

**Leadership & Communication Exercises (Part 4)**

I would like to open part 4 with a note about the value of using pressure-release cues: Horse owners & riders should not underestimate the value of doing groundwork and saddle work in the application of pressure-release cues. The communication and understanding gained with pressure-release cues goes a long way in building understanding between you and your horse.

**Body Work Communication Exercises - from the Ground**

When you are working to apply pressure for cues on the body, try using your fingertips or the bend of your knuckle joints to apply the pressure-release movements. One exception can be to use the flat of your full flat fist to mimic the feel of your calf, on the sides of the ribs or barrel, if you are intent in using your calf for pressure rather than your heel or spurs. I typically advocate the use of heels or spurs in a scratching movement rather than a pressing movement as that avoids the claustrophobic reaction horses can often feel and exhibit.

Once the requested action is achieved or even if an honest effort to comply is exhibited by the horse, then cease the applied cue pressure as a reward for the horse.. By rubbing the spot(s) you just applied pressure to, you will be furthering your teaching them to "soften to the rub" as another aid/cue that is very handy when tacking up or moving small distances for specific tasks from the ground and is handy for holding static positions from both ground and saddle, etc.

An important point worth repeating in each different exercise using the application of pressure-release is to remember the importance of the horse recognizing "our recognition" of their compliance to our requests. This may seem to be a loop of sorts but the cessation of pressure from us is how horses will best recognize our intentions. This can be effectively established via the consistent use of **rhythmic "Non-Static" "pressure release"** (not by jerking on ropes and/or reins) followed by the immediate cessation of pressure once the horse makes the slightest attempt or shows any honest inclination to comply with our requests.

**So, be quick to recognize & release pressure in a timely fashion. The reward for the horse is the release of pressure**

**Initially ignore errors of forward or backward motion** so long as the horse "gives" to your specific requests (or makes an honest effort to comply) and does not oppose your cues by going against the pressure - release action. This is often called "opposition reflex" and is not acceptable

as long as we are not applying "static pressure". Any errors (other than opposition reflex) in movement direction can be corrected in due course.

***The following are some specific exercises, although not an exhaustive listing:***

***Incremental exercises:***

- a. from side of the face, request movement away from mid jaw and/or nose.
- b. from the front of the face, apply pressure to the bridge of the nose about half way between the nose and eyes to ask for backing up movement.
- c. from side of the neck, request movement away to the side (in more than once place along the neck).
- d. from the middle of shoulder, request movement away to the side.
- e. from ribs or barrel, request movement away to the side.
- f. from middle of hip, request movement away to the side.

***Entire body movements:***

- a. using pressure release at the points of chin, neck, shoulder, ribs and hip ***simultaneously*** (side pass), request movement away from your pressure (crossing feet in due course). When doing this exercise **initially - allow forward or backward movement** so long as the body moves evenly to the side (not exhibiting opposition reflex) then correct in due course.
- b. Lateral bending** of the neck is a very important exercise as when or if you need it in order to redirect energy, esp. in an urgent manner, the horse must already know how to do this and that you can direct it.. From the ground this exercise can be done using a rope halter. From the saddle the bit can be used. In both these cases the use of pressure release is a must.

***Closing Tack Reminders:***

1. A Chin strap (not a curb strap) is important when using a bit as it moves the entire lower jaw when you need to turn the head to a side urgently. The chin strap will prevent the bit from being pulled through the mouth or allowing contact with the teeth in any emergency turn . The reins attach to the bit ring "above" the chin strap, not below it.
2. Chrome or stainless mouthpiece bit parts are not a good idea, as the electrolysis created by the nickel in the material can be painful if not only irritating. If you have ever touched your teeth with tin-foil you would know what the horses are dealing with. It is easy to select bits with sweet iron, copper or brass mouth pieces (happy mouth plastic bits are good for training nervous horses as well). The bit rings, shanks can be chrome or stainless steel without generating any problem.

***Until next time, have fun and stay safe.***

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