

Foundation Communication & Leadership Exercises Part 1

Following repeated requests, from Livery and Stud facility management as well as multiple clients, for FOUNDATION EXERCISES information to post and have on hand, I am re-presenting the following Communication & Leadership Exercises part 1. Many folks have come to realize the importance of working "WITH" their horses in a language/manner that horse better understand which brings them to trusting their owners / riders as leaders.

These Foundation exercises and movements are to prove to the horse that you are capable of moving it around as would other horses higher up in the pecking order in a herd and show your leadership capabilities in a firm and benevolent manner. I always have and will continually advocate the judicious use of Pressure-Release movements on ropes and/or reins as well as with ALL foot and leg cues. It is paramount not to fall into habits of using Static Pressure on ropes, reins and all other cues whether whilst riding or handling from the ground. Static pressure will near always illicit an opposition reaction from horses. This opposition reaction is in their Nature and DNA hard wiring. This has been passed down to them in their brain DNA over millions of years along with their natural autism and claustrophobic natures.

Foundation Leadership 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 Exercise is a set of movements that initially requires an average of about 30 to 60 seconds to complete. The movements are all conducted via a lead rope (from the ground) and via rein (from the saddle). The movements all use direct and indirect rein/rope with application of well-timed pressure-release movements. Never use a constant /static pressure on a lead rope, rein or any other foot, leg or other cues!

Once you have completed your initial periodic greeting with your horse, which I hope is firm and benevolent and once you have halted the horse (lead rope attached), you can begin the initial leadership exercises. Begin the First movement using a direct rein. Preferably begin with your back to the front shoulder and it 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 in a direction whereas it feels as if it is coming from your elbow when you are sitting in the saddle. I also recommend you not hold any of the slack portion of the rope in your opposite / free hand, as you should be using your 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 to request/require movement of the head, neck and front quarters into a bend (toward the side you are standing) turning a moderately tight half to full circle turn around you. Continue this movement until you can get your horse to cross step with its back feet (i.e. disengaging its hind quarters). Continue this movement of disengagement for one to three steps. As you progress - around yourself - and the horse bends to the side, shift your pressure from a direct rein direction aimed to the side - into an indirect rein direction pressure aimed across its back toward the opposite hind quarter in order to disengage their hindquarters. As you are asking / directing the horse to bend and disengage via the direct and indirect rein, you can provide additional cues to the hock, if needed, with your free hand. As soon two or three steps are completed, you can start the process of changing over to the opposite side to accomplish the Second Movement. You should make the transition to the

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opposite side by simultaneously stopping the disengagement indirect rein pressure and stepping directly toward the back of the horse whilst turning your body so that you are facing its head as you pull (via pressure release) and move its head across and past (in front of) yourself whilst the back legs are still in the motion of crossing over in the last step. Whilst the momentum of pulling your horse across in front of you as you step across in the opposite direction, you can quickly and smoothly make one or more steps around/across the front to get to the opposite side of the horse in a way where the of you pass one another smoothly & simultaneously. By making the move in this way, you will be protecting yourself from any untoward action the horse might contemplate.

You should not change your rope over from your initial leading hand to the other as and when you change sides. Once you have stepped across and onto the other you will then be facing the horse's opposite side as opposed to your initial position where you started with your backside to the horse. Now you can proceed by executing the Second Movement - a mirror image of the initial movement you directed with on the starting side. As you are asking / directing the horse to bend and disengage via the direct and indirect rein, you can again provide additional cues to the hock, if needed, with your free hand. Once you have returned to the original starting point from this second 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 then ready for the Third Movement.

The Third 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 in which you are holding the rope that you have been using to direct the horse from the beginning and throughout the exercises (i.e. having not moved the rope from your initial hand to the other). I mention the halter knot in the assumption you are using a classic rope halter, which is far more effective than most halters made with other / flat materials. If you do not have a rope halter, then grab whatever attachment point exists on your halter under the chin. Once you have the halter knot in your hand, begin, again using pressure-release movements, moving the horse back three or four steps. The Fourth movement begins when you let go of the halter knot, releasing pressure. Then quickly pay out approximately 6 to 8 feet of rope whilst you are facing the horse and backing quickly away. This is done whilst they are still in process of backing as you had just been directing 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 then begin the Fifth movement by 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 Sixth Movement. This sixth movement consists of using a side-to-side waving cue in a horizontal "Sine Wave" wiggling motion. Do this in 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 sixth movement stipulates your space requirements in their mind. Now, once you have completed the first six movements, you must execute the Final Movement of stepping up to him or her and giving them a very sincere friendly rubbing - not a patting as no horse ever pats another. If you do make the mistake of patting, as I sometimes still do as a result of old habits picked up when I was a young trainer in Texas - then quickly rub the spot you just patted. I also recommend often rubbing where their mother and other horses tend to rub, nibble, etc. - which is on their crest, cheeks and forehead. This helps convince them that you are a benevolent yet firm leader following the series of exercises as well at other times.

You will then have completed one complete ground routine, which I would recommend be done (at least in part) each time you greet them following any long period of absence (six or more hours). Once both of you understand the routines, they 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 hand, forearm, elbow, upper arm and shoulder line would be moving the rein when you are in your saddle. Don't forget to praise

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your horse with benevolence and rubbing NOT PATTING at the end of the entire leadership exercise routine.

Closing Reminders:

Horsemanship is largely about Communication that provides confidence between horse and rider. Good clear communication is dependant on two minds listening & being open. The art of communication in Training / Teaching is much more effective when presented in a language the horse can understand. Whether you are applying 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. This is just as it is and has always been, in herds of horses.

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

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