

Stages of Farrier Development (Part II) by Esco Buff, PhD

Movement from career stage to career stage is the essence of career development. We move to a new career stage by meeting certain needs characteristic of our current career stage. We then select opportunities that best help us meet those needs.

Associated with each career stage are identifiable characteristics and needs that guide thoughts, behaviors, and actions at a particular stage. These ultimately have an effect on the nature of developmental opportunities appropriate at a particular stage.

While the farrier stage model suggests progression from one stage to another, it acknowledges that not all farriers will progress through all five stages over the course of their career. For each stage, there are suggestions to help drive professional development at that point in one's career. There are distinct suggestions for each career stage. Also listed are some possible professional development opportunities that may be appropriate for each stage.

A failure to successfully navigate through the various stages can have significant consequences. If a farrier experiences declining commitment, they may seriously consider leaving the farrier profession.

Stage 1: Entry Farrier

As stated before, this is the time that an individual first enters the farrier profession. It is essential that all professionals move out of this stage to attain career satisfaction.

Growth and possible movement from this stage may include:

- Further your understanding about the equine industry and Farrier profession.
- Keep practicing and obtaining basic level farrier skills.
- Establishing a support system and networking through respected peers in the field.
- Move from dependency to independency by practicing and studying.
- Resolving personal and professional issues.
- Expand your knowledge in all areas including relevant lameness issues, breed and Discipline understanding.
- Build relationships with other professional peers.
- Get mentoring from General Farrier Practitioners or Seasoned/Professional Farriers.

Stage 2: Crossroads Farrier

This is the stage that the farrier is faced with a decision to opt to become a lifelong farrier or to pursue another career? The farrier in this stage needs to find ways to manage their stress through reliance on family and peer support. You will begin to experience burnout due to generally working long hours nearly every day of the week, and the added conflict that is often present between work and personal life.

Growth and possible movement from this stage may include:

- Developing an area or discipline of expertise.
- Becoming good at lameness problem solving.
- Work on developing a professional identity in your area by providing a service or specialty that others in your area do not offer.
- Start to share knowledge and information with your customers and other horse owners.
- Develop educational material to hand out to your customers.
- Start gaining membership in the professional community (AFA, BWFA, etc).
- Focus on increasing your effectiveness and efficiency as a farrier by practicing your skills and increasing your knowledge in business, time management, etc.
- Expand your knowledge regarding relevant issues in your day to day practice (business, radiology, lameness topics, breed topics, etc).
- Get mentoring from Seasoned/Professional or Advisor/Leadership Farriers.

Stage 3: The General Farrier Practitioner

Professional farriers typically exit the Crossroads Farrier stage with making the decision to continue their work as a General Practitioner Farrier. This stage can be a satisfactory level for many farriers for many years, as long as growth continues. Some farriers never need to move beyond this level, thriving on the independent work.

Growth and possible movement from this stage may include:

- Acquiring broad-based expertise.
- Build at least one area of expertise for which you will be noted for.
- Increase your involvement in professional local associations.
- Developing close networks with other farriers.
- Start mentoring to Entry level and Crossroads Farriers.
- Start seeking and developing your own mentoring relationships with Seasoned/Professional or Adviser/Leadership Farriers.
- Start writing articles for submission to newsletters, journals, and other publications.
- Develop an on-line presence and start promoting your assets.
- Develop opportunities to give horse owner lectures, clinics...

Stage 4: The Seasoned or Professional Farrier

As you might imagine, the Seasoned or Professional Farrier stage can be a double-edged sword. As the seasoned or professional farrier becomes increasingly older, they may experience a shift in their relationship with other farriers and customers. The age differential gradually expands and many farriers often experience an ever expanding division between newer farriers and themselves. Rather than looking at this difference as a hindrance, it can become an opportunity to help mentor other farriers along.

Farriers in this stage have displayed a high commitment to the farrier profession. However, there may be some pull to explore other options such as becoming a clinic or university farrier or leaving the profession all together because of financial concerns or stress. In the early part of this stage, it is very important for the Seasoned or Professional Farrier to find ways to challenge themselves and psychologically grow. If this does not happen, there is a high risk of becoming

stagnant and stale. They also come to rely on their own internal expertise. Over time, experience-based generalizations and accumulated wisdom replace the use of "external" sources of expertise and prescribed way of doing things. In this sense, the Seasoned or Professional Farrier has their own body of knowledge that they rely on much more heavily in their work.

Growth and possible movement from this stage may include:

- Achieving the respect of others in the farrier profession.
- Possibly attain leadership position in professional circles.
- Engage in farrier innovation.
- Achieve a position of influence or respect in the industry.
- Provide mentoring to other farriers.
- Stimulate thought in other farriers.
- Expanding your knowledge regarding specific issues.
- Seek opportunities to utilize your expertise.
- Seek and develop your mentoring relationships with Adviser/Leadership Farriers.
- Have a strong on-line presence.
- Routinely write articles for submission to newsletters, journals, and other publications.
- Obtain referencing resources (written, verbal, on-line...).
- Have a concrete retirement plan.

Stage 5: The Adviser or Leadership Farrier

During this period, there is intense personal and professional reflection, consciously giving time and energy to processing, alone and with others, significant life and professional experiences. Adviser or Leadership Farriers may question whether they realized their dream and if they have lived their life with integrity.

Another observation during this stage is as time goes on, the Adviser or Leadership Farrier may experience increasing professional isolation. Professional elders may gradually disappear through retirement or death. Those that remain behind often experience a sense of loss of their professional peers. Similarly, there may be feelings of isolation or inability to significantly contribute to the field in a substantial way.

Growth in this stage may include:

- Promoting autonomy and professional respect in the industry.
- Promote professional involvement at the local, regional, or national levels.
- Enhance your professional relationships among colleagues.
- Routinely provide lectures, teaching opportunities, and mentoring.
- Routinely write professional articles or even your own books.