

Dear JH -

Hope all is well for you with Spring coming! My name is BuddyBeGood, and I am a young mule in training. My owner is pretty good about letting me have days off of working in the round pen and in our riding arena when I am having a "bad day" and can't concentrate, but I still have a real problem. She gets to coughing, and I know she feels bad, but she insists on coming out to work me. I get confused sometimes if she starts coughing while she is riding me, and scared if she has a problem breathing.

Shouldn't SHE get some time off, too? Will it hurt our training program more to have her work, or wait? What would YOU do if Kathleen, your person, got a cold?

Thanks!

Buddy

Hay Buddy,

You have a great name because it because it explains in just 5 letters what we as mules are to our people...I love it.

Spring IS coming...thank goodness. It has been long enough getting here too! Want to hear a spring story? This week my person decides it is time to finish up the body clipping on Joey and me. About a month ago she had started with shaving our legs, neck, stomach and head and leaving all our barrel, chest and butt coat alone. She SAYS that she does it this way so that we cool out quicker when the days are a bit warm but still have enough hair to keep warm at night. Personally, I think that she just gets plain itchy to clip...she is a self-confessed shave-a-holic. You know I think she bought me because I grew SO MUCH hair and she would have a good reason to clip to her hearts content :>). Anyway yesterday was the appointed day to completely shave Joey and me.

Joey was first and stood like a statue. It probably helped that she was quite pooped. Kathleen and Joey had just come back from riding in our hunt country on a friend's 900 acre farm with miles and miles of trails [I waived good-bye from the comfort of my paddock and a days worth of hay to munch on]. Anyway Joey stood and stood for the clipping and only fussed a bit when she had to get her ears done.

Next it was my turn....now I'm another story...I also stand like elves came out and nailed my feet to the ground EXCEPT for my upper head and ears. When she gets near them with the clippers I revolt and tip my head JUST out of the way without every moving my feet...it REALLY aggravates Kathleen. It is REALLY easy to do [tip my head out of her reach not aggravate her] because she is so short [5'2"] and I'm really tall especially with my head up in the air even when she is standing on a chair. Well, she got out the EQUIPMENT [a twitch] and did my head [damn, another spring and that head tipping trick didn't work] and then went on to do my body. Kathleen was clipping away and even using the clipper oil stuff when BAM! The clippers seized up and the blades wouldn't move. She TOASTED them! YEA!

I say YEA but really I looks like I have been attacked by a herd of moths! Oh well, I will grow out soon enough...but what to do about that patch of winter hair still on my side :-). *[Note: I haven't told John Henry yet but I ordered another pair of heavy duty cattlequine clippers first thing the next morning - what's another \$300?...Kathleen].*

Now on to your question....

You know your person should take the L O N G view of mule owning. I don't know about you but I often get what Kathleen calls "the 1,000 yard stare"..well, your person should get the 1,000 yard view of mule owning and training. In the long run it doesn't matter in the least if we get a day or a week off. The most important words are RELAX and ENJOY. When Kathleen gets a cold [about 2x a year] she still comes to the barn but only brushes and gives us treats and mucks, of course. One year when she was sick she taught me how to smile and another time she taught me how to bow. This type of training is wonderful because I get hands-on time, which I really like, but Kathleen doesn't use up a lot of energy.

All our interaction with our people is training, really, just different kinds of training. Sometimes we train them and sometimes they train us. Kathleen doesn't usually ride or drive me when she has a cold so I can only speculate what I might do....I think that I would be even more of a slug than I naturally am! And THAT'S saying something! Kathleen is forever asking me to move on by using alternate leg pressure and complaining loudly just how much work it is to make me move...if she doesn't feel well she will be even less inclined to be able to make me move and will remember this and not ride me at all. I would much rather be brushed and fed treats in the isle...this is my definitions of heaven.

Speaking of moving, I have tried for years not to move any more than necessary when I was turned out. Now I have this Joey girl living with me and she, like EVERY other female in my life, is the boss. So now I am doing a lot of walking when we are in the paddock [24/7]. I walk from my pile of hay to the next one when Joey decides that my hay looks better than hers. If she wasn't so cute I MIGHT get mad but, you know, looks go a long way in my book. If I have to live with someone they might as well be nice to look at.

But I digress....tell your person that time off when we or they are sick is just the thing. Both of us will come back rested and ready for the next training challenge. Have a great summer
BuddyBeGood.

Sincerely,

John Henry \ /
as told to Kathleen