



PART 3 - 20 BASIC EXERCISES FOR BUILDING RESPECT AND TRUST

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The article will be divided into four parts so keep a lookout for the next parts

20 BASIC EXERCISES FOR BUILDING RESPECT AND TRUST

I will not give a detailed explanation of all exercises, esp. for a horse who is very disrespectful of his handler or very nervous.

I merely give you an overview of what I feel is important, with a brief explanation.

As I said before, there are plenty of good sources available if you feel you are not sure of how to apply the following. And if anything remains unclear, I am glad to help.

And also please keep in mind that what I am talking about today is what works for me. There are many different ways of getting to the same goal, and it does not make one method right and the other wrong.

One thing I still have to mention:

Whenever we ask the horse to do something, we do this first with the lightest possible aid, then, if the horse does not listen, gradually increase the pressure. We want the horse to become very light and responsive to our requests, so we need to train him to as light an aid as possible.

I allow about 2 to 3 seconds for each incremental increase. for a total of about 4 to 5 increments, but you can use as many as you like.

Eventually it will not even be necessary to touch the horse as long as he can see us. Just looking at the body part we want him to move or pointing at it will be enough. But keep in mind that horses wearing blinders cannot see this, so in this case we will have to use physical contact, and they need to be taught to understand this.

The first 10 exercises can easily be done in a small space like a stall or grooming area.



1 Move The Shoulder

Move The Shoulder



In this exercise we ask the horse to move one shoulder sideways one step at a time. The crossing leg should pass in front of the stationary leg. We gently push his head into the direction where we want him to move and at the same time apply light pressure to his shoulder with one or two fingers. If he does not respond to light pressure, we increase the pressure in increments until he

shows the slightest attempt. Even if he does not cross over yet and does not really move sideways yet we reward the attempt by relieving all pressure immediately and then repeating the exercise.

As soon as the horse has responded we praise him by scratching, stroking or rubbing him and telling him what a good horse he is. Before we repeat the exercise we first rub him a bit all over his neck, then down to his shoulder, so we don't surprise him with our aid.

At first we only ask for one step, take a break, then another step, change from one side to the other.

When he is good at it we can ask for more steps in a row, but always one step at a time. We don't want him to learn to rush anything and only do as much as requested.

This exercise is also the basis for a turn on the haunches, and the turn we need to have the horse pivoting the carriage around the inside wheel(s).



2 Move The Hip

Move The Hip



For this exercise the horse has to look toward you and the side you are trying to move sideways.

In other words, if you want to move the horse's left hip, you will stand on his left side and make him bend his neck and head a bit to the left. When teaching this exercise to a horse that is mainly ridden I tend to use my pushing aid where my leg would be. For the driving horse I push further

back, like the flank area or even the hip area. It should be at a spot that you can reach with your whip from the carriage, and then it will make more sense to him.

The same basic ideas apply as above. The crossing leg should move in front of the stationary one and we ask only for one step at a time. Praise every attempt or successful step, and before repeating the exercise rub your way along the horse toward the pressure point again.

This exercise is also the basis for the turn on the forehand. For the riding horse, this turn has many applications, for the driving horse we only need this understanding to move the haunches to the side as when asking for a better bend in turns, for moving the rear end one way or the other when on a straight line, for maneuvering the horse between the shafts or when hitching a pair horse to the carriage.



3 Come To Me

Come To Me



For this exercise you move to the end of the rope in front of your horse and ask him to come to you by applying first the lightest possible pressure, then increase until he listens. When he is close enough, say Whoa, and raise up one or both hands as a stopping signal. Then praise again. This will help to make him lead eventually on a light contact.



4 Back Up

Back Up



For this exercise the horse needs to be really relaxed, with his head about at wither height, and the poll soft. Then gradually start applying pressure backward on the nose band until he thinks about backing up or actually does back a step. Instantly release pressure and praise. When the horse has a problem with this or crowds you can also push on his nose with your free hand. One can also push against the chest, but since driving horses have to learn to move against pressure there it can be a bit confusing for them. Although they can and will learn to understand the difference over time.

Back Up





5 Head Down

Head Down



This is a very important exercise for a driving horse, and you should make sure that he does this really well. Not only does it make it a lot easier to put the bridle on, but should the horse become stuck with his bit or a rein around a shaft he will not panic, and when you need to hold him in a dangerous situation on the head he will know how to respond properly. Needless to

say it is also useful should the horse step on his lead rope or get tangled up some other way with his head, or is tied and gets scared and tries to pull back.

To teach him to respond to pressure, start applying pressure downward with the lead rope.

This sometimes takes some patience and strength. Many horses will respond to that first by raising their head. Again, every slightest attempt needs to be rewarded.

