

Loving Horses & Living Leadership Series
Training the Whole Horse® with Missy Wryn
Part 3 of 4

So I've got my horse joining with me after a Wholistic Joining following my every move, backing up when I back up with her instinct invoked recognizing me as her herd leader. It seems like magic, but really is simple herd animal psychology. As I recognized the Four Core Emotional Concerns in my previous article and have established the Wholistic Joining, it is time to teach my horse Three Foundations that I require every horse to learn so she can be safer with me. I'm no match for 1000 lb animal so my Three Foundations are non-negotiable.

The first of my Three Foundations starts with Backing Up my horse. I want my horse to learn to back up with just a jiggle of the lead rope. Like I said I'm no match for a 1000 lb animal so no amount of physical pressure by pushing or pressing from me is going to keep me safer, but if I can control my horse with just the slightest jiggle of the lead rope I have power. I always tell my students *your power lies in the lead rope, not your physical strength.*

Teaching my horse to back up also continues to invoke her instinct to recognize me as her herd leader since *he who moves the other's feet first is in control.* Because I use jiggling the lead rope to back up my horse I do not have a clip or clasp attaching my lead rope to the halter, but an eyelet so as not to hurt her. The way I teach my horse to back up is I stand in front of her and jiggle the lead rope back and forth slightly increasing the jiggling, upping the pressure, until she steps back or even leans back and instantly I stop jiggling "asking" expressing appreciation "good girl", drop my eyes and bend at the waist dropping **ALL** my pressure. Remember *horses learn from the release of pressure, not the pressure itself* so your release of pressure must be INSTANT. That's why I will bend at the waist bowing at my horse when I'm teaching so my horse will "get it" that much faster. And then I'll walk up to her with my hand outstretched, shoulder to her, not my chest facing her because a full chest is pressure to a horse, while my eyes are averted avoiding eye contact, eye contact is pressure and means move, and I stroke her neck. Stroking her neck is another sign of appreciation and it releases a chemical response that relaxes her which accelerates learning.

Now for the next Foundation "Leading", but first let me ask you a question, how were you taught to lead a horse? I was taught from the age of six to lead my horse with my hand just below their chin by the shank of the halter or bridle with the horse next to me at my shoulder. Just about everyone I ask this question agrees this is how they were taught too. I understand and recognize we need to lead our horse like this for shows and halter classes, but I'm going to tell you leading your horse right next to you is dangerous!!!

I have heard time and time again stories of horses knocking down their handlers because of the delivery truck or school bus or even a garbage can scaring the horse right into the handler leaving them sometimes severely injured. Horses respond in instinctual ways and when they “see” something they don’t recognize or have not had adequate desensitizing they often spook right into us wanting to jump in our laps. You’ve seen them crash into one another in the pasture and many people can attest to costly vet bills as horses don’t even think about another horse when it comes to the “horse eating” plastic bag flying by in the wind.

I want to set myself and my horse up for success so Leading my horse safely is one of my non-negotiable Foundations. I want my horse to lead at least a half horse length behind me so I can hear those hoof beats coming and have time to respond. To teach my horse to lead safer I incorporate Backing Up as I’ve taught my horse the first of the Three Foundations.

While I’m leading my horse I jiggle the lead rope to keep her back. For a more pushy horse, often a mare, I will lift my hand like a stop sign and push in the air at her face saying back, back. For the really pushy horse I’ll swing the end of the lead rope like a helicopter blade around and around and if that horse tries to get past me the lead rope will find the end of her nose – she chose to run into it as it was going around and around, but she walked into it trying to pass me. I may spend one or two sessions teaching this especially when I have a dominate pushy mare, but out in the herd she wouldn’t dare pass the herd leader’s shoulder therefore she must not be next to mine and I want her at least a half horse length behind me following quietly.

Remember, your strength is in the lead rope so use the jiggle to keep her back and the end of the lead rope swinging if she is trying to lead you. Praise her when she is leading behind you in a safer position; let her know she’s doing what you ask for. Keep in mind Appreciation accelerates learning so focus on what she does right and only correct her when she is trying to lead you. Help her understand that walking quietly behind you is a safe and happy place so you’ve got to make **doing that** a good place to be.

The last of my Three Non-negotiable Foundations is Pressure & Release with Bonding. This foundation establishes the *safe and loving place we go when we are in trouble*, her emergency handbrake. Every horse has an emergency handbrake which I teach first on the ground and then translate under saddle for a safer ride. The emergency handbrake is a one rein stop, but with my techniques I teach this as the *safe and loving place we go when we are in trouble* which has paid off BIG for me especially when a bear cub crossed my path early April while running my mare on a logging road. At a full run the bear cub ran right across our path and into the woods and what my mare did was amazing. She dove to the ditch alongside the logging road, stuck her nose to the girth, *the safe and loving place*, and began disengaging her own hindquarters looking up at me with the whites of her eyes showing as if to say “what do we do, what do

we do". I gathered up the rein and held her nose in position at the girth while stroking her neck to calm her down. I continued holding on to the rein keeping her nose to the girth until her feet stopped moving and when she relaxed and became soft in hand I released the rein. We finished the run all the while her nose was turned towards the woods watching out for the bear. Thank goodness we never ran into the mama bear – phew. The one rein stop really paid off that day since my mare had learned that was the *safe and loving place we go when we are in trouble*.

I teach the *safe and loving place* by putting my hand over my horse's nose and apply pressure moving her head towards her girth. As soon as she gives her head towards her girth softly I release her nose. I continue to do this until I can get her to bring her nose around and she bobs her nose towards her girth. While I'm doing this my body language is relaxed and a little hunched over as I stand behind the girth area out of her way so she can get her nose close to her body. I will also stroke her girth area so she gets the idea to put her nose close – it's like tapping someone on their shoulder and they move their head to look who did that. Stroking the girth lets her know where I want her nose to be. Once she is relaxed or "gives" or bobs her nose towards her girth I will appreciate her by stroking her neck and verbalizing "good girl". If she moves her feet while I'm asking for her head around I simply stay with her, but do not let go of her nose.

For a horse who is struggling to understand or is uncomfortable bringing their nose around to the side I will hang onto the nose band knot of the rope halter while I gently coo and ask for the slightest try, the smallest change and release instantly when the horse gives her head even slightly. Take baby steps if your horse is concerned and stay with them if they move their feet. Keep stroking the girth and asking, but don't release their nose until their feet stop moving. This is going to translate under saddle as your emergency handbrake so teaching it on the ground first will make it safer and easier under saddle.

Many people think a one rein stop is dangerous and yes it can be when done without training on the ground and translation under saddle. It surely can throw a horse off balance like the Hollywood stunt horses, but when taught on the ground first and practiced under saddle making it a habit whenever you feel under threat or your horse becomes frightened it is a safer tool for shutting your horse down and in my case my horse shut herself down. This is why I teach the one rein stop as the *safe and loving place we go when we are in trouble* and we practice practice practice this under saddle as I explain in my Five Fundamentals that Translate Under Saddle for a Safer Ride in the next article.

Missy Wryn is the founder of *Training the Whole Horse®*, IRON FREE Riding, and HorseMAREship plus inventor of the ALL-IN-ONE Training Halter Bitless Bridle. Professional trainer Missy Wryn developed **Training the Whole Horse®** on the foundation of **Do No Harm** creating **SAFER** trusting relationships

with horses. Check Missy's schedule for appearances and lectures in your area at www.MissyWryn.com or call 503-630-3744.