LIVE INTERVIEW WITH CINDY K. ROBERTS AT LUCKY THREE RANCH

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- Interview is live from Lucky Three Ranch
- History between Cindy and Meredith
- How to structure success in business
- How to build a successful team
- Measures for successful production
- Mules' contribution to production library
- How to get that "special" footage/photos
- Stay focused and organized
- Keep things worry-free and resistance-free
- Knowledge is something to be SHARED
- Philanthropic pursuits

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www.MuleTalk.Net or www.LuckyThreeRanch.Com/Podcast-Appearances/

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

The mules are in the corral. Welcome to Mule Talk. And I'm Cindy K. Roberts, your host.

On this episode of Mule Talk, we are live on location in Loveland, Colorado, at the Lucky Three Ranch. And I have been visiting with Meredith Hodges, who needs no introduction. And we have known each other for many, many years. And it is such a delight to finally get to see you. Meredith, thank you for coming on to Mule Talk.

Meredith Hodges:

And thank you for being here at Lucky Three Ranch. I've wanted you to come and visit for so many years. And we've done so much stuff together, it's like, like we've never been apart, really, but we've never been face to face. Which is just amazing.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

This is awesome because it's like we're, we're, we're kindred souls, you know? It's almost like we share the same DNA, which can get kind of scary here.

Meredith Hodges:

That's right. But you know, with certain people you do have that connection, you know? You're just like soulmates and, and it just comes outta nowhere. Yeah. There are certain people in the world that you just absolutely click with right away and those are your true soulmates in the world. And it doesn't mean that you have to be face to face or anything like that. That's pretty obvious with us. We've been really close for a lot of years. You know, you've gotten a lot of my stuff. You've seen a lot of my stuff. I've got your books. I think I've got just about everything you've ever done, because starting with that cookbook way back in, what was it, 1983 or something? (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh my. Yeah. Back in the days, and I...

Meredith Hodges:

Both of us here.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right, right. And I really didn't know how to cook back then, as Sue Cole from Mules and More convinced me that I needed to do a cookbook for my first book.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah. But as long as you have a lot of support from people that do know how to cook, they can give you recipes at work, you don't need to learn how to cook. You just need to learn how to read the directions.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

You know? It works. (laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

It works. That's why it was a good book to do.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well-

Meredith Hodges:

It was something we all have to face.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

That's right. We do. We have to, we have to go beyond our comfort zone and try to do new things all the time. And by meeting with you, I am so enamored by the work that you do, your creativity, your staff, your schedule, your organizational skills. I mean, this is really, really very awesome. And I have never met anyone in my life that has so much grit in one body.

Meredith Hodges:

Really? Not even True Grit with John Wayne?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

I mean, here I am on your ranch and this is like a living Yellowstone TV series. I mean, this is the real deal.

Meredith Hodges:

Yes, it is the real deal. And I gotta say, I'm glad I've watched every episode of Yellowstone, 'cause I sure learned a lot about how to keep this place, how to make it look nice, how to be able to keep things going and have the right people here. And that is really what it's all about. When you have people that have skin in the game and who really care about what they're doing and put their heart and soul into their jobs, and we work together as a family, we have rules, but they're, they're very loose rules. It's really important to do that. I'm not just a boss. I am part of a big family here.

And every m- morning we have a morning meeting where everybody throws out their ideas and what's going on on the ranch, what needs to be done, how we wanna do it, who we wanna hire, if we have to have anybody come in from outside. But over the years, we've determined that a lot of this stuff that was happening before with production companies, distribution companies, call centers, and all these things that they say that you have to have, um, in order to be successful, really don't help you get successful at all. What's really important that you do is that you have an open mind, that you talk freely and openly and debate issues with your team, and let everybody have the input, because every single one of those people has their own creativity to offer and to put into the projects. And with all of the things being put out there on the table, then we could choose what's gonna be best for the projects.