Eventually you should be able to just press lightly with your hand on the top of the poll, or pull ever so lightly down on the lead, and he should keep his head in any desired position, for as long as you are asking him. This also helps a lot with ear shy horses.

This exercise also will help to make him lead on very light contact.



6 Flex Neck To Each Side

Flex Neck To Each Side



Although this exercise is more important for a riding horse as one can use it to get a horse to stop under saddle, it still is a good thing to teach to the driving horse. It helps to enforce the request of yielding to pressure, supple his neck and helps detect stiffness problems.

You start this by first turning his head to your side by bracing your free hand against his neck and with your other hand on the

halter ask him to look your way.

When he does this, move your free hand further toward the shoulder and repeat. Most horses will at first circle around you, until they understand the request.

You can also take the tail into your free hand, bring it forward and let the horse sniff on it.

This helps to control the rear end a bit better, but usually also results in a lot of circling at first.

As another variation you can turn the horse's head away from you by bringing the lead over his back and apply pressure to the rope until his nose touches his side opposite of you.



7 Turn All The Way Around, Following The Lead

Turn All The Way Following The Lead

1



2



3



4



From this last position, you can run the lead around his hind quarters and make him turn around all the way. Another way of yielding to pressure



8 Pick Up All Feet From The Same Side

Pick Up All Feet From The Same Side



This is very valuable for the driving horse, especially in the pair, as when a horse is hitched and you need to check his feet for whatever reason you need to do it from the same side, or with a single horse, you don't need to run around to the other side and it is just another thing to do with your horse to establish communication



9 Rope Around The Legs

Lift Legs With Rope



You want to get your horse used to being touched around and between the legs just in case he gets tangled up in traces or other parts of the harness, should something brake It also is very helpful to put the rope around the ankles and lift the leg this way, moving it in all directions. This gets the horse used to not panicking, should his legs get tangled up in something



10 Rope Under Tail

Rope Around Legs And Under Tail



This is of course a good practice for accepting the crupper, but also a good preventative for ground driving, should the long rein or rein get caught under the tail

All the above exercises are very elemental and simple, and it does not take long at all for the horse to learn them, but their far reaching effect on your relationship with the horse is enormous. It is a true pleasure to handle a horse that understands those

basics, and it gives the horse great peace of mind by understanding what he is supposed to do. As mentioned earlier, horses like to interact, and like us humans, are very willing to “play games” that lead to reward and appreciation. Who does not like doing things that work out well, get approval and praise?



11 Standing Untied

Standing Untied



stands still.

One can do this of course in a stall as well, but it becomes more meaningful in an open area.

We tell the horse to Whoa, and when he moves we just move him back quietly to where he was.

Since we can easily do this now, it is not a big deal, we get to practice all the previously mentioned maneuvers, and the horse will soon find out that he does not have to do any work if he complies and



12 Sending The Horse Out Onto A Circle

Send Out Onto Circle



Let's say you want to move your horse off to the left.

You stand near his left shoulder, your left hand holds the lead about 1 ½ to 2 feet away from the halter, plus the surplus length. Your right hand holds the other end of the rope, with about 1 foot left hanging. This end can be twirled toward the horse or also be used to touch the horse if the twirling is not enough. It is our driving aid.

With the left first finger pointing, you raise the lead ahead of the horse

to show him where you want him to go, and with the right you twirl a little the end of the rope. Just like before, increase this aid in increments until he listens. You also look where you want him to go. This is very important.

If you keep looking at the horse he may not move.

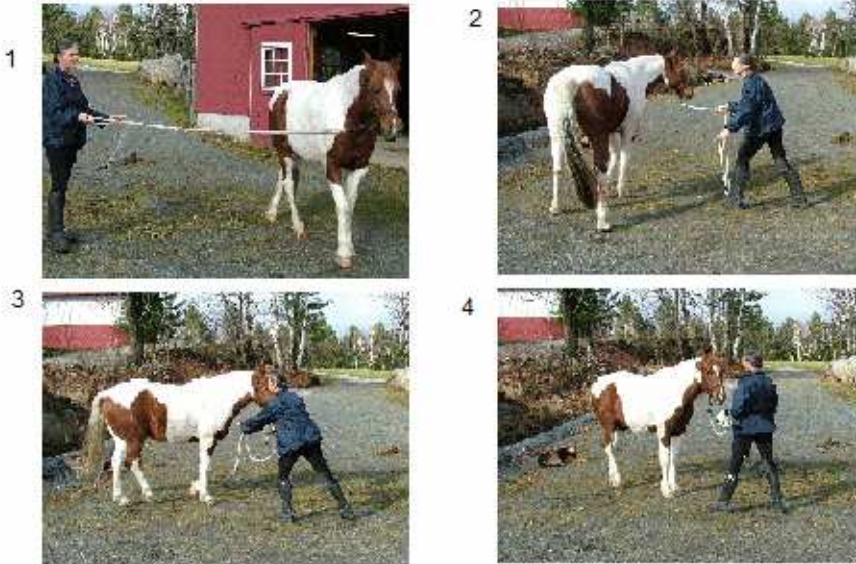
As soon as he responds by moving off you drop the lead out of your left hand and give him full freedom to move. Then you pick up the lead again with the left hand close to your right hand.

