

Opening Reminders :

1. Horsemanship is about Communication.
2. Good communication is at least 2 minds listening and 2 minds open – not just one.
3. Teaching is the art of communication.

Opening Comment :

As last month my article ran too long for the magazine and it was necessary to shorten it at an awkward point - I am repeating a small portion and adding the omitted “Leadership” parts here:

Understanding Leadership Exercises from the ground and from the saddle:

After extended times away, whenever greeting your horse; whether approaching them at the stable or in the paddock / field, in the morning or in the afternoon/evening, there are a few simple things you can do to improve the relationship and improve safety. The first is simply by approaching in a friendly manner and avoiding appearing as a predator (which of course we all actually are). The other is an exercise that is aimed at mimicking what horses do when greeting one another in a herd situation and establishing or re-establishing / reiterating their hierarchy (pecking order). The exercise is initially a bit more involved - then as time passes a more brief exercise will suffice just as it does amongst horses in their herds.

Parts of this exercise are helpful when you are Tacking Up and/or Saddling Up. You can use the indirect rein movement or backing to get a horse to exhale when you are cinching up (tightening the girth). This is much more effective (and time saving) than walking a horse around in order to get them to exhale or leaning down to tighten the cinch / girth from the saddle or worse kicking or hitting them which some ugly folks do. This “ground and/or saddled” exercise also serves to briefly reiterate your competent leadership position from either position. By accomplishing this exercise you won’t be “holding up / delaying” your departures as in fact you will generally be ready to mount up faster and depart sooner than usual and ahead of most others whenever going out in a group.

The Leadership Exercise:

The exercise is a movement that requires, initially and on average, at most, about 45 seconds to complete. It shortens even more as you and your horse improve. The movements are conducted via a lead rope (from the ground) and via rein (from the saddle). The movements use a ***direct and indirect rein***, with the application of well timed wrist and/or finger ***pressure- release*** movements. **Never use a constant or static pull!**

When initially greeting your horse and once you have completed your friendly greeting and haltered the horse (lead rope attached), begin with a ***direct rein*** and move the front quarters to either the left or right in a tight half to full circle (depending on how long it takes to get your horse to cross over it’s back feet a.k.a. disengages). Once you turn the face, as you progress around, shift to an ***indirect rein*** in order to add pressure across the loin area in order to disengage the hind quarters. As soon as the horse crosses its rear feet (disengaging), reverse your direction and for safety be sure to lead their head past you and toward the opposite to your body movement direction whenever changing sides and carry on to the opposite side in order to execute the same movement around to the opposite side and until the horse crosses its back feet (disengaging) in the opposite direction. Then return to front and grasp the halter under the chin and back your horse a step or more (whilst facing your horse and whilst he is moving back away from you) stop and quickly back yourself up to about five or six feet

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(Leadership Exercises, Lunging and Ground Driving Advice)

away and lead him towards you - then use a side to side wiggling motion (in a low hand position) on the rope as a cue (and using your voice) to stop him and cause him to recognize / respect your space. Then relax and step to him, giving a quick friendly rub (not a pat as no horse pats another or if you pat - then rub the spot you patted) on the crest and forehead (as did their mother when they were young) to convince him you are a benevolent yet firm leader. You will then have completed one leadership exercise routine and any head avoidance issues will subside after a few sessions once they learn the cue and that there is nothing to fear. This routine can be reduced, smoothed out and abbreviated with practice, once the routine is well established. The exercise should be as fluid movement (much as my run-on sentences indicated above). From the saddle, conduct the same exercise using pressure release on the direct and indirect reins, leaving out the last step obviously.

Remember, when on the ground, you need to apply pressure from the lead rope in an “upward” movement to mimic how your arm-hand-elbow “rein line / plane” would be moving the rein when you are in your saddle. Don’t forget to praise your horse when successful. An *indirect rein* is nothing more complicated than using (once the face is turned) your **direct rein** to apply pressure from the halter or bit (via pressure-release movements - using your wrist or fingers once you have learned the muscle memory habit) across the loin area and towards the opposite side hock whilst directing that pressure release behind and around your body.

Lunging Training Advice :

Applying pressure at the girth / cinch area is a method of applying pressure where the horse can “see” what is happening and not instinctively assume something worse - as they typically do when we apply pressure via placing it at or behind the hind quarters. Applying pressure so that it is visible to the horse, allows the horse to move whilst using it’s left brain or pragmatic side instead of it’s right brain or instinctive side where they would normally / simply run away from pressure applied where they cannot see what is happening. In this escape mentality, running them in circles is sorely limiting their understanding and learning. Although there can be times when putting pressure on the hind quarters is appropriate, especially for our safety in emergencies, lunging for training is not generally one of those times. Much of the intended communication and queues we are trying to teach are lost in the escape instinct.

For lunging work as well as all training, I favor using a single marine grade nylon, braid on braid, **12mm, 22’ line** which has a very good transmission of feel with only small movements whilst retaining sufficient weight to stay in contact on a loose line. I also favor using (with all horses, including the many stallions that I deal with on a regular basis) **simple rope halters** of 6mm to 8mm, marine grade, braid on braid, nylon (not a pressure halter or any type).

Closing Reminder :

To repeat the same reminder from last month which I believe is well worth repetition: **The results a horse can achieve when we are teaching and/or working with them can be no better than how well they understand us. That result also can be no better than how well they accepted it – and they can’t accept anything until they are calm and feeling safe.**

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn

www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com, blackieb@btconnect.com

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blackieb@btconnect.com

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