



RAISE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

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*If we raise our expectations of our mule,
we will have a better trained mule*

Do you own a perfect mule? Most mules are not perfect, but all mules should be safe, obey a person's cues and be calm and gentle.

It amazes me how many people overlook their mule's problems. I hear it all the time from mule owners. "My mule is great except he walks off when I mount...but that's okay, he's just being a mule." Or, "He runs into me when I lead him or he bucks when I ask him for a left lead, but that's okay, he's just being himself."

Keeping those low expectations of your mule is the same as hiring a contractor to build an addition on your house; he finishes the job and informs you that the job is great, except for the hole in the wall. Do you overlook the hole in the wall or fix the problem?

If a mule has a problem and WE ignore it, so will the mule. The problem will continue or get worse until it becomes important to us. It may not be important to you now, but it will become important, I guarantee it. For example, say your mule does not stop well. It is not a problem until the mule runs away with you and you get hurt. Or, it may not be that big of a deal that a mule walks into you until he knocks



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escalated, it was a big deal. Worse yet is when someone tells me the problem is "he is just being a mule" or I hear "that's a mule."

Equines are a reflection of their owners. A mule is more of a reflection of their owner than a horse. A mule is always thinking. Anytime you ask a mule to respond to a cue, the mule is asking itself, "What is he asking me to do and why is he asking me to do this".

This is the same if you are just walking into the mule's pen or pasture to feed him. The mule sees you and asks himself, "What does he want?"

So what is "just being a mule?" To me, a mule can be better trained than a horse. However, mules are too often looked at as the second class citizens of the equine world. A lot of horse owners that have never seen or been around mules have a bad image of mules.

They think that all mules will kick you, bite you or run away with you. They think that a mule could never be used for ranch work, unless you are packing them. Dressage, forget it; a mule could never do any good at Dressage, western pleasure, barrels and you could never rope a calf off a mule.

It is our job as mule owners to educate non-mule owners to the pleasure and benefits of mules. How can we do that? By raising our expectations of what our mule should be and having a well-trained mule. Our mule will have to be better trained than their horse.

We need to have a mule that will calmly walk down the trail as their horse is spooking at objects on the trail. Many times I will be riding or training at a public arena. People will always comment on how well trained the mule is I am riding. They will say "I wish my horse could do that." That is the best compliment I could get.

In my outfitting business, Bliss Creek Outfitters, I take people from all over the world on big game hunts. Clients book trips to hunt elk, big horn sheep or bear. Most have never ridden a horse or mule and they did not book a trip

you down. The mule is telling us ahead of time that he has a problem and it could turn into an accident.

When a person brings me a problem mule to train, I talk to the owner and get the history of the mule. In all cases, I can see the problem months before something major happens - the owner either did not see the problem, ignored the problem when it started or decided it was not that big of a deal. Once the problem

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to just ride. By the end of the trip, most clients will comment that they never knew mules were such good animals and they request to ride a mule out of camp to the trailhead.

When someone does not know mules or does not have high expectations of mules, then problems make mules look less than perfect. But, just like we are not perfect 100 percent of the time, neither are our mules. It becomes our job to raise our expectations and teach our mules to be as close to perfect as we can.

In order for our mules to be perfect, we must be consistent and light in our cues and quick with our release. If the mule runs off with us on the ground, he will run off with us under saddle.

Today there are many ways to find help to fix our problems. *Mules and More* has training articles each month to help readers improve their relationship with their mule.

I receive many calls from mule owners with questions. That is part of a trainer's job, to not only train mules for clients, but also to help people who do not have a trainer. No trainer in the world can train every mule. There are not enough days in the year or hours of the day. But, as a trainer, if I help an owner with his mule I help the mule; that is what I love to do, make mules look good! This also helps the mule industry and the perception someone without mules will have of mules when they see that mule.

If we have a problem that we do not feel confident fixing, get professional help.

Training for your mule is one of the best investments you can make. We send our children to 12 or more years of school in order for them to be their best, yet we do not want to send our mule off for a month or two. Don't settle for problems. Teach your mule!

If we raise our expectations of our mule, we will have a better trained mule which will be a more enjoyable animal for us to own.

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