

Foundation Communication & Leadership Exercises Part 2

Continuing with the 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 Second part of the Communication & Leadership Exercises - as PART 2. 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.

Good solutions for solving self-doubt and fear issues that "we and our horses often hold" are to better clarify communications, understanding and leadership. This is important in both directions (to and from our charges) and must be clear initially from the ground as well as from the saddle. Some basic, important points for us to keep in mind are for us to ride and generally act in a firm & benevolent manner as well as when we practice training. In all activities, we should practice controlling in firm yet non-confrontive methods in order not to generate "opposition reactions". These points are most easily achieved via controlling 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 reins & bits or kicking them. Paramount in all actions (or cues that we give) is to release whatever pressure we apply once the horse makes the slightest effort to comply with our directions. Additionally, you should always use apply cues with "pressure - release" action - versus static pressure. By working in these manners you will be much more successful in avoid generating the natural opposition response inherent to all horses. This advice equally applies to use of ropes, spurs and legs. To repeat the other key communication point is for the horse to recognize "our recognition" of their compliance to our requests. Therefore, be quick to recognize their initial compliance and then release pressure to make it clear.

Leadership Foundation Exercises from the Saddle

Further to the ground work leadership exercises in my Part 1 article, the following exercises are similar to those ground work exercises and should be done whenever you mount any horse at any time. These exercises are applicable in varying degrees depending upon the mental state of whatever horse at any time. These exercises from the saddle are generally much briefer than from the ground method. A similarity to the ground exercises as outlined in Part 1, is that these foundation exercises are generally accomplished via "firm" pressure-release movements. These exercises should take, on average, about 30 seconds to complete. The movements are conducted via direct and indirect reins simultaneously with your legs and heels. Both reins and leg / heel pressures are applied with well-timed pressure-release movements. Never use a constant or static pressure generating needless opposition reflex. Follow the exercises just as you would in Part 1 and only omitting the "wiggle" rope cue.

An important note concerning mounting safety: whether you are mounting from a mounting block, from a portable stand, having someone give you a leg up or otherwise - it is extremely important to protect yourself from harm when something unexpected happens to frighten your horse. Start by using your onside rein & bending (via pressure release) the horse's neck laterally around towards you. You should then hold that rein tightly in your onside hand, whilst simultaneously gripping your hand on a part of the front of the saddle until you are completely mounted and have both feet firmly in the stirrups. Do this whilst leaving the offside rein longer in order to prevent pressure in the opposite side of the bit. This applies to whether you mount & dismount from either 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 throughout the movement of placing one foot in the onside stirrup then sitting & moving your offside foot into place. To attempt to mount whilst holding both of the reins together in equal length from the bit (i.e. head facing forward) will allowing a frightened horse to run forward. This is most dangerous as with only your onside foot in the stirrup whilst the horse runs forward - with each breath the cinch can slip around the girth area and

eventually you will contact the ground with your head and run great risk of a broken neck.

Once you are properly mounted, you can then safely begin the leadership exercises, always remembering to use pressure release movements throughout. Begin the *First movement* with a direct rein to move bit and nose to the side whilst using your inside leg / heel just back of the girth area, on the same side, to disengage the hindquarters. Keep the direct rein on the plane created between your elbow on down your forearm through your hand then down the rein all the way to the bit ring. As the horse begins turning its nose to follow the direct rein, you can begin to bend your elbow whilst turning your shoulders to the same side and using your fingers to generate the pressure release movement. Once two or three hindquarter steps are accomplished, you can then begin the *Second Movement*. This is simply a copy of the first movement on the opposite side.

The first and second movements are lateral movements that your horse will soon learn to follow very softly as the horse realizes you are capable of disengaging his hind quarters easily. Following completion of the first two movements, you can then proceed with the *Third Movement*, which is reining back two or three steps. Once this is completed, you are ready to ride. It is very important that your horse be able to accomplish these lateral movements well & he will also have gotten used to "seeing" you conduct the exercises as his leader. Without the ability to make a good lateral bend you will not be able to make a successful emergency stop or redirect energy and gain control during an adrenalin rush. Once the leadership foundation exercises are completed from the saddle and lateral movements are checked and established as solid, you will be considerably safer with much better ultimate control over your horse in multiple conditions and situations when riding. Do not forget to praise your horse with *rubbing NOT PATTING* at the end of the leadership exercise routine. Not to temp fate, keep your hands on both reins when rubbing your horse, do not put them in one hand and rub with the other.

Tack Notes

Regarding lead ropes; A 10 or 12 foot rope is much better than 6 foot rope as typically used in the UK. Using a longer lead rope is much safer for both the horse as well as safer and "more functional" for the handler. Safety factor for the horse is large should the horse escape the handler's grip and run off as a shorter rope will be hanging free under the chin and unseen by the horse with it's initially raised head. Using a longer lead rope will weigh more and tend to drag to the side where the horse can see it and if it does fall between the front legs he can feel it between them and often will tend to run to the side just enough to evade the touch. It will be heavy enough to maintain the horse's attention whilst dragging (either way). Even if the horse is worried about "what that is following or frightening it" - there is a much better chance that the horse would avoid stepping on the rope at speed and hurting itself. Whereas a typical 6 foot rope will be hanging under the chin when the horse suddenly leaves, for at least for the first few strides. Once the horse has run a few strides and begins to relax, it will begin to drop its head and as it cannot see the rope hanging straight down, it will often step on the rope at speed and hurt it self. This is another good reason never to use a chifney bit when leading as it can actually break the jaw even easier than a normal bit could should the rope be stepped on at speed. The extra length of rope is also much safer for the handler as more distance can be maintained whilst still maintaining contact. Also pressure release can be applied without losing contact.

Closing reminder:

The highest result a horse can achieve, when we are teaching them, can be no better than how well they understand us. That result also can be no better than how well they accepted it – and they cannot accept anything until they are calm and feeling safe. Firm, Benevolence goes a long way in helping to achieve this. In following months, I will continue with PARTs 3 & 4 to the Leadership & Communication Exercises

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

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