

Leadership & Communication Exercises (Part 3)

A note about doubts and confidence: A good solution for solving the inherent *self-doubt and fear issues that we and our horses often hold* is to clarify communications, understanding and leadership between horse and handler / rider. Initially best handled from the ground and then from the saddle. The groundwork *foundation* exercises that I recommend help immensely to begin this process and gives the horse the most confidence as they can see us so much better.

From the saddle, a basic and very important method to consistently apply is for us to learn and practice firm, non-intimidating & non-confrontive methods of redirecting our horse's energy instead of trying to block or prevent them from various actions in a confrontive fashion. This especially applies to the counterproductive pulling on their bits with steady or intense pressure. This advice also applies to handling with ropes from the ground as well as the use of reins from the saddle. In my last two articles, I explained effective **Leadership exercise** methods to use in groundwork as well as from the saddle. This month I am concentrating on **Communication exercises**, which are no less important than Leadership work. All exercises are accomplished best via use of a rope halter, but any halter can be used to varying degrees of efficiency.

Communications Exercises from the ground:

A prime objective in establishing good communication with any horse is for the horse to recognize "our recognition" of their compliance to our requests. This may seem to be a loop of sorts but it is how horses think and recognize our intentions. This can be effectively established via the consistent use of **rhythmic pressure** (not jerking) on ropes and / or reins - followed by the immediate release of pressure once the horse makes the slightest attempt or shows any inclination to comply with our requests.

Therefore, be very efficient in recognizing and releasing pressure in a timely fashion.

Head & Neck Work (15 exercises)

All communication exercises are accomplished by using a basic three levels of **rhythmic - pressure & quick release** at the slightest attempt or show of correct intent by the horse in compliance with our requests. With all communication exercises, do not overly worry (initially) about the precision of movement(s). It is much more constructive to be more concerned with their general attempt to comply as well as our timing of recognition and release of pressure in response to any compliance (i.e. intent or actual yielding to our instruction). It is important not to cause the horse to **react in opposition** via Natural Instinct (**aka Opposition Reflex**). This opposition can be generated via our use of static pressure on ropes, reins or static application of pressure of any kind. Directional accuracy in compliance can be dealt with after the horse clearly understands how to correctly give to the pressure/release cues. Once our specific cue has become familiar to the horse, then you can progress to varying the exercise routine from time to time for more accuracy as well as beginning to abbreviate them as well. I outline a number of positions to use in initially apply pressure for cues, however once the horse begins to learn we should endeavor not to consistently use full regimes of work with them or you are likely to drive your horse to distraction. The number of positions can be reduced.

I initially select a few specific positions from a myriad of available positions.

September 2011 Essex Rider Magazine
(Part 3) of Communications & Leadership Foundation Exercises

First movement: From a position of standing to one side of the horse, facing forward as is the horse, near the head where your eye and the horse's eye are adjacent, ask for movement **straight down** from the halter loop under the chin (using a lead rope). Then ask the same question whilst standing at the aide of the head but facing the horse rather than forward. Then whilst still standing beside the horse's head, face toward the hindquarters - again adjacent eye to eye. In each of these three positions keep the horse's head facing forward. Once the three efforts are complete on one side then change to the opposite side to repeat the exercises for a total of six movements requiring a downward movement from the horse. Always using **rhythmic - pressure & quick release** at the slightest attempt or show of correct intent by the horse in compliance with your requests. An important point to keep in mind is whenever the horse raises its head whilst you are using the rhythmic pressure - do not stop use of pressure or the horse will incorrectly read that as the correct response. You must continue the use of rhythmic pressure and rise up with the horse until a downward motion is attempted or begun, even if it is done from high up rather than our initial starting point. **Release the pressure only on the instant a downward movement is made.**

Next movement: Again from the side of the head and at the same three positions on each side of the head, ask for the horse to step **straight back** (keeping the horse's head straightforward until it complies). Once the backward movement is accomplished (initially only for a step or two), then you can turn the head to the side so the horse can see where you led it to. This set gives six more exercises. Finally, for the last three exercises in this phase of foundation communication work, you will be asking for movement **straight down from the poll** (with your hand). Begin by again standing to the side of the face (adjacent eye to eye) facing forward next to the horse's head (do this one from both sides), **Use your hand to apply rhythmic pressure** in asking the horse to drop its head (initially only a small amount or effort). Then stand directly in front of the horse facing the forehead and use your hand to apply the **rhythmic pressure on the Pole** to ask for a **downward movement**. Be sure to allow the horse to see your elbow out to the side when doing this movement from directly in front of him or her as they cannot see well without binocular vision but can see your elbow to the side with their wide viewing capacity..

-----***Riding advice***-----

Another solution to solving *self-doubt and fear issues* is to apply leadership methods in a consistent manner, such as acting in a firm yet benevolent manner when practicing, training, riding by controlling in firm yet non-confrontive methods. I mean to say, control and redirecting your horse's energy, rather than trying to overtly block or prevent their actions in a confrontive fashion, such as pulling harshly on their bits or kicking them. Always use "pressure - release" versus static pressure. These means making all efforts to avoid the use of steady or static application of pressure, which will generate the natural opposition response inherent to all horses. This advice equally applies to use of ropes, spurs and legs. Another key communication point is for the horse to recognize "our recognition" (the loop) of their compliance to our requests. Therefore, be quick to recognize and release pressure once your horse complies or even "begins" to comply.

Closing reminders

A closing note to remind folks about mounting safety: whether you are mounting from a mounting block, from a portable stand or having someone give you a leg up - it is important that you use your inside rein and bend the horse laterally around towards

www.BlackburnNaturalHorseTraining.com

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn

blackieb@btconnect.com

0771-8317654

September 2011 Essex Rider Magazine
(Part 3) of Communications & Leadership Foundation Exercises

you. You should then hold that rein tightly in your forward hand and on the front of the saddle until you are completely mounted and have both feet in the stirrups (leaving the offside rein longer to relieve unnecessary pressure in the opposite direction). This applies to whether you mount from left or right side of the horse. In this way, should something occur that spooks the horse, the only way he can turn is around you. In this direction the centrifugal force will be helping you stay safe as opposed to holding the reins together equally allowing the horse to run forward which leaves you in a dangerous position if you have not yet mounted solidly. *In future articles, I will explain some training methods for teaching your horse to do this well.*

Once you are mounted, you can begin the leadership exercise, always remembering to use pressure release movements throughout

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,

www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com,
blackieb@btconnect.com, 01799-543711, 0771-8317654