

Communication and Understanding

This review of the workshop will cover the placing of the hoof. One simple move requires that we show the horse what we want through a series of communication attempts. The fundamental task is to have the horse understand that we are asking for the movement of a limb.

One of the most useful and successful ways to achieve this is to demonstrate it ourselves. It is a clear, visual, non-imposing way to indicate what we are asking.

It is important to have your horse relax and have the time with you to be enjoyable. I suggest a good grooming and scratching and massage/rubbing session to start with. Then a warm up. Put the cordeo onto the horse (hold up the cordeo, say `cordeo`, and if the horse is willing, place it over his head) Jog or run in a straight line with the horse.

Then, place an object that is already laying close by. Even if it is within reach, move it to a new location, even just a few feet, and then, if your horse is not already interested in what you are doing, position the horse in front of the `target`.

Now, it should be understood that using a prop (target) only makes things a little more interesting to the curious horse.

As demonstrated with Atlas, the vocal cue (step), my own step to demonstrate the move, the touch of the twig on the hairs of the back of the leg, was done without a target. I think that with the unique situation of him being picked out of the herd and with the discussion going on, plus the on-looking audience, helped him to understand that something was being asked of him. He responded well to that, in his own way. That is, we learned that he moved into a touch, not away from it. That is another important point.

We should not overlook how the horse responds to our request. I was trying to teach him what I wanted, but I also had to learn how he perceives it. Instead of working against it to stick to the original idea, I adjusted to the situation to continue the interaction and the thought process. When touching the back of his leg, he moved it backward. So, I then proceeded to touch the front of his leg, then point, touching the ground in front of his leg, and also placed my own foot forward. It worked. Even if I had a specific language in mind to start, with his input, we created a new dialect.

The objects to use can vary. It can be a piece of cardboard on the ground, a plastic lid, or natural objects (which I find work better) such as a bail of straw or hay or a log.



With a horse that never had such a communication attempt nor any semblance to such an exercise, I still had success with a plastic barrel. It is not always so much the object that is used, but how you approach the exercise in your own attitude.



Above: Barrel is slid into place, and I am talking and smiling saying that I know he can do this...



Above: For this horse, reassurance a must, the word `step`, my own demonstration, plus a light finger touch to indicate his own leg. No stick, no cordeo. This horse did not want any type of equipment to touch him. Turns out that this kind of interaction is what he longed for... and **Below:** A fast learner. I use my far arm, he uses his far leg.



The above photos are of the second day. The first day, I was too insistent and focused, and he was too doubtful. He walked away. I let him walk away. Because of that, he was willing to try again the second day. He gave me another chance.

Notice that I am a good distance so that he can clearly see me looking at the leg that I would like him to move. I had to encourage him, smile, laugh (you would be surprised how laughter dissipates a lot of anxiety or fear) This horse is a `rescue` and it is no surprise that this intelligent boy had enough of never being listened to or understood. I had to make it clear that I was asking, and not telling him, what to do.

The exercise should be like a game with a child. It is not `I say – you do`, but rather, let`s try to do this new game *together*. Relax, don`t think too much or focus too hard.

As with the exercise with Atlas in the demonstration, here is another horse that likes individual attention. Just to be asked to come away from the others, into our own little space, he is very attentive.



By learning this, one leg at a time, the back crunch materializes. It is the first stage, not only in communication and understanding, but the prelude to the front crunch...



Position yourself at the horse's shoulder:



Get the horse's attention by saying his name, raise a finger in line with his eye. This finger can be useful in the future. It is also a non-vocal cue for 'psst – pay attention'.

An example would be, 'Atlas, step', and then place your own leg forward and touch his leg lightly.

Step is the word, your own action is tied to what it means, and for further clarity, you indicate by touching the leg, that he should copy you with the leg you touch.



Reward and praise and be happy for any little semblance of an attempt from the horse...



In the process of trying to show what we want, we should not surpass 10 minutes. If after about 10 minutes, even if the horse has not yet responded fully, then we remove the cordeo, change ideas by thanking and scratching the horse and break for recess...



When the horse learns what you ask and responds, you can practice it, but do not ask the same move more than 3 times per session.

Next to follow, how to play...