Um, when you have people that say, "Oh yeah, I can do this for you," maybe they're not gonna do what's really you. They have what's going on in their own head and, and what they wanna produce and that's what they go after.And I think

one of the biggest things about when I was... I spent a lot of years with production companies when I was on RFD TV, and so we did 42 shows for television, but they would come in here with production crews and cameras and lights and, you know. And then I'd get the bill and it was so high. And, and they would not let us just free shoot the cameras. They go, "Well, you don't wanna waste any tape." And I'm going, "There is never any waste of tape when you are filming mules. Mules always have something to offer."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Exactly.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah. And as you well know, you learn from them, you get humor from them if you've got a sense of humor at all, and they'll always give you something that's worth filming and that's worth a million bucks, or it's completely priceless.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

And that becomes part of your library, which gives you more things to look to for the future. Because when you're willing to be going beyond what's controlled and take what's coming in naturally and accepting it and being gratified by what you're getting at the time, and start living in the moment, then you get a lot more opportunities for the future.

We are producing a lot more things now than we did when we said, "Oh, we're gonna do a therapeutic riding documentary." "Oh, we're gonna do one about Bishop." You know, we've done three more new ones here just since 2017, and they've got a lot more substance to them because we're using old footage that we just went out and took. We take pictures of everything.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yes.

Meredith Hodges:

We take photographs, we take video, we make sure that we have it in our library. So if we think of a new project to do, then we've got the video and photos to back it up. Because the one thing that's really obvious is when I was doing all my show

mules, of course, I had to get all of what they were doing on at the time on tape, because they were getting older and it took probably 20 years to get them ready and prepped for the championship things that they accomplished. So that's just once around with the mules, and then it's done. That's once around when you go compete against horses and you're there for the first time ever having a mule, you know, competing against horses. Those things don't happen over and over again.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right, right.

Meredith Hodges:

So you can't go back and get it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Exactly. And you know what, really amazes me is that I, I did a walk through with you of, of everything and your work is indexed. You have, uh, tables of contents everywhere, and everything is marked labeled, and it's stacked accordingly. I mean, you have sections and departments. I am really, really amazed. I mean, it's like we're on the same plane about things, because, uh, this, this is all agreeable to the way that I do my stuff. And I am so, so pleased that we do think alike. I never realized how much that we do think alike. I mean, I, I never showed to the extent that you did, but your work is just phenomenal.

Meredith Hodges:

Well, thank you. I think most people would call us anal. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah. They would say, we have a problem.

Meredith Hodges:

Yep, they would. But that's only because they have a problem trying to keep up with that kind of stuff, but they don't realize how easy it really is. It, it becomes easier when you do stay organized, when you do stay up with content.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

When you don't close yourself off and say, "I'm only gonna do this."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Right.

Meredith Hodges:
You know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Right.

Meredith Hodges:
I, I just say, I get up in the morning and I go, you know, people might ask me, "What are you gonna do today?" I don't know unless I look at my computer. I gotta turn that on first.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
You know, uh, I just can't get over, we were talking about social media and everything and it really just struck a chord with me when I would, uh, read something posted out there that was negative or, or a myth or really bad truth about a mule or a donkey and it really would hit me wrong. And then you taught me today, you just even said, "Don't even waste your energy." Because I, I used to try to waste my energy and teach people and say, "I'm sorry, but you're wrong about that." But you taught me well.

Meredith Hodges:
Well, I had the same problem for a long time. And that I, when I started all of this, I, my main mission has not changed. It's always, I want to help people to have the best relationship with their animals that they can have the most fulfilling, uh, relationship that they can have. So they can not get into any resistant fights with them or anything. Teach them the resistance-free way to everything. And unfortunately, that sounds like a marketing line, and it probably is. But the one thing that, the lesson that was in it for me, is I cannot change what other people are doing.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Exactly.

Meredith Hodges:

And the only person I have any effect in change, changing, is myself. So all I can do is put out the information that I've learned over my 50 years with mules and what I have learned from them, because they're the ones that taught me, they're the ones that humbled me, they're the ones that taught me a better way, and I just like documenting things and putting things together and putting 'em out there for the public and sharing them, because I believe that knowledge and education is not something that should be sold. I think it's something to be shared.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh. So well said. Thank you.

Meredith Hodges:

Thank you. That kind of knowledge should come free. That's what we should give to our children. Teachers should not be asking a great big, uh, pension or a great big wage or salary or anything like that. You need to be working so that you're doing the best for the children to give them the tools to go into the future and carry on teaching their children and the children that come after that. So that we can have a free country that can appreciate what every single citizen has to offer, whether they're schooled, educated or not. People are only gonna learn at their own rate. And like we were talking today, you know, I get those negative comments too, but a lot of it comes from people that don't know how to read very well. So they-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

There you go.

