

Basic Training for Life

(Rules for Recreationists)

By Del Albright, BlueRibbon Ambassador

Does it seem to you that not all recreationists follow the same rules? Have you ever encountered an angry land owner upset with someone who did not close his gates? Have you ever had a loaned piece of equipment returned to you broken? Can you recall meeting an inconsiderate trail user? Are you tired of picking up after others?

I'm sure you answered yes to most of these questions because these things are common in our sports. In my opinion, these things need to stop! Well, I have some suggestions that might help. In fact, I'd like to share with you these rules of life I found the other day posted in an RV park. I think if we all followed these, we might find our lives and our recreational pursuits in better shape. Check these out.

Basic Training for Life:

1. If you open it, CLOSE IT.
2. If you turn it on, TURN IT OFF.
3. If you unlock it, LOCK IT.
4. If you break it, FIX IT.
5. If you can't fix it, CALL SOMEONE WHO CAN.
6. If you borrow it, RETURN IT.
7. If you use it, TAKE CARE OF IT
8. If you make a mess, CLEAN IT UP.
9. If you move it, PUT IT BACK.
10. If it belongs to someone else, GET PERMISSION TO USE IT.
12. If you don't know how to operate it, READ THE DIRECTIONS or DON'T MESS WITH IT.
13. If it doesn't concern you, DON'T MESS WITH IT.

I don't know who made this list up, but I do know that many of these rules make sense to me. I can clearly remember my folks laying some of these rules on me as I was growing up. It had a lot to do with manners also. Seems like we spent more time learning manners in those days.....

Some of my readers have complained to me about the need for rules on the trail. They ask: "what happened to the days of just going out in the woods to get away from it all and have a good time?" I answer: "They're gone."

Yes, it's too bad that we've had to take more and more rules to the trails. But it's a fact. There are too many of us out there enjoying the great outdoors not to have rules. Besides, some folks just don't behave well unless there is a punishment for being bad. It takes rules to make that happen.

You might ask, "What happened to common sense, Del?" I would answer, "It's mostly gone too." I say that because there seems to be little left of commonality in our busy lives these days. Diversity, freedom of choice, hundreds of cultural blendings, cyberspace, and so on have elevated our society into one of many choices and many different approaches to life -- which is good, right? Well, maybe not on our trails and lands...

In order to keep our trails and lands open, we need to follow the rules that will keep our opponents off our backs and our friendly supporters (politicians) out of trouble. In order to do that, we have to develop the rules we can live by. We have to follow them; and we have to enforce them.

So what else can we do? Here are my suggestions from what I've learned around the country in my BlueRibbon Ambassador travels.

If your association or club has a code of ethics, learn them and live by them. If you don't have a code, develop one. Make up laminated cards of your code and make all members carry one, or post them on your rig where you can see them. Print out this list of Basic Training for Life and adapt it to your area. Make it part of your code. Put your code on the back of your business cards and club flyers. Post your code where you recreate. Make it part of your daily recreational life.

If you have kids, teach them these or similar rules and make ethics part of the common sense you'd like them to have. Explain to them how this will help keep our lands and trails open in the future.

In the leadership training course I offer, as well as in the Strategic Planning I help folks with, I emphasize the importance of having an organizational Mission, Vision and Values. Now I think I will add Code of Ethics to that list. I think we need more of them. I believe this will help us instill a feeling of stewardship towards our lands and trails, as well as our recreation. Heck, maybe it will just plain help re-instill those things we used to call common sense, courtesy, manners and respect for others. Hopefully, it will go a long ways towards keeping our lands and trails open well into the future for all of us to enjoy.

Here's a final Basic Training for Life rule I made up myself that I'll leave you with:

14. If you want something to change, ACT NOW -- CHANGE IT!

END