

Communication & Leadership Exercises (Part 3)

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; however it is an effective and important method of communication - which horses 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 static pressure or any rein jerking) on reins or 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 manor.

Head & Neck Work:

All communication exercises are best accomplished by using increasing levels of rhythmic pressure - with a quick release at the slightest reply or show of compliance intent 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. Therefore, patience on our part is very important. However, we should endeavor to be sharp in our timing of our recognition and release of pressure in response to any signs 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 applying static pressure* on reins, ropes and with any 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 our horse clearly understands how to correctly give/respond 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 - release from ground work as well as in saddle work. Once the horse begins to learn, we should endeavor not to overly repeat full regimes of procedures or that could drive the horses to distraction. Simply reduce the number of procedural steps, once they have a better understanding of our cues / requests. In due course, the use of only a few movements in our cues will suffice.

Initial movement: From a position of standing to either side of the horse, facing forward as is the horse, near the head where your eye and the horses' eye are adjacent, you can then ask for movements / replies, **straight down**, by application of cues via the halter loop under the chin. Then repeat the request, from your same position but facing the rear rather than forward - again remain adjacent eye to eye. Then repeat the cue, a third time, whilst standing in front and facing the horse. 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 facing forward and to rear exercises for a total of five movements requiring a downward pressure-release cues. Initially you will be seeking a simple movement from the

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(Part 3) Communications & Leadership Foundation Exercises

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 release & a full release* at the slightest attempt or show of intent of correct movement. An important point to keep in mind is that whenever the horse raises its head whilst you are using the rhythmic downward pressure requests - "do not release" the pressure application until a correct movement is felt. 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 until the correct motion is achieved, even if the compliance is attempted from a different location than where you began.

Second movement: Again, using pressure release, from both sides of the head and at the same two positions on each side, whilst you are facing toward the rear, as well as the one where you are standing in front and facing the horse. This time ask the horse to step **straight back** (again, keeping the horse's head straightforward until it complies). Once the backward movement is accomplished (initially for only for a step or three). Once this is successful, you can then turn the horse's head to the side and show it where you, "as leader", have **safely** taken it. This set gives five more exercises and instills more confidence in you as leader. 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 each side of the face (adjacent eye to eye) facing forward next to the horses 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 your horse and use your hand to once again 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 as well with limited binocular vision but can see better with your elbow to the side via their peripheral vision.

Closing reminders:

Good solutions for solving inherent self-doubt and fear issues, which both we and our horses often hold, are to clarify understanding of communication and leadership. Initially, this is best addressed via groundwork, followed by saddle work. Horse's more easily seeing our body-language initially from the ground. From the saddle, it is also basic and very important to consistently apply non-intimidating & non-confrontive methods of giving cues with releases. 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 applies to handling with ropes from the ground as well as use of reins from the saddle. Always try to control & redirect energy, rather than trying to overtly block or prevent actions in confrontive fashion.

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

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