Meredith Hodges:

They jump real quick and they, "Oh, you're a scam. You said it was for free, but it isn't." Well, if you read the text it says to put in the code name, you know? (laughs).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Uh-huh.

Meredith Hodges:

But, you know, so all you can do is write back and tell 'em, "Well, maybe you forgot to put in the code name." But at the end of the day, you gotta make sure that when you say that, you're not saying it in an offensive way or a report or anything

like that. Because at the end of the day, you need to live with yourself and how you handled it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right. Right.

Meredith Hodges:

And, and if you can be proud of yourself about the way you handled it, then you know, you're doing your job. You're putting the information that you learned out there. You're giving it to people for free. It's up to them how to use it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay. Now you are writing a song about mules. And I wrote a song years ago, the lyrics. I wrote the lyrics and you, your lyrics, I heard those today. It's amazing. And now somebody, or you are writing the melody. I'm sorry. What's going on with the melody of your song?

Meredith Hodges:

My videographer is also an avid guitarist and plays with bands all over Colorado. And, uh, so I wrote the lyrics for it. And I was talking to Blake, his name is Blake Miller. And, uh, Blake Miller and his brother write a lot of music, and they've written a lot of the music behind the, uh, music videos that I have listed under training on my website. And so I asked Blake, I said, "I'm having trouble. I wrote the lyrics, but I don't have a melody line for it." And I said, "So will you, will you kindly put a melody line together for me?" And then they got busy. I was gonna have 'em just do the song and let 'em play with their band and everything, but we just couldn't pull that together.

So I told Blake, I said, "Just give me the melody line." And what I will do is, I know how to write music, so I will go ahead and take that melody line off of the iPad and put it on my piano, and then trans- transcribe it onto sheet music. And then when I get the sheet music done, then I'm gonna, uh, go ahead and write the accompaniment for 12 string guitar, uh, 6 string guitar, and, uh, then take it to my keyboard. And I've got all kinds of options on there. The two I'm looking at is the banjo and the fiddle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

And I wanna get them in there, too. And there may be other instruments on my keyboard I wanna get into it too. And when I've got all the different tracks done for the melody line to go ahead and go with the melody line, including me singing this song, there's going to be an audio track of me singing it too, um, then I'm gonna put it all together and mix it on the keyboard, and then take it over to my computer and we're gonna make a music video out of it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

And your piano, your Yamaha piano has a beautiful sound to it. Thank you for letting me play a few bars to Amazing Grace.

Meredith Hodges:

Oh, yes. I love that song. And you sounded wonderful.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, thank you. I, I was standing up. I normally don't stand up when I play the piano. (laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

It's easier if you're sitting down.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Can we talk about the rodeo arena?

Meredith Hodges:

Sure, we can talk about that. Uh, we have had a lot of plans and we've developed a... In 2006 we took out the 501(c)(3), uh, for the Loveland Longears Museum and Sculpture Park at Lucky Three Ranch. And, uh, I've already collected a lot. I've got thousands of mule and donkey statues throughout the ranch. And we've probably got 26 full-size bronzes just outside. But we also have a lot of other things like plush animals and small, little big statues, uh, banners, t-shirts, all this other stuff that we'd like to put into the museum. And they even wanna do a Meredith Hodges corner where they're gonna take my fancy boots and my fancy jackets and all my show pictures and put all those in there for posterity.

At this point I might mention people will be like, "What are you going to do when you die? What are your plans?" Well, I, I told my attorney, I says, "The cemeteries are pretty full, so."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

So I, I don't think I wanna go there. I never was big on crowds. So I asked my attorney, I said, "So what do I do? You know, I, I should be cremated, so where, what do I do with my ashes? You know, my favorite place is here on Lucky Three Ranch." And he said, "Well, I had a client that put their ashes into a bronze statue." So when Robin Laws did, uh, Lucky Three Sundowner, she left room for me in the top hat. So that's where I will be when I am, when I'm dead.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, that is so neat.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

That is so cool. I'm just so glad to find out that you're not gonna be in cement mixture of, of a hitching post.

