

This issue deals with a Frequently Asked Question about one of the exercises in our DVD. This exercise is so important to all the work we do with our horse on the ground, as well as on their back, that I wanted to make sure everyone understands the principles here. This exercise also demonstrates how the cues we give the horse on the ground are consistent and parallel to the cues we use when riding.

FAQ: When I am doing the lateral bending exercise in lesson three of the DVD 'Establishing Control of Your Horse', is it important which front leg moves first? It feels as though my horse is still resistant to my lateral cue, even though he is stepping over. . . . Nancy W., Holley, NY

Answer: This is a great question Nancy. You know, as I work with more and more horses, I never stop learning to pay particular attention to these little SUBTLETIES.

Remember, the point of this exercise is to teach the horse to:

- 1) give in the poll,
- 2) drop and turn his head and then
- 3) step over into the outside shoulder while also bending his body.

First we have to make sure that our horse is "soft" in his head, meaning that he will willingly keep his head quiet in the position that we asked him to bend to, even when we let go of the halter.

Then we can apply the lateral cue (a push on the inside shoulder). What we are asking for and need to have happen, is for him to step over by moving his INSIDE front leg first, (meaning the one closest to us) and then to follow through by moving the outside leg.

Here's the reason this order of leg movement is important: If he moves his outside leg first, he is showing an intention to first BRACE himself rather than to step over. If instead, he moves his INSIDE front leg first, (which is what we need), your horse is now showing his intent to STEP OVER into the outside shoulder.

Again, by moving his inside front leg first, he starts to move sideways. Then by stepping over with his outside front leg, it allows him to regain his balance, and complete the movement with a "WANT TO" attitude. So you see, these little subtleties can really make a difference!

Remember, we are "Building a Foundation You Can Ride On" so this lateral bending exercise which we are doing from the ground is preparing the horse for when we will ride him. Here's how.

Being "soft" in his head and bending to light pressure on the halter is the same as giving to the bit and bending to light pressure on one rein when we are on his back. And the stepping over from light pressure on the shoulder is the same as stepping over from light pressure at the girth from our inside leg.

This is what I mean when I say that the cues I teach the horse are always consistent regardless of whether we are on the ground or on his back. This takes away confusion and frustration and makes it easy for the horse to understand what we want and promotes a 'want to' attitude in the horse.

So the take home message here is:

**** Beware the subtleties ****

Sometimes a very small difference (in this case, which leg moved first) in how your horse does something, can tell you a lot about his attitude and willingness to perform.