

TEN COMM

For Show Ring Parents

BY BARBARA LABARBARA

"I don't care if your arm drops off, hold his head up," an impatient dad yelled at his 9-year-old just before the tearful child entered the show ring. The youngster had complained his arm was tired. He was small and had to hold his arm high to get his animal in the proper position.

How many battles have been fought about how an animal should be shown or groomed? Who should clean the stalls or do the chores?

It often takes more time and energy to supervise an eager young show person than to do the job ourselves. But we need to teach our children the necessary skills to compete in the show ring and gradually increase their responsibilities as they grow or we fail as show ring parents.

The ten commandments for show ring parents may not make you perfect, but, if followed, will elevate you with your children, their friends, and the many judges you will meet along the way.

I. *Thou shall know the rules*

There are written and unwritten rules regarding the showing of animals. Topping the list of written rules are: Be courteous at all times and never lose your temper.

One young exhibitor told of being verbally attacked by a parent of a competitor as she left the show ring. She had slapped the heifer in front of her on the rear to get it moving. She then went on to win the class.

An informed parent would have known it is proper to do all one can to keep the show moving, including twisting a tail or gently slapping an animal on the rear.

II. *Thou shall allow your children to do their project themselves*

Obviously, with a younger child a parent is going to do much of the work. However, there is a gradient when the youngster starts doing more and taking increased responsibility.

The most common complaint young people voice is that some parents do all the work. They wash and clip the animals, spray their hooves, bone their legs, rat their tails and turn the halter over to the child when it is time to enter the show ring. A number of parents even hire professionals to fit their children's animals. This practice is more unfair to the coddled child than it is to the youngster who has done their own work. How can they learn if their parents do not give them opportunity to develop?

In Wyoming, the Laramie County Fair Board adopted a rule that states a child can be disqualified from the show if they receive fitting assistance from their parents. When asked about the 9-year-old first timer, a veteran 4-H'er said the child should learn at home and older club members should help them at the show. Encourage your children to offer help if someone needs an extra show person or a hand with fitting their animals.

Most Extension 4-H agents agree that if a 14-year-old has not yet acquired the necessary skills for fitting, showing and caring for an animal, the agents and the youngster have fallen short of what is expected.

III. *Thou shall be supportive and involved*

To the other extreme, some parents believe there should be no parental involvement or help. That is unrealistic. The breakdown of many American families can be directly related to families having nothing in common, no family projects or goals. An NJAA or 4-H project can bring the entire family together with a common goal. Parents often find they have as much to learn as their children.

At home, parents can help with training, feeding and care as the youngster learns and grows. At the show, parents can give advice if they see a judge is looking for something particular in the show ring. They often see an area on the animal that needs more attention, Parents make great bucket-carriers, runners for something forgotten and animal holders. Most importantly, they can give a word of encouragement and a smile when it is most needed.

IV. *Thou shall allow your child to practice and participate*

Experience is the best teacher. Nothing builds more confidence or takes the place of the actual feel of the leather strap and show stick in a child's hand.

Many breed associations and 4-H and FFA organizations sponsor showmanship workshops as well as field days throughout the spring and summer. These activities not only give your child an opportunity to gain experience, they help you get an idea of the type of animal needed for a project.

V. *Thou shall provide proper equipment*

Though it's not fancy or expensive equipment that determines a winner, appropriate equipment is a necessary part of showing.

Many exhibitors build their own show boxes and make their own rope halters. Some enterprising youngsters even build their

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own blocking chutes. On occasion, you can purchase used clipper, blowers, brushes, combs and other items at dispersal auctions.

There are usually tack dealers at major livestock shows. You will find their prices tend to be higher than you might pay through a catalog or at your local dealer. However, be sure to consider their products because they usually carry reliable equipment as well as new and innovative items.

Remember, show equipment makes great presents.

✓ / *Thou shall keep your attitude in check on show day*

Your attitude on show day can temper how your youngster performs. If they are worrying about mom and dad being upset, it's impossible for them to concentrate on what they ought to be doing.

It is as important for a parent to be a good sport as it is for a child. The old adage, "Win without bragging and lose without complaining," holds especially true for parents.

✓ / / *Thou shall not be a show ring sideline director*

Parents standing on the sidelines giving instructions to their child are distracting to other exhibitors and the judge. Your child is better off doing it on their own and making his or her own mistakes. That is how they learn.

✓ / / / *Thou shall not complain about the judge*

Complaining about the judge rarely accomplishes anything. You don't have to agree with a judge's opinion, but you should try to see his perspective on that day. Even if you can't, don't complain. Remember, there is another show and different judge down the road. Regardless of the judge, you will win a few and lose a few.

! ✕ *Thou shall not disparage the competition*

There always seems to be a good deal of griping about how somebody got the job done. The only solution is to make sure you and your children are getting the job done in the right way. If others are cheating or not behaving in a suitable manner, they will cause their own demise.

Never make negative comments about the competitor or their animal. Consider what happened to one mom. As she watched the competition she carelessly said to a friend, "Boy, that girl is as big as her heifer." Little did she know the girl's father was standing on the other side of her. It was a moment not soon to be forgotten.

✕ *Thou shall honor your child*

Now and then a parent who is really good at showing and fitting cannot accept the fact that their children could be good at it, too. They may be well-meaning folks, but they cannot seem to keep from doing the work themselves.

Mark Kronquest, a Colorado County, Wyo., Extension agent, says a major thing that cripples a youngster in a developmental sense is to say, "You are not doing it right, or exactly the way I would do it, so I am going to do it for you." Even if the words are not spoken, the youngster knows what is implied. It takes away their self-esteem and what they might have learned if they were allowed to do it themselves.

When a parent ridicules their child for a bad performance as they leave the show ring, they're forgetting the award—the trophy, the plaque, the blue ribbon — is not as important as the things the child learns and the friends they make while pursuing that goal.

As parents, let us remember that the show ring is not just for prize animals; it is the show place for the finest young people in America. Let us be proud,

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