

## **Leadership & Communication Exercises (Part 2)**

Good solutions for solving *self-doubt and fear issues that we and our horses often hold* are to clarify communications, understanding and leadership, initially from the ground then from the saddle. Some basic, important points for us to keep in mind are for us to act in a firm & benevolent manner as well as practicing training, riding and controlling in firm yet non-confrontive methods. I mean to say, control 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 bits or kicking them. Always use "pressure - release" versus static pressure. These means make all efforts to avoid the use of steady or static application of pressure, which will generate the natural opposition response inherent to all horses. This advice equally applies to use of ropes, spurs and legs. Another key communication point is for the horse to recognize "our recognition" of their compliance to our requests. Therefore, be quick to recognize and release pressure once your horse complies or even "begins" to comply.

### **Leadership Foundation Exercises from the Saddle**

Further to the ground work leadership exercises in my July article, the following exercises are similar to the ground work exercises and should be done whenever you mount any horse at any time. These exercises are from the saddle and much more brief in only three steps. A similarity to the ground exercises as outlined in my July article is that these foundation exercises are generally accomplished via "firm" **pressure-release** movements. This exercise 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.

**A note concerning mounting safety:** whether you are mounting from a mounting block, from a portable stand or having someone give you a leg up - it is important that you use your onside rein and bend the horse laterally around towards you. You should then hold that rein tightly in your forward hand and on the front of the saddle until you are completely mounted and have both feet in the stirrups (leaving the offside rein longer to relieve unnecessary pressure in the opposite direction). This applies to whether you mount from left or right 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 as opposed to holding the reins together equally allowing the horse to run forward which leaves you in a dangerous position if you have not yet mounted solidly.

Once you are mounted, you can begin the leadership exercise, always remembering to use pressure release movements throughout. Begin the **First movement** simultaneously with a **direct rein** to move bit and nose to the side and **inside leg / heel** just back of the girth area to disengage the hindquarters. Keep the direct rein on the plane created between your elbow on 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 and turn your shoulder to the inside whilst using your fingers to generate the pressure release. Once two or three steps are accomplished, you can then begin the **Second Movement**. The second movement is simply a copy of the first movement on the other side.

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**Part 2 of Communications & Leadership Foundation Exercises**

**The first and second movements are lateral movements** that your horse will soon learn to follow very softly and you can then begin to lessen rein and leg pressures accordingly. 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** as he will have gotten used to "seeing" you, as it is performed, and 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 under an adrenalin rush. Once the leadership foundation exercise is 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**

A 10 or 12 foot rope is better than 6 foot. Using a 12 foot 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 as the horse can feel it between it's front legs and 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 out to the side (where the horse can see it). Even if the horse is worried about "what that is following it" - it is very unlikely that the horse would be able to step on the rope at speed and hurt 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.

**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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