

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 Response / Recognition” of their compliance (even their slightest attempts for compliance) to our cues/requests. This may seem to be a loop of sorts but it is an important method of communication method that they naturally understand. It is how horses think and recognize our intentions. This can also be effectively established via the consistent use of *rhythmic application of pressure - release* (without jerking) on reins and ropes. Our *immediate release of pressure*, once a horse complies, is very clear to them. The easiest way we can do this is simply via our fingers or feet without needing to move any larger muscles such as our arms or legs. Therefore, be very attentive and efficient in recognizing their efforts and releasing our applied pressure - in a very timely manner.

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. As with all communication exercises, do not overly worry (initially) about the precision or accuracy and specific timing of the horse's reply / movement. 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**. It is their Natural Instinct to reply with *Opposition Reflex*. This opposition can be generated via our use of *jerking or via use of static pressure* on reins, ropes and other cues. 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 becomes much easier. I use a number of procedures 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 the number of procedural steps - once they have a better understanding of our cues / requests. 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 horse's eye are adjacent. Then ask for movements / replies, **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 same side 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 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. 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***

June 2014 Essex Rider Magazine
(Part 3) Communications & Leadership Foundation Exercises

horse raises its head whilst you are using the rhythmic downward pressure request - do not release the pressure application until it begins a downward movement. To do so, the horse would incorrectly read your release as a signal that it has correctly replying - in error. You must continue the application of pressure/release and rise up along with the horse until a downward motion is achieved, even if the compliance is attempted or done from higher up rather than from the initial starting point.

Second movement: Again, using pressure release, from both 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 horse's head (do this once from each side). **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 **clarify understanding of communication and leadership**, avoiding misunderstandings between horses and riders or handlers. Initially, this is best addressed via groundwork, followed by saddle work, due to horse's 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 initially see us much better. From the saddle, it is also basic and very important to consistently apply, learn and practice firm, non-intimidating & non-confrontive methods of giving cues with releases. 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 (fighting). This especially applies to the counter-productive 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 with varying degrees of efficiency. Always try to control & redirect energy, rather than trying to overtly block or prevent actions in confrontive fashion. Always use via "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.

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,

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

www.BlackburnNaturalHorseTraining.com

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn

blackieb@btconnect.com

0771-8317654