

Team Roper Etiquette Ten Commandments

BY LACEY MADDALENA (Maddalena)

I hauled out to a lower numbered roping this weekend. I love these ropings because I think it is fun to watch people of all levels compete, and in all honesty, it reminds me why my job here at Roping.com is so important! However, there are a lot of times that I go to these ropings and I end up getting a little frustrated. I don't want to be that blog writer who is always complaining, but this is stuff that I think a lot of low numbered ropers don't know and need to know!

It's hard telling why ropers don't know these little rules. Perhaps they didn't grow up team roping or have a dad that was as strict as mine! I remember getting reprimanded for these things as a tiny kid and if I got caught doing it twice, I was told to get off my horse and wait in the pickup. These are simple, common courtesy, team roper etiquette rules that should be followed by EVERY roper, regardless of age or number. We shall call them the "Team Roper Etiquette Ten Commandments."

Commandment #1: Thou Shalt Not Stand In The Gate

There is nothing quite as frustrating as trying to ride to the box and nearly getting turned out because everyone and their brother is standing right in the gate. Seriously, guys...get out of the way! Find a place to wait where you are not blocking the gate and if you aren't up in the next 50 teams, there isn't any reason for you to even be standing near the arena.

Commandment #2: Thou Shalt Not Leave Halters Tied To The Fence

This may be my number one pet peeve at ropings because it is such a dangerous, careless thing to do. I see so many ropers bridle their horses and then leave their lead ropes and halters tied to the fence. I can pretty much assure you that the first time you witness a horse hang his leg in a halter will be the last time you leave one tied to the fence. I've spared you the gory photo of the horse that nearly cut his leg off at a jackpot because he got his leg hung in a halter at someone's trailer. Always, always, ALWAYS untie your lead rope from the fence. By not following this commandment, you are putting your own horses and everyone else's at risk.

Commandment #3: Thou Shalt Be Kind To The Chute Help, The Flagger, And The Secretary

There are three really tough, thankless jobs at team ropings: the chute help, the flagger and the secretary. They work in the heat and the cold. They rarely take breaks. They get yelled at, disrespected, treated like dirt, and are completely under-appreciated. Take the time to thank them! Every time I leave the catch pen, I tell my chute help "thank you." It's really not that tough. Kindness really does a lot for your karma.

Commandment #4: Thou Shalt Not Tie An Ornery Horse To The Fence

If you know your horse is a jerk, DO NOT TIE HIM NEXT TO OTHER PEOPLE'S HORSES!!!! EVER!!!!!!!!!!!! I can't stress this enough! When I was growing up, we had our good kid's horse get kicked by another horse at a roping. We had to put that horse down. That was a horse that was shared by 4 kiddos. You don't want to be responsible for that kind of accident. Trust me when I say, if your horse kicks at mine at a roping, it will meet the tail end of my rope repeatedly and you'll be lucky to not experience the same treatment. If you have an ornery horse, leave him in the stall or tied to your trailer away from everyone else's.

Commandment #5: Thou Shalt Apologize For Crashing Into Someone Else

I'm sure we've all seen this or experienced this a million times. You are just standing there minding your own business and someone's horse spins around or backs up, crashing into you. If you are the person responsible, for Pete's sake, say you're sorry! We are supposed to be cowboys and cowgirls which means that we uphold to a higher standard of living. We say things like "please, thank you, ma'am and sir." We pride ourselves on being courteous to others. So, when you crash into someone, the least you can do is apologize for it!

Commandment #6: Thou Shalt Follow Your Cattle Out Of the Arena

I know I said that leaving your halters tied to the fence is my number one pet peeve...this is a close second. If you miss your steer, don't just pull up and ride up the pen. Follow your cattle out of the arena. If you are a heeler, you help push your cattle out of the arena as well. It's pretty frustrating to be waiting to rope and watching a steer wander around the back end of the pen because people are too lazy to push their cattle to the catch pen. It's also not the flagger's job to push your cattle out. When you nod your head, that steer is yours until it is all the way in the catch pen.