Meredith Hodges:

Oh, no. I would not ever, ever do anything like that. However, we have poured a lot of cement around here 'cause we had to, mostly for Chad's kids, 'cause they need a place to ride their scooters and their, their, their Hot Wheels and their roller blades.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) There you go.

Meredith Hodges:

But anyway, getting back to the museum itself, it's getting kind of big. We have a place, a big vault in one of the warehouses where we're collecting trunks full of stuff to go into the museum at the same time, I watched the 4-H Club, the Little Britches Rodeo, uh, Junior Rodeo, and a lot of these kids groups, um, that used to be down here at the Larimer County Fairgrounds. And they had free access to the fairgrounds for their shows, their clinics and all their functions, their meetings. And then, uh, the people came in to put the ranch out there by the highway, which is the new upgraded fairgrounds and everything. And they promised these kids that they could go over there and have use of that fairgrounds the same way. And it

works for a while. But then they got, uh, tempted by a lot of corporations and people that were coming in there to pay to use the facility. So those people started getting preference over the kids, and the kids lost their place to go.

So we feel that we could supplement that by building a rodeo arena/museum on this property here, and have a full functioning rodeo arena with bucking chutes and roping, you know, stanchions. And even over the top of where the ropers would come out, we're gonna put a stage, so we can have concerts here too. So the lower level will be half-and-half. It'll be half museum and half holding stock chutes to feed into the bucking chutes and the roping areas and everything. And then the second, uh, level will be on the floor arena, and, uh, well, I guess it would be... It will drop down, the second floor will be the stadium, but the arena will be sunk in it so that we can get all the stock from the bottom into the bucking chutes, into the roping areas and everything. But the seating will be up at the level of the concert level, so people will be able to see the concerts real well.

And then that's at one end of the arena. At the other end of the arena, we are going to put in a dance hall bar, and it's going to have windows top to bottom and all the way along the whole width of the arena. And the view out of those windows is gonna be the Rocky Mountains. And, and then it'll have a staircase that goes up to a third level, and the third level will be above the seating, and it will have open windows all the way around to the outside, or you can... And it'll have little tables and chairs up there. You can take your food and your drink up there, and you can either look out the windows or you can look down into the arena and see what's going on in there. So that project is, uh, scheduled for 5 to 10 years from now. We have a, a certain amount of money we have to raise, first of all, to support the foundation when I'm dead.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

Because my crew is going to carry on the same way they are now.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Awesome.

Meredith Hodges:

They're just gonna pluck me out and keep going the way they're going.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Good.

Meredith Hodges:
And, and then, um, we need another 20 million on top of what we have to get.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Sure.

Meredith Hodges:
To, uh, go ahead for the foundation. It'll be 80, we'll need another 20 million to go ahead and, and build this arena we're talking about. It's all laid out. We know the property where we wanna put it. Um, the county is putting in a four-lane road down there. They want an easement of... I think they're saying 70 feet down on our property, and where I'm fighting it on all other borders of my property, that's the one border I will not contest because it would be to our advantage to have that kind of access for the traffic to come in to the rodeo arena.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Oh, you bet. You bet. Oh, you know, tha- this is awesome. Not only do you dream big, but you do big. I mean, you just don't talk the talk and you know, I'm so proud of you. Your work is just ongoing, and your enthusiasm, your energy level. I just, you know, and, and we just had a cheeseburger today-

Meredith Hodges:
Yeah. We did. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
... so think about... (laughs) So anyway, we weren't, we weren't just having granola and fruit nuts and...

Meredith Hodges:
Oh no, not... Of course not. But you know, the thing is, yes, I dream big and you know, when I do that, I talk it over with my crew in the mornings.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
There you go.

Meredith Hodges:

And we all dream big and we don't know if we're ever gonna hit the mark.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:
We, we, if we can just hit the milestones along the way, you know? And, and one day we'll say, "Oh, well we could do this, you know, today, I mean, this isn't expensive, but it's kind of on the road to what we wanna do," then we just start doing the smaller pieces and they start falling into, you know, into the bigger projects. And before you know it, the bigger projects are already completed.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:
You know, like we started with, uh, the idea of doing the old western town, and Steve shook me to the core because he goes, "Well, we are not in construction right now. What are we gonna do?" And I says, "I got an idea." I went, "Uh-oh." (laughs) [inaudible 00:21:50]-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
... and I love your western storefronts out there, your western front.

