

Mule Psychology 101: The Rules

By Cindy K. McKinnon

To conclude the Mule Psychology 101 series, once again here are the rules. Like the admired schoolteacher that can identify and relate to each of her students, you must develop the ability to identify true behavior problems so you can relate to your mule.

First we must adopt some rules that shan't be broken. These are rules that I have adopted for myself. They are nonnegotiable.

- 1) No one gets hurt – you or the mule. Because of this rule, risks or short cuts will not be taken. Not ever!
- 2) Have a goal or purpose in mind and shoot for it. Never compromise this.
- 3) Read as much as you can and don't get stuck on one thing. Learn the many different riding disciplines and never lose interest in learning. Learning is a life long process. We will all leave this world only knowing so much.
- 4) Train the mule quickly and efficiently. Why quickly? Simply because the mule is a "get to the point" kind of animal. And, we don't want to bore him.
- 5) Train the mule with the least amount of conflict. Meaning, keep your disagreements to a minimum.
- 6) Learn the many languages of the mule, so that you many speak his language and then there will be no disagreements.
- 7) Give the mule the right amount of credit for his intelligence. To much credit to his IQ will get you into trouble as well as discounting him.
- 8) ALWAYS match the punishment to the crime when correcting your mule. NEVER over reprimand and NEVER lose you temper. You can get mad, just don't lose your temper. Once the proper correction has been quickly and effectively applied, forget it and move on.
- 9) WHEN you do make a mistake, forgive yourself, and then forgive your mule. Move forward. Learn together.
- 10) REWARD you mule for his good behavior, with kind words, caressing his neck, and/or treats.
- 11) When behavior problems develop, stand back and find out why. Investigate, is their pain from ill fitting equipment? Does he need time off from the hectic show schedule? A change in his routine? You are the professor and you are responsible for finding out what is troubling your student.
- 12) Respect you mule and let him be himself. That's right, let him be a mule. The unique, bold, calculating, inquisitive, suspicious, independent, athletic, hybrid creature is deserving to be himself. Altering his behavior is one thing, but to change him is another. Accept him as he is and you will both learn from each other.

Now that we all know the rules, we can begin. The biggest mistake that people tend to make regarding their mule's training, is not being able to IDENTIFY the less favorable behavior. In other words, they know that what the mule is doing is incorrect, or the wrong response, but are not able to pinpoint the CAUSE or the reason for that behavior. Gadgets or training aids are abruptly applied and to add to this, the owner is frustrated, the mule SENSES this and ANXIETY worsens. Usually, a bad habit is quickly developed as a result, then a frantic phone call to the trainer.

What if, you received a set of "instructions" that came with your mule? A booklet that explained all of his moods, temperaments and the how's and why to all of his quirks? Would you feel less intimidated by him, if you clearly understood him? Would you have more confidence in your schooling techniques if you possessed the knowledge? Are you able to act or apply when needed, and to quickly access each training incident with an open and objective mind? Can you be creative with your training so that you both keep a keen interest? Would you feel more at ease in your training techniques if you knew the rules to the hybrid mind? Yes, there are rules that are ever so in black and white, according to the mule. It doesn't matter in the least what you think, not according to the mule. It does matter, however, WHAT YOUR MULE THINKS. You see, we can't change the way of thinking. We can adjust his attitude, but more intelligently, we can think on his terms. We can present our methods to him in the manner that he likes. The talk that he wants to hear. Because, we know that the mule learns best when he teaches himself. Not when you or I attempt to apply something to his world. To be successful trainers, we have no choice, but to learn the mule's language. So that we can keep his mind fresh and willing. Not heart, but will. We must learn his language, so that we may communicate our wishes to the mule to get positive, favorable responses in his training. THAT is the key to a successful trainer. Keep an open mind, a hybrid state of mind, where both mule and rider win.