

Top 10 Values and Skills Gained Through Participation on a Judging Team



Horse judging is only 10 percent about horses. The other 90 percent is about learning how to be a better person!

I remember my coach reminding my teammates and me of this several times throughout my year on the horse-judging team. As I reflect on my year of competitive judging, I realize how true that statement is.

There are countless members of 4-H, FFA, and collegiate teams who set out to learn how to compete on judging teams for horses, livestock, dairy, poultry, and a variety of other animals every year. However, of those who begin this endeavor, only a fraction are able to see their plans through by fully committing to practice and competition. Why? Because judging is not only a mentally strenuous task, but also one that will challenge you physically.

I frequently speak with young people and parents who are initially interested in the idea of judging, but they are eventually deterred after realizing how much it demands. However, it is extremely important to recognize that immense benefits come along with these difficulties. Therefore, I decided to write this publication about the top 10 values acquired by competing on a judging team.

Top 10 Values

Importance of Commitment

A commitment is defined as a pledge, promise, or obligation—something that is completed from start to finish. Too often youths and adults join clubs or teams only to disappear once challenges arise. However, participation on a competitive judging team shows individuals the benefit that comes with perseverance and following through with commitments.

In most collegiate programs, members are eligible to compete in contests for only 1 year. Therefore, team members are constantly reminded of the need to work extraordinarily hard and stay committed until the end.

While competitive judging is a physically and mentally exhausting task, it is certainly worth the dedication that it requires. Out of 317 completed responses in a survey conducted by Texas A&M University researchers, 226 people strongly agreed and 85 people agreed that the time they spent on a collegiate judging team taught them the value of



hard work and dedication to the common goal (Cavinder et al. 2011).

Oral Communication

In today's society and education systems, many students struggle with basic oral communication. I have often observed that people who have been through a judging program have less difficulty with verbal communication, especially when speaking in public to an audience. Many of their counterparts have not been through the same rigors required of judging team members.

The oral reasons component of judging gives participants practice, critique, and overall confidence at public speaking. As they become more comfortable presenting sets of reasons, young people also become more confident and comfortable speaking to peers and adults, especially in classroom settings.

Critical-Thinking Skills

Critical-thinking skills are crucial in today's world, where bosses and teachers often ask for others' opinions to generate practical discussion. In the judging arena, both in practice and competition, participants learn to make quick yet precise decisions to place classes. They also learn to use their ideas and knowledge collectively to communicate their descriptions effectively.



Improved Confidence

Animal evaluation programs inspire confidence in youth and collegiate participants through the knowledge gained. This knowledge allows them to become comfortable and confident in their ability to correctly evaluate animals. This confidence presents itself in many other facets of life, including work, school, and personal relationships.

Self-Esteem

In the Texas A&M survey, 95 percent of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that their self-esteem was enhanced because of their involvement with the judging team (Cavinder et al. 2011). While the term is often used interchangeably with confidence, self-esteem is actually a reflection of a person's thoughts of himself or herself. Participants of animal-evaluation programs learn to value themselves through a combination of factors such as confidence, critical thinking, and assertiveness.

Teamwork

"We can't control the actions of others; we can only control our reactions to their actions." I heard this saying many times growing up. Although some people consider judging to be an individual activity, there is a strong team component that cannot go ignored.

Each member of the team competes individually, and then their scores are compiled together to create the team score. During practice, however, it is not uncommon for teammates to discuss terms for reasons, placings of classes, and many other aspects that allow them to enhance their understanding through the process of evaluation.

Judging programs teach students to be open-minded and value others' opinions. Furthermore, time spent traveling with a team helps members learn to work out differences in a respectful manner, and it exposes them to experiences where they learn how to handle people of many different personalities.

Time Management

This is definitely a valuable skill in today's fast-paced world! Along with the newfound freedom that comes when young people move away from home, learning to prioritize and make schedules is a crucial process. Judging teaches these skills in several ways.

First, participants gain time-management skills when they learn how to judge classes. For example, in some classes, four horses are placed in the arena all together, and judges must evaluate them, take notes, and come up with their placing within an allotted time. Some contest settings require participants to judge 12 classes and prepare up to six sets of oral reasons. This hectic competition requires them to learn or perhaps improve their time-management skills. There is quite a bit going on during a judging contest, and there are several strategies participants learn to help them manage their time better.

In my opinion, perhaps the most important aspect of participation on the judging team is that students learn to manage their day-to-day schedules. Time management becomes crucial when they try to fit in formal practice, along with practice at home, all while keeping up with school-work, work, and personal relationships.

Stress Management

I believe that stress management goes hand in hand with time management. When those who participate in competitive judging programs learn to manage their time, they also will learn how to handle the stress of hectic situations. Judging presents its participants with many situations that are mentally and physically stressful. However, because of preparation, what was once seen as a "stress level 10" situation can be managed at a "stress level 3."

Decision-Making

Through judging programs, youth and collegiate participants learn to sort through and consider vast amounts of information in order to come to a final decision. Judging competition trains them to rapidly make decisions that are accurately based on knowledge. In today's society, where an increasing number of young people lack the confidence and ability to make their own decisions, this is one skill that certainly sets judges apart.

Assertiveness

Last, but certainly not least, judging team members gain the value of assertiveness. This newfound willpower comes as a culmination of improved confidence, oral communication skills, and decision-making, enabling participants to carry themselves in a way that reflects someone who is hard-working and respectable.



Assertiveness benefits judges long after their days of competition are over. It aids them during job interviews, school activities, and public speeches. More specifically, the payoff of participation on a judging team aids participants even through their careers. According to a study by the University of Idaho, the 4-H judging program positively influenced 63.8 percent of participants in their preparation for the workforce (Nash et al. 2005).

Value of the Process

Most states have 4-H programs that offer some type of competitive judging (horses, livestock, meats, land, dairy, or other areas) at the youth level. Approximately 60 universities and colleges offer the same opportunity at an advanced level. 4-H agents, FFA advisors, volunteers, and industry professionals should keep in mind that judging can also be a means to introduce new people into a very important aspect of the livestock industry.

With that said, I haven't yet mentioned the most important part of the judging-team experience: PREPARATION! "It is not important that you win a contest, but it is imperative that you prepare to win!" I heard Dr. Gary Potter say this, and it always stuck in my mind. Trophies are nice, and winning makes the game a lot more exciting. However, the value of the process is what makes the journey great.

Citations

Cavinder, C. A., B. E. Boyd, J. Franke, and G. Holub. 2011. Texas A&M University life skill development and professional achievement from participation on a collegiate judging team. *NACTA J.* 55(1):60-62.

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