

I Just Don't Have Time

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These days we all have busy lives. It seems that there are more and more things that require our time. Mules to feed, the kids need to get to school, soccer and football practice, the truck needs an oil change and the pasture fence still has not been replaced. And of course there is work to pay for it all.

If there were 36 hours in each day, we would all have it made.

Most of my training for the public is private lessons instead of clinics. In a clinic situation, a trainer must train the group and give lessons to a group of riders. Very little personal time can be spent with individual riders.

With private lessons, I spend 100 percent of the clinic time with one person and their mule. We work on the problems they are having with their mule. I do not train the mule; I train the owner to train their mule. Using this format, the owner does not have problems continuing the mule's training at home. If they run into a problem, I can talk them through the problem over the phone.

One thing I hear from all owners and in most of my private lessons is "I do not have any time to train my mule."

So, I guess you could ask...How much time is actually needed to train a mule? A training session can be as short as five seconds and as long as you would like.

I know you are thinking; I cannot get any training done in five seconds. But, you can. Clients in my private lessons are amazed when I show them all the things that can be asked of a mule in just five seconds.

Not all training sessions have to be an hour long. Some lessons will take a lot of time for the mule to learn; and you cannot expect a mule to pick-up a lead change, stand when saddled, or extend the trot without a lot of time spent learning and practicing the lessons.

Training is a long term commitment and the more time you spend with your mule the better trained animal you will have. It will take years of constant training in order to have a highly trained animal. Do not get the wrong idea that you can train a mule in five minutes.

However, every time you are around your mule, you are training him. Every morning you feed your mule and check his water before you run off to work, you are training him; and at the end of your day you repeat the process.



TIM takes five seconds and asks Angel to leave her hay and come to him



TIM takes a couple of minutes and asks Angel to move her shoulder

Use these times to train your mule, even if you only have five seconds. When you walk into the mule's pen or stall to give him hay, ask the mule to do something, anything.

Ask the mule to take one step back. When the mule takes a step back, turn and walk away. You are done training for the day. It is that easy.

If you have five minutes, place a halter or bridle on the mule and ask the mule to move his shoulder over or disengage his end hind. Maybe ask the mule to pick up his hind foot or drop his head.

The goal is to ask the mule to do something, when the mule does what you are asking, release the pressure and leave.

You are teaching the mule that whenever you come into contact with the mule, the mule must stop whatever he is doing and look to you for direction.

You do not need to ask the mule to do something every time you are with the mule for the rest of your life. You just want the mule to think you are going to ask him for something so that when you are with him, he is focused on you and only you.

The mule will forget the horses running around in the pasture or the bag blowing across the pen or the hay in front of him when you are around.

You will also teach your mule to start looking to you for direction. The mule will stop reacting to situations and turn the thinking over to you.

This is what the mule wants. It is easier for the mule to act on a cue given to him by his owner than thinking through a situation on his own.

This is so because mules are thinkers. They are constantly thinking about self-preservation and how to make life easier. A horse, however, will react when given a cue.

When a mule receives a cue, the mule will ask himself, what is this person asking me to do and why is he asking me to do it? This is also why, as mule trainers, we must be more consistent with our cues. But, in the end, a mule will listen

better than a horse because he has given the job of thinking to the owner.

An example would be if you are working inside turns in the round pen with your mule. If you ask the mule to turn at the same spot two or three times, the mule will make an inside turn at the same spot each time he travels by the spot on his own.

In this instance, the trainer thinks the mule has learned the cue to make an inside turn. But in reality, the mule has memorized the trainer's pattern. We, as trainers, must make sure the mule is responding to our cues, not our pattern.

We will need to ask the mule for turns at different spots around the round pen. Sometimes let the mule travel all the way around without asking for a turn. We need to mix it up. That way the mule is always looking to us for direction.

So, how do we know if the mule is looking to us for direction? The mule will be looking at us. It is that simple. If the mule is traveling around the round pen and looking outside the pen, the mule is "thinking" outside the pen.

However, if the mule is traveling around the round pen, but has his head turned to the inside and looking at us, then the mule is "thinking" inside the round pen. This also means the mule is thinking about us.

So the mule should always be looking at us whether we are in the round pen or feeding him hay in the pasture.

This is where our five second training sessions pay off. We have trained the mule to always look for to us for cues

and direction. The mule is starting to allow the person to make the decision for the partnership of mule and rider.

This is our ultimate goal, a partnership between rider and mule. The mule will give us his best performance when we are partners. He will not be responding to our cues from fear. He will be responding to us because he wants to, not because he has to.

This means we will get the mule's peak performance. How does this happen?... With lots of training, including five second training sessions.

So we now know that all of us have time to train our mule.

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Some lessons will take hours for the mule to learn, but frequent five-second lessons help establish a partnership between rider and mule that results in his best performance



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