

## Leadership & Communication Exercises (Part 1)

Following repeated requests, from Livery and Stud facility management as well as multiple clients, for reference FOUNDATION EXERCISE information to post and have on hand, I now present the following *Leadership Exercise part 1. From the Ground.*

I always have and will continually be advocating the use of Pressure-Release movements on ropes and reins. It is important to avoid use of any Static Pressure on ropes and reins as static pressure will illicit an *opposition reaction*. This opposition reaction is in the nature of every horse and passed down to them in their brain DNA over millions of years along with their *natural autism and claustrophobia*.

### Leadership Foundation Exercises

These foundation exercises are very similar whether you are working from the ground or from the saddle. *I will begin with the execution of the leadership exercises from the ground which are done "generally" with firm pressure-release as opposed to the more gentle pressure-release used for purely communications exercises.*

The *Basic Leadership Exercise* is a movement that requires, initially and on average about 30 seconds to complete. 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 application of well-timed pressure-release movements. Never use a constant or static pull pressure on a lead rope, a rein or any other rope attached to a horse!

Once you have completed your initial periodic greeting with your horse, which I hope is firm and beneficial, and once you have haltered the horse (lead rope attached), you can begin the initial leadership exercise. Begin the *First movement* with a **direct rein**, preferably with your back to the front shoulder and this does not matter whether you begin on the left side or right side of the horse. All pressure on the lead rope should be directed via pressure-release (not via static pressure or pulling) as if it is coming from your elbow when you are sitting in the saddle. I also recommend you not keep any rope in your opposite or free hand, as you should be using the free hand to touch your horse and assure them of your intent & giving cues whilst doing the exercises. You can then use your free hand without frightening them with a rope in that hand.

Begin the *First movement* by applying pressure-release movements on the **direct rein** in order to instruct movement of the neck and front quarters into a bend and beginning a tight half to full circle around you (depending on how long it takes to get your horse to cross step with its back feet). Thus being effectively disengagement for one to three steps. As you progress - around yourself - and the horse bends to the side, shift your pressure (being sure to maintain use of pressure-release and not static pressure or pulling) from a direct rein direction (to the side) into an indirect rein direction aimed across their back in order to disengage their hindquarters. As soon as the horse crosses its rear feet (disengaging) for one to three steps, you can start *the Second Movement* by stepping directly toward the back of the horse whilst turning your body away from the horse's body so that you are facing its head so that you can pull its head across and past (in front of) yourself. Whilst the momentum of this pulling your horse across is occurring, you can make one or more steps toward the front and opposite side of the horse so that the two of you *pass one another smoothly & simultaneously*. By making the move in this way you will protect yourself from any untoward action the horse might contemplate, for whatever reason.

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Communications & Leadership Foundation Exercises

Once you have stepped across and onto the other side of the horse, you will then be facing the opposite side as opposed to your initial position where you started with your backside to the horse. ***You should especially note that you have not changed the rope from your initial hand to your other hand - but instead have changed the position of your body in relation to the horse so that there was no need to manipulate the rope and risk dropping it or interrupting the flow of the exercise.***

Now you can proceed by executing the ***Third Movement*** by making the same movement of directing with a direct rein (as in First movement) to bend the horse to the side you are on and once a bend is occurring you can again use an indirect rein so that you can disengage the hindquarters to the opposite direction for another one to three steps. You can again provide cues to the hock, if needed, with your (same) free hand.

Once you have returned to the original starting point from this third movement (or thereabouts as you will have turned back approximately as far on this second side as you did with the initial side) you are ready for the ***Forth Movement***.

***The Forth Movement*** begins with reaching under the chin (as we are working from the ground in this example) and grabbing hold of the halter knot (in the same hand where you are holding the rope that you have been using to direct the horse (again having not moved the rope from one hand to the other). I mention the halter knot in the assumption you are using a rope halter, which is far more effective than halters made with flat materials. If you do not have a rope halter then grab whatever attachment point exists on your halter. Once you have the halter knot in your hand begin (again using pressure-release) to move the horse back three or four steps. ***The Fifth movement*** is when you let go of the knot and "pay out" approximately 6 to 8 feet of rope whilst you are facing the horse and backing away quickly as they are still in process of backing as you had directed them to do. This assumes you are using a 10 to 12 foot lead rope, which is much preferable to a 6-foot rope for many reasons. As you back away, you will begin ***the Sixth movement*** and begin pulling your horse towards you in a firm manner (using pressure-release as always). Once he or she takes 3 or four steps forward and toward you, then you can execute ***the Seventh Movement***, which consists of using a side-to-side cue in a (horizontal "Sine Wave") wiggling motion at a wave width of about 12", so that they ***can see it with each eye without having to turn their head***. You can also use your voice and tell them to "whoa". This seventh movement stipulates your space requirement in their mind. ***Now you must execute the Eighth and Final Movement***. Step to him or her and give them a very sincere friendly rubbing - not a patting as no horse pats another. If you do make the mistake of patting as I sometimes still do, from old habits as a kid growing up with horses - then quickly rub the spot you patted. I recommend rubbing where their mother would have been kind and loving to them - which is on their crest, cheeks and forehead to convince them you are a benevolent yet firm leader following the initial Seven Movements of the exercise.

You will then have completed one complete ground routine, which I would recommend be done each time you greet them after any "six plus" hour absence. Once both of you understand the routine, it can be abbreviated into only partial turns, backing and leading. The exercises should be as connected and fluid as possible.

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 line would be moving the rein when you are in your saddle. Don't forget to praise your horse ***with benevolence and rubbing NOT PATTING*** at the end of the entire leadership exercise routine.

**Closing Reminders:**

1. Horsemanship is largely about Communication.
2. Good communication is dependant on two minds listening & open.
3. Training / Teaching is the art of communication.
4. Whether you are doing leadership or communication exercises, which require varying amounts of pressure, they are all accomplished via instant releases of pressure once the horse begins to comply.

*Ya'll ride safely and Aware.*

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