

Building a Partnership with Your Horse

"Basic Ground Training, Part 2"

By Lynn Palm

In the last article, I discussed the "golden rules" of ground training— "respect your position" and "make straightness a goal." In this article I will continue on with two basic ground-training commands that will make life with your horse easier and safer. Before you start this lesson, make sure that your horse is equipped for the lesson with a properly fitting halter with a longe line attached and leg protection. I prefer to use a longe line instead of a lead rope for ground training.

Teaching the "Whoa" Command

Once your horse understands the command to move forward, it's time to teach "whoa," or the command to stop. Your horse will "whoa" quicker when he is standing straight, so start the lesson with the horse standing parallel to the stall wall, as you did with the "come to me" command.

Start by getting the horse to move forward in response to the "come to me" command. Be sure you are standing in front, but slightly to the side of your horse so that he does not walk into you if he doesn't stop.

As the horse moves toward you, raise your hand in front of his face like a stop sign and at the same time say "whoa" in a deep, commanding voice. When he stops, praise him with a stroke on his forehead. Sometimes a horse may be surprised and bring his head up in response to your hand being held up in front of him. If this happens, use your voice and give him a pet to reassure him. Ask him to move forward again, just a few steps, and repeat the "whoa" command. Immediately praise him when he complies. If your horse fails to stop or moves in too close to you, use your hand on the side of his head to push him away. Do not move him away by pulling against the longe line or lead rope.

Many people have the tendency to steer a horse from under his head using the lead, or by pushing on the middle of his neck. To truly control a horse's head, you need to have contact on the middle of his head. The middle of a horse's head is half way between his ears and his muzzle, at the jaw area. It will be close to where the halter's cheek piece touches his head. Experiment with your horse until you find this spot. You will know when you find it because you will be able to move his head away very easily with the slightest contact.



LYNN PALM & LARK
PHOTO BY CAPPY JACKSON

Teaching the "Move Away From Me" Command

The "move away from me" command teaches the horse to move away from pressure, which is a key concept for your horse to understand other ground work and under saddle training. Once your horse knows this command, it becomes a tool that helps teach your horse respect and helps keep a safe space between you.

The first step I use to teach this command is to get the horse to move away from me by shaking or "throwing" the longe line towards him. Once he understands that this means to move away, you can minimize the shaking of the line as you do this gesture. This is an important tool to get the horse to move away from you for safety. He should be able to move away from you, at your command, without any tension being placed on the lead.


To introduce the next step, put your right hand on the point of the horse's shoulder while your left hand serves as a gentle guide to keep his head straight during the maneuver. Any excess line should be held in your right hand. Gently push, or use a vibrating touch, to move the horse's shoulder away from you. Give a "cluck" to reinforce teaching him to "move" or "go forward." Follow his motion with your body while your other hand maintains a light contact with his halter to guide his head straight. Do not put any more tension on the halter than you have on his shoulder. The instant that he responds by taking one step, stop and praise him with a soft mellow voice tone, and a pet.

We will learn the "back" command in our next lesson.

Learn how to build a partnership with your horse from the ground up with Palm Partnership Training™. Ground training is covered in detail in my six-part **Longevity Training Visual Series**, (available in VHS and DVD), and each maneuver is demonstrated with several young horses. You can order these videos and other helpful training products at www.lynnpalm.com or by calling 800-503-2824.

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