

Communication & Leadership Exercises (Part 3)

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 (even their attempts to compliance) to our cues/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 application of pressure** (not jerking) on ropes and reins - followed by the **immediate release of pressure** once the horse complies or even makes the slightest attempt to comply with our requests. **Therefore, be very attentive and efficient in recognizing their efforts and then releasing applied pressure in a timely fashion.**

Head & Neck Work

All communication exercises are accomplished by using increasing levels of **rhythmic pressure - with a quick release** at the slightest reply or show of intent to comply by the horse. With all communication exercises, do not overly worry (initially) about the precision or accuracy and specific timing of the horse's movement(s). It is much more constructive to be concerned with their general attempt to comply. However, we should endeavor to be sharp in our timing of OUR recognition and release of pressure in response to any of their compliance or intent to comply with our instructions. It is important not to cause the horse to **react in opposition** - in its Natural Instincts of **Opposition Reflex**. This opposition can be generated via our use of jerking or via use of static pressure on ropes and/or reins. Static application of pressure of any kind as well as our delay to recognize any attempt to comply can cause unwanted replies by our horses. **Accuracy in compliance can be dealt with after the horse clearly understands** how to correctly give to our pressure/release cues. Once our specific cues have become familiar, then progress to varying the exercise routines for more accuracy as well as beginning to abbreviate them. I use a number of positions for application of pressure both from ground work as well as saddle work. Once the horse begins to learn, we should endeavor not to use full regimes of procedures or that could drive the horses to distraction. Just reduce number of steps once they have a better idea from us. **In due course, select only a few positions from the myriad available.**

Initial 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 horses' eye are adjacent. Then ask for movement, **straight down**, by application of cues via 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 rear rather than forward again adjacent eye to eye. Then repeat the cue, a third time, whilst facing inward toward the horse's face. In each of these three positions keep the horses 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. Initially you will be seeking a simple movement from the horse and in due course it can be extended to lowering their head all the way to the ground or near in any case. Always use **rhythmic - pressure & quick release** at the slightest attempt or show of intent to compliance by the horse. ***An important point to keep in mind is that whenever the horse raises it's head whilst you are using the rhythmic pressure - do not stop use of the pressure application or the horse will incorrectly read your complete release as a signal that it is correctly replying.*** You must continue the use of rhythmic pressure and rise up

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with the horse until not stop your signals until a downward motion is attempted or begun, even if the compliance is attempted or done from higher up rather than from the initial starting point. **Release the pressure only on the instant a downward movement is made.**

Second movement: Again from the sides of the head and at the same three positions on each side & whilst you are facing toward the rear, ask the horse to step **straight back** (keeping the horse's head straightforward until it complies). Once the backward movement is accomplished (initially for only for a step or two / more steps in due course), then you can turn the head to the side for the horse to see where you ("as leader" have **safely** taken it). 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 horses 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.

Closing reminders

Notes on doubts & confidence: Good solutions for solving inherent self-doubt and fear issues that we and our horses both often hold, are to **(1) clarify understanding of communication and leadership**, avoiding misunderstandings between horses and riders or handlers. Initially are best addressed via groundwork followed by saddle work due to horse ability to see our body-language in the first instance. Groundwork *foundation* exercises that I continuously recommend, best begin the process and gives the horse 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 giving cues. This is even more important in redirecting our horse's energy - rather than trying to block or prevent them from various unwanted action by use of overt force. This especially applies to the counterproductive pulling on their bits with static or intense pressure as oppose to the much better pressure - release method. This advice applies to handling with ropes from the ground as well as use of reins from the saddle. All exercises are best accomplished via use of rope halters (with their more clear signals); however any halter can be used to varying (somewhat lesser) degrees of efficiency. **(2)** Another solution is to **apply leadership methods in a consistent manner, such as acting in a firm yet benevolent manner** when practicing, training or riding - by controlling in firm yet non-confrontive methods. I mean to say, control & redirect energy, rather than trying to overtly block or prevent actions in confrontive fashion. Always use "pressure - release" versus static pressure. Never kick them nor jerk their reins. This advice equally applies to use of ropes, spurs and legs.

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

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