Meredith Hodges:
See, you just spilled the beans, because that's not what Steve told me. Steve says, you know, "We got that, that, uh, indoor or that outdoor exhibition arena out there and, and that's about two acres." He says, "Can we build an old western town out there?" I went, "Are you kidding me? There's only five of us, five of you guys, and one of me-"

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Right.

Meredith Hodges:
... "taking care of the whole place. Can you imagine trying to take care of a whole western town?"

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

You know? I said, "But here's what I will do, Steve." I said, "You can build an old western town front on the back of the equipment barn. It's huge. You should be able to get a lot there." And he goes, "Well, then, think of the name of the place." And so we threw around some names and everything, and we came up with the name, Ass-pen.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, I love it. I love it. Ass-pen. Okay, so your morning meetings are over coffee.

Meredith Hodges:

Yes.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Which I have to ask this magical question. What kind of coffee do you drink?

Meredith Hodges:

I drink Folgers Colombian coffee. And every Friday Chad brings doughnuts.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Awesome. Colombian coffee. Kinda like, uh, Juan Valdez. Yeah. He brought the coffee beans down from the mountains, right?

Meredith Hodges:

He did. And do you remember the Colombian relief program that they had years ago when they had the, the, they had a big disaster down there and, uh, when they did, they needed a mule for their posters, for their Colombian relief posters. And maybe CT was the mule they choose for... Chose for the posters.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

See, I knew it. I knew it. Even through coffee, we're connected.

Meredith Hodges:

Yes we are.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

I love it.

Meredith Hodges:
Yes we are. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Okay. Okay. So what drives you?

Meredith Hodges:
Mules.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Mules. I mean, it's like you're living... You're so blessed. You must be living according to God's plan. It's like, it's like you're spiritually driven.

Meredith Hodges:
Well, I really am, and it's God telling me what I'm gonna do next in my gut. And what I had to figure out was how do I know if it's him talking or the devil talking and trying to lure me into something I don't wanna do? And first of all, the mules, usually if, if I'm doing the right thing, then they'll go along with me. And if we're not doing the right thing, then the mules disagree, and they let me know about it in no uncertain terms. And my-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
(laughs) They're, they're good for that, aren't they?

Meredith Hodges:
They really are. And the most telling thing is, my gut hurts when it's the wrong thing.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:
When it's the right thing. I could not be happier.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well, I wanna thank you again for a wonderful day and inviting me out here to your ranch. It's just been an awesome, awesome day to spend time with you. You're incredible. So, it, I'm so proud of you, and thank you for coming on to Mule Talk.

Meredith Hodges:

Well, thank you for coming. And like I said, and I, I will probably depart with these words, is that I have also determined that one is never too busy to see their friends. You make times for friends. You don't say, "If I have time." You make the time for your friends. And that, those are words I live by. Those are words my grandmother told me a long time ago.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well-spoken my friend. Thank you.

Meredith Hodges:

Thank you too, Cindy.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Gotta go. My mule is looking for me.

Speaker 1:

Mule Talk is an Every Cowgirl's Dream production.

RESOURCES:

WEBSITE at www.LuckyThreeRanch.com **/TRAINING:**

1) Another Augie & Spuds Adventure
2) Chasity's Challenges
3) Longears Music Videos
4) Mule Crossing Articles
5) Mule Facts
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7) Training Tips
8) Rock & Roll: Diary of a Rescue
9) What's New With Roll?

10) Video On Demand
11) Wrangler's Donkey Diary

BOOKS/VIDEOS IN THE STORE:

1) Training Mules & Donkeys: A Logical Approach to Training
2) A Guide to Raising & Training Mules
3) Donkey Training
4) Training Without Resistance
5) Equine Management & Donkey Training
6) Equus Revisited Manual
7) Equus Revisited Video
8) Rock & Roll Documentary
9) Building the Jasper Carousel
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11) The Road to Bishop
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14) Walk On: Exploring Therapeutic Riding
15) Building of a Nation
16) Give Your Equine the Athletic Edge
17) For Children: www.JasperTheMule.com for books & videos