The goal at this point is that he walks calmly around you 2 or 3 times. You keep encouraging him with the driving end of the lead, and if he comes in toward you you step quickly toward him waving the entire lead at him.



13 Bring Back In

Bring Back In



Then we bring him in by disengaging his hind quarters. To achieve this we slide the left hand up on the lead, crouch down with our posture, stare at his hind quarters, point with the right hand there as well, control his forward movement with the left hand. If all this is not enough we can move closer to him and touch his hind end with the end of the lead. Most likely this will not be necessary. He will step over for 2 or 3 steps and come to a halt.

Praise lavishly and try again, alternating the directions.

This work on the lead is a wonderful exercise to teach the horse voice commands and basic lunging skills. This does not require much space, no round pen, and the ground does not have to be totally level.



14 Change Directions

One can change the direction without actually bringing the horse to a stop.

For this one disengages the hind quarter like when bringing the horse in, but as soon as he complies one points with the new leading hand into the new direction while using the other hand now to drive the horse on. The horse will turn toward us, but following the new direction signal it will cross over with his front leg away from us like in the turn on the haunches.

This is a very efficient way of changing direction and requires lots of coordination from both, horse and handler. The trainer needs to be very quick changing the leading and driving aid from one hand to the other, the timing has to be just right, and the horse needs to really pay attention and respond willingly and quickly. It is really fun to do once horse and handler get it right.

Change Direction





15 Introduce Trot And Transitions

When he does all this well at the walk we can start with the trot. Since the circle is very small, only a calm jog trot should be expected. One can make the circle larger by moving with the horse, especially if he is too excited at first for a calm trot. When he does well on the shorter lead, one can also use a longer lead or longe line.

Then one can also do lots of transitions, like walk/trot, walk/halt, halt/walk, halt/trot etc. etc.

One can also ask for rein back by voice. This usually needs quite a bit of close up help at first, but eventually one can rein the horse obediently back at the end of the line.

This can be very helpful in many instances: when grooming, harnessing, hitching, when he got himself into a tight spot somewhere in the isle, backing out of a trailer etc.



16 Leading At Walk And Trot, Asking For Transitions With Voice Commands, Practicing Standing And Backing, All From Both Sides Of The Horse

Leading at Walk and Trot



By now, the horse should follow you around on a loose lead, at the most with some light contact.

If he gets “stuck”, esp. in the transition to the trot, you can point with your leading hand and drive with the end of the lead like you did on the circle. His head should be either at your shoulder or just a tad behind you. Practice a lot of turns, both ways, to the side you are leading from and to the opposite side. This you do by pointing with the leading hand in

front of him, and if necessary, push him a little on the shoulder like in the turn on the haunches. You can lead him behind your back from one side to the other by switching the lead from one hand to the other.

Following The Lead





17 Send The Horse Ahead

Send the Horse Ahead



Now is the time to teach the horse to move ahead of the handler. This is great preparation for ground driving. Basically it is the same as the last exercise, but the handler now stays at shoulder height of the horse or even further back, and the horse has to take on the leading role, but still be in full control on very light contact. The aids are the same, the pointing leading hand and the driving and supporting hand. At first the horse may circle, cut across

the handler's path, go strong against the lead etc. But he soon will learn.

From this exercise you can bring him easily back to your shoulder, change direction behind your back and push him ahead of you from the other side.

You now have countless combinations you can ask from your horse and make a walk very interesting and challenging. E.g., you can change from leading him to a circle, out of the circle to moving ahead of you, from there back onto a circle, change direction within the circle, trot off into a straight line, make tight turns both ways, come to a stop, etc. etc.



18 Side Passing

Side Passing



side passing is just another coordination exercise. Although a driving horse never actually can perform side passing as such, he still needs to do a lot of side stepping in turns. This exercise will help him with the understanding and body coordination he will need for tight turns. It really is a combination of move the shoulder and move the hip. Except, that now the horse is always looking opposite to where he is going.

