losses:

- The money already invested (sunk costs)
- The identity attached to the approach
- The future you'd imagined with this strategy
- The time spent that can't be recovered

This grief is real and necessary. You're not just changing strategies—you're letting a version of yourself die.

### **Healthy mourning includes:**

- Acknowledging what this strategy gave you when it was working
- Feeling the sadness of what you're losing
- Honoring the lessons learned, even from failure
- Expressing gratitude for what the experience taught you

### **Stage 3: Resource Recovery (The Triage)**

Once you've decided to dismount, you need to stop the bleeding and recover what resources you can.

### **Steps for resource recovery:**

- 1. Stop all new investment in the dead strategy immediately
- 2. Liquidate recoverable assets (sell equipment, close subscriptions, end contracts)
- 3. Redirect time and energy to exploration of alternatives
- 4. Preserve relationships that have value beyond this specific strategy
- 5. **Document lessons learned** so the investment wasn't completely wasted

#### Stage 4: New Horse Selection (The Pivot)

The goal isn't to never ride again—it's to find a horse that's actually alive and going in a direction you want to travel.

## **Criteria for evaluating new financial strategies:**

- Market validation: Is there real demand for this approach?
- Resource alignment: Do you have the time, money, and skills needed?
- Energy test: Does thinking about this approach energize or drain you?
- Values alignment: Does this approach reflect who you want to be?
- Exit strategy: How would you know if this new approach was becoming a dead horse?

#### **The Graceful Dismount Script:**

When explaining your decision to others (and yourself), use this framework:

"I've learned a tremendous amount from [dead horse strategy]. It served me well for [time period] and taught me [key lessons]. However, the market/my situation/my goals have evolved, and I've decided to redirect my energy toward [new approach]. I'm grateful for what this experience gave me, and I'm excited about what comes next."

#### **Common Dismounting Fears and Responses:**

**Fear**: "People will think I'm a failure." **Response**: People respect those who can adapt and make tough decisions more than those who cling to obvious failures.

**Fear**: "I'll lose all the money I've invested." **Response**: You'll lose more money by continuing to fund a dead strategy than by cutting losses now.

**Fear**: "I don't know what else to do." **Response**: Not knowing what's next is better than knowing you're heading in the wrong direction.

**Fear**: "I might be wrong—maybe it will work if I try harder." **Response**: If trying harder was the answer, it would have worked by now.

### Integration Exercise: Your Dismounting Plan

Choose one dead horse you've identified and create a dismounting plan:

- 1. Reality check: What are the actual numbers and results?
- 2. Loss acknowledgment: What will you be grieving when you let this go?
- 3. **Resource recovery**: What can you liquidate or redirect?
- 4. New direction: What alternatives are you curious about exploring?
- 5. **Timeline**: When will you complete the dismounting process?

#### Page 5: Finding Your Next Living Horse

The goal of dismounting a dead horse isn't to walk everywhere for the rest of your life—it's to find a horse that's actually alive, healthy, and heading somewhere you want to go.

But after riding dead horses, many people become "horse phobic." They're so afraid of making another mistake that they avoid trying anything new. This is just another form of dead horse—the paralysis horse.

### **The Living Horse Identification Process:**

#### **Step 1: Market Reality Check**

Before falling in love with any new financial strategy, do the market research you probably skipped with your dead horse.

#### **Questions to research:**

- Is there genuine, growing demand for this approach?
- Who's succeeding with this strategy, and why?
- What skills, resources, or circumstances do successful people have?
- What are the common failure points, and how can you avoid them?
- How is this market likely to evolve over the next 3-5 years?

#### **Step 2: Personal Alignment Assessment**

A strategy might be working for others but still be wrong for you. Honest self-assessment prevents riding the wrong living horse.

#### **Alignment questions:**

- Do I genuinely enjoy the activities this strategy requires?
- Do I have (or can I develop) the skills needed for success?
- Can I afford the time and money investment without jeopardizing my security?
- Does this approach align with my values and long-term goals?
- Am I choosing this for the right reasons, or am I running from something?

## **Step 3: Pilot Testing**

Instead of betting everything on a new strategy, test it in small, low-risk ways first.

## Pilot testing approaches:

- Time-limited trials: Commit to trying something for 90 days, then evaluate
- Limited investment: Test with money you can afford to lose completely
- Side projects: Try new approaches while maintaining current income
- Skill building: Develop capabilities before making major transitions
- Market validation: Get real customer feedback before scaling

#### **Step 4: Success Metrics Definition**

Define what success looks like BEFORE you start riding the new horse. This prevents falling in love with activity instead of results.

#### Success metrics should be:

- Specific: Clear, measurable outcomes
- Time-bound: Deadlines for achieving milestones
- Meaningful: Connected to your actual goals, not just vanity metrics
- Realistic: Achievable given your resources and market conditions
- Honest: Based on real data, not hopeful projections

## **Step 5: Exit Strategy Planning**

Plan how you'll recognize if your new horse starts dying, so you can dismount before it becomes a dead horse.

### Exit trigger examples:

- If revenue doesn't reach \$X by month 12, reassess
- If I'm consistently working more than 60 hours per week, something is wrong
- If customer satisfaction drops below Y%, investigate alternatives
- If I start dreading the work, it's time to reevaluate
- If market conditions change dramatically, pause and reassess

## **Living Horse Examples from Former Dead Horse Riders:**

**Marcus** (failed software platform): Became a digital transformation consultant, using his experience of what NOT to do as valuable expertise. Income increased 40% in his first year.

**Elena** (struggling consultant): Joined a growing company as Chief Strategy Officer. Same skills, different context, double the income with half the stress.

**James** (failed restaurant owner): Started a food truck specializing in his signature dishes. Lower overhead, higher margins, more freedom.

**Sarah** (obsolete graphic designer): Learned UX design and became a freelance user experience consultant. Built on existing design skills but pivoted to growing market.

The key insight: Your next living horse often uses skills from your dead horse experience, but in a new context that's actually viable.

## **Your Living Horse Criteria Checklist:**

☐ <b>Market Demand</b> : Real people are paying real money for this ☐ <b>Skill Alignment</b> : I can develop the
capabilities needed for success $\square$ Resource Realistic: I can afford the investment required $\square$ Energy
<b>Positive</b> : Thinking about this approach energizes me D <b>Values Congruent</b> : This aligns with who I

want to be 

Exit Clear: I know how I'll recognize if this becomes a dead horse 

Timeline Defined: I have specific milestones and deadlines 

Support Available: I have mentors, resources, or

Before committing to any new financial strategy, ensure it meets these criteria:

communities to help

**6** Final Integration: Your Horse Transition Plan

Create a complete transition plan:

**From** (Dead Horse): What specifically are you dismounting from? **To** (Living Horse): What new approach are you exploring? **Timeline**: When will you complete the transition? **Resources Needed**: What do you need to learn, buy, or develop? **Success Metrics**: How will you measure progress and success? **Support System**: Who will help you stay accountable and objective? **Exit Strategy**: How will you know if the new horse starts dying?

#### **The Ultimate Dead Horse Wisdom:**

The Dakota saying ends with "the best strategy is to dismount," but it doesn't say "and then never ride again." The wisdom is in knowing when to let go AND when to try something new.

You are not defined by your dead horses. You are defined by your willingness to recognize them, dismount gracefully, and find living horses that can actually take you where you want to go.

The key insight: In wealth building, as in life, your success isn't determined by never making mistakes—it's determined by how quickly you can recognize and correct them.

Final thought: Every successful person is riding a horse that used to be someone else's dead horse. The graveyard of failed strategies is also the breeding ground for new opportunities.