Commandment #7: Thou Shalt Not Act Like An Animal When The Draw Is Being Posted

It used to be that guys would walk up and get their numbers and write them down. Now, you have 50 people swarming around a 5 foot space with pocket knives out. It's only a matter of time before someone gets stabbed. I saw a secretary this weekend nearly start stapling people because she no sooner got the first sheet up and they were reaching over her shoulder with pocket knives trying to cut their numbers off the page! She was pointing her staple gun at the crowd and shouting, "Get back!!" as if she was fighting lions! Good grief, people! I promise you, you will have PLENTY of time to get your numbers! Another thing, Edward Scissorhands, don't hack up the entire sheet! It's always fun to do a scavenger hunt on the ground after everyone has cut the page to shreds and your numbers are now MIA (that was sarcasm, in case you were unaware)! Again, word of the day is "COURTEOUS!"

Commandment #8: Thou Shalt Control Your Kids And Dogs

Several years ago, I called for my steer at a roping and a three legged dog ran out from behind the heelers box and chased my horse and my steer down the arena. I didn't pull up and ask for another steer and I ended up with a no time. Needless to say, I wasn't pleased and I ended up breaking several of my own team roping commandments. Several years later, the same thing happened again except this time, the dog (who had four legs rather than three) ran in front of my horse and luckily, we didn't get in a bad wreck. Moral of those two stories is that it is not uncommon for people to let their dogs run loose. Don't do that! As far as kids go, I heard a story not long ago about a little kid riding out in front of a team and getting in a bad wreck. The kid ended up in the hospital. Luckily that little kid is okay, but that was a wreck that could have been prevented. Keep a close eye on your kids and your dogs!

Commandment #9: Thou Shalt Not Park Like An Amateur

It's common knowledge that finding parking at some team ropings is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. However, this weekend, I sat in my pickup and watched as a guy tried to squeeze in between two rigs with his. He legitimately had a helper out there making sure that he had enough room on both sides. If you have to have a helper to make sure that you aren't hitting the guy next to you, you are TOO CLOSE! Trust me when I say there was plenty of room for him to park somewhere else. But, rather than park a little further away, he left about 2 feet of room between his rig and the other two. The people next to him couldn't even access their tackroom, let alone tie their horses up if they wanted to. That's just rude.

Commandment #10: Thou Shalt Learn How The Warm Up Arena Works

The warm-up arena...it's probably the most dangerous place at a roping. You have 75% of the people "warming up" walking in a circle, one direction, for 20 minutes. The other 25% are DESPERATELY trying to lope their horses. Then you have what I like to call "the stopper." This guy will be loping in front of you and then all of a sudden, without warning, he will sit his horse on the ground like he's a calf roper in the 10th round of the NFR. I'll admit, I am impressed by a horse with a nice stop...but not when I am loping right behind him. Why am I right behind him, you may ask. Well, because there is a small window of opportunity to actually warm up your horse and I don't like paying my good, hard-earned money to get bucked off going down the pen! Of course we can't forget the guy who likes to swing his rope. I'm totally okay with that...in fact, I ENCOURAGE you to swing your rope as often as possible...just be aware of your surroundings! Don't hit someone with your rope and then blame them for it! If you are going to walk, stay closer to the center of the circle. Lope towards the outside if you can. Swing your rope only when it is safe to do so. And don't stop your horse unless you can do it without causing a wreck. And if you want to warm up in the right lead, lope in a different area or stick to the very outside if it's even possible.

So, those are the Roping Etiquette Ten Commandments. Live by them. Follow them. And just be COURTEOUS!

About the Author:

Lacey grew up on a cattle ranch in Northern California where she learned to ride and rope at a very young age. Her dad was an avid team roper, and unlike most little girls who dreamed of the adrenaline of chasing barrels, Lacey dreamed of being a team roper just like her dad. She won her first jackpot at just 13 and has been hooked ever since. She is not only a passionate team roper and a writer, but also an artist and an outdoorsman. When she is not in the arena, she enjoys painting, archery, fishing, hiking, and traveling the world.