In the shoulder move exercise we pointed his head toward where he is supposed to move to, in the hip exercise in the opposite direction.

For this exercise his body should stay straight, only his head and neck are slightly looking toward the side he is yielding away from. His shoulder needs to lead, his body should never be more than 45 degrees to the line of movement. If the angle gets more than this he will step onto his own feet.

Usually it is enough to lead the head a little and point the end of the lead toward his flank.

It does take coordination from both parties, but really is surprisingly easy to do.

The reason we have the horse look toward us is that it is easier for him and us like this.

Later, in the carriage, he will look into the direction he is going like in a turn on the haunches.

If you are coordinated enough you can teach it to him like this to begin with, but horses seem to have no problem with doing it both ways.

The easiest way to start is a few feet away from and along a fence or building, but once the horse understands, you can do it anywhere.



19 Work Over Poles Or Boards

Work Over Poles or Boards



Now we can introduce poles or boards. I like boards better as they don't roll, the horse can step on them without hurting himself, and they are easier to carry around. We can ask him to step over and back over single boards, a combination of boards, back straight between boards, back around corners, and we can also side pass him over boards.

This work is very important for a driving horse so he learns to

trust stepping over things, touching things with his feet, staying within certain limits of an obstacle etc. If this kind of work is omitted he may easily panic in the carriage when he has blinders on, should he get into a situation in the woods or in an obstacle class at a show



20 Working Horse Over All Kinds Of Different Obstacles

Now we can give free rein to our imagination. Puddles, streams, tarps, black and clear plastic,

Working Over Obstacles



plywood, teeter totter, soda cans, plastic jugs, tires and whatever else you can think of.

You can lead your horse or send him over or into things, push things between his legs like paper bags, soda cans and plastic jugs.

The more you get him used to the better. Just keep it all a fun game.

As I said earlier, these are all very basic exercises, and you can teach your horse a whole lot more on the ground, but if you don't have much time to spare, these will do fine

for most horses. Some horses are very timid or strong willed, and they may need additional time and consideration.

But for the majority of the horses this is a great and sufficient base for beginning with ground driving and the actual driving education.



INTRODUCING THE WHIP

Just one more thing we have to do before starting the actual driving process: the horse needs to understand and accept the whip as an aid. He should never fear it. Respect yes, but not fear.

This we accomplish by rubbing the horse all over his body with the whip, between the legs, up and down the legs, behind the ears, etc.

Getting Comfortable With The Whip



Move The Haunches



One can also swing the whip through the air around the horse, hit the ground with it, make some noise with it, at first very gently, then increase the motion and noise. I also like hitting a wall or other objects with the whip.

Then we teach him to listen to the various touches.

There are two basic things we want to tell the horse with the whip: move forward and move sideways



The difference is where we touch the horse with the whip

Introducing the lateral aid

I like to begin this with moving the hind quarter. This is basically the same exercise as moving the hip, but now I tap the horse lightly with the whip in a spot that I can easily reach from the carriage. The same basic principles apply as before, start with the lightest aid possible, and instantly stop as soon as the horse complies, and always one step at a time.

Then I do the shoulder move. Usually I introduce this during the ground driving process, using the halter. For this, I stand behind the horse, turn his head with the reins a bit in the direction I want him to move to

and tap him on the opposite shoulder. He may first move forward or back up, but will soon understand, esp. if you explained the shoulder move to him well in the beginning.

Side Passing



After doing this both ways, I ask for side passing. A few steps are enough.

Move The Shoulder



**The whip as a forward aid**

To signal forward movement it is best to touch a driving horse high up on the back, right behind the saddle, on either side of the back strap.

One can also get the horse used to it by tapping him on top of the croup, but this may lead to bucking. But you can practice it anyway, just so he won't buck if you accidentally hit him there.

Personally, I train my horses to accept this spot as sort of an emergency spot like: you need to move forward NOW and no questions asked. This location of touch offers itself more to really get a horse to move as it directly affects his hind quarters and thus the engine. (when horses among themselves want to really move another horse out of the way, and this horse does not listen to gestures, they usually bite him on the croup)

Touching the back requires more mental agreement from the horse. It is at or even in front of the so called "driving line" of the horse, the invisible line in a horse's body where a cue signals either forward or backward movement to him. In other words, when you want to push a horse from the ground, facing his side, you need to address the right part of his body. When you apply your aid and intention too far forward he will not move or even back up. This line is usually close to where the rider's leg would be, but each horse may have a little different spot, often depending on state of mind. So when you touch a horse close to this line, he may interpret it at times according to his mental state. If he feels willing and bold to go forward, he may do this, but if he feels timid and rather not go there, he may not respect it as a forward aid.