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Article

The Go Forward Cue

By Me, Tracy Porter

Why do we need a cue to go forward? Think of it as one of the first words you can establish in a language between you and your horse. Remember Helen Keller? She was lost until she made the connection between water and the word signed into her hand. The same goes for your horse. He may spend most of the time guessing what you want from him. One day he may get sick of playing guessing games. But if you had a language with him, how much better you both would feel. Have you ever been in a foreign country and explained to the best of your ability where you needed to go hoping that the cab driver understood at least something you were trying to convey. We treat the horse the same way, the funny part is that our cabby has the brain learning capacity of a 2 year old child. Hmm, are we trusting souls!

So why do we need a go forward cue? Teaching leading and longeing. Asking the horse to walk into a wash stall or pond. I use it daily to position my horse alongside a picnic table, light post or anything else I can climb on to mount. I want the horse to know it so well, I only have to think about his hip and he moves it. Wouldn't it be nice to ask your horse to come across his paddock, circle you and stand by your side? How about just waltzing on into the trailer, when YOU'RE ready to load? The go forward cue also establishes a pattern of movement that we use when we are riding. Think of it as a back up cue we teach first. Back up meaning a reserve cue we can use if our subtle cue fails to work. We may get to where we can just think of the hip moving and it does, but maybe for some reason, you had a breakdown and had to unload your horse on the interstate and lead him over and up to another trailer and load him in. COULD YOU? Some may find it hard enough to move their horse once he is out of a trailer, let alone reload him into another one.

Tools you will need: A 10 cotton lead, halter or bridle with a full cheek snaffle, 36 stiff dressage whip and a cattle marking paint stick. First mark the hip spot on your horse with the paint stick. Make a round dot large enough so you will easily see it. You will begin by standing to one side of your horse with your body *parallel* to his. Hold the lead, 2 inches down from the snap with your hand closest to his head, and the whip in the other. The hand on the lead only controls the direction of his head, it does not try to lead the horse forward (aka pull starting!).

Begin to tap the dot with a rhythmic, light tap. If you see the horse thinking about moving, STOP! Give him a pet and tell him good job. Then begin the process again. You will be letting the horse stop on his own the first 10 times or so. Then we will begin to stop his feet before he does. To do this: stop your feet and let him take the slack out of the lead. He will stop his feet on his own. Then praise him. Begin the process of tapping again, ceasing when he thinks about moving. Allow him to move along, making a mental note of how many steps he will go before you THINK he will quit. Always stop your feet first anticipating, the moment prior to his stopping on his own. This allows the rider to become active instead of reactive.

As the horse gets the idea, approximately 15-20 sequences, it is still important to continue to tap the horse. We want him to physically connect our tapping with the hip spot. We want to practice this so that it is so ingrained in his thinking that he will go forward whether he wants to or not.

The horse must move forward. If he begins to move backwards or to the side, continue tapping. He's only going through his set of options. We want to teach the horse that when we cue the spot on his hip, the feet are supposed to go forward. We must be consistent not only on knowing what response we are looking for but also recognizing when he has done it

and rewarding him.

Why don't we want to pull the horse forward on the rope? A horse's natural response to pressure is to pull back. We haven't taught him to give to pressure. By pulling on his head, his feet begin to drag, causing him to become heavier. It is the hip that has the power to move the horse, not the head. If you want to see a demonstration of this, watch little kids in a showmanship class, watch the horse's response when they try to walk or trot their animals using a pull start. The feet get sticky, the neck gets braced and suddenly the horse is moving with rigidity from the nose to the neck, through the front feet or maybe there is no movement at all.

In the beginning don't confuse the issue with introducing many different ways to cue the horse to move. That's why we start out with a light, rhythmic tap. Later we can teach a cue off our body (useful for instance in halter class or a trot off in an endurance vet check etc.). Since moving off the body is a more vague cue it's harder for the horse to connect to the feet moving, we want to have a more specific cue to use as a back up should the situation ever arise that the horse says "not right now."

Rewarding your horse with a rub and kind words is more meaningful to him than an excited smack. Think of a fly that lands on the horse. If the horse can feel a housefly land, jiggle his skin to remove it, then he's sensitive enough to appreciate a rub versus a pat. To differentiate between rubbing and patting, if you hear yourself praise the horse then it is slapping. The horse may have figured it out, but probably would appreciate you more if you rubbed on him. After all a partnership is based on the word partner without it it's just a ship. And ships have been known to sink

For more information and detail about the "spots" and physical changes that we see happen in our horse...look at other articles in this section. In the mean time may your horse enjoy spending time with you, as much as you do with him!



The hip drives the horse.
Tap steadily UNTIL he THINKS of moving his feet
forward.
Then STOP TAPPING!



Dragging your horse to get him to Go Forward makes him
heavy.



The Go Forward Cue is useful for many situations like Trailer Loading!

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