

STOP HOLDING ON

In the making of a Hackamore or Bridle Horse, the quality of the finished product will depend greatly on the timing and feel offered by the hands on the reins. We can use different bits, hackamores or other devices tied at different angles to develop a head set or certain responses, but the maintenance is going to come down to how well we can present and maintain a feel with our hands. If it was easy anybody could do it, but it isn't and that is why we have to work to figure it out. What we can learn from other horseman may work at certain times, but because every situation may be different we need to develop our judgment, so we are able to compensate under any circumstance.

One thing that makes a lot of situations difficult for the horse is when the person holds steady pressure on the reins for a complete maneuver. We can only pull or send a signal and expect the horse to respond as the foot or feet are on the ground or leaving the ground. The horse can not redirect a foot that is falling. If we are pulling as the horses' foot is coming down, they can only wear the pull until the foot is on the ground again and then reposition for a change. This is the point that the horse can easily learn to push on our hands. It is important that we slack or relax the pressure on the reins when the horse can comply and get in time with the feet to apply pressure when the horse can comply. A big percent of the problems people have handling their horses is a result of their feel and timing not being compatible to the horse, causing problems with head position and or being hard mouthed. An insecure horse may require a light, steady contact to support the

idea to complete a maneuver, but too much force from the reins can be counter productive.

The more experience the horse has the better the horse should understand its job. The better the horse understands its job, the less we should need to do. We need to be patient and understanding with the horse that does not have confidence and at the same time be careful yet effective with the horse that doesn't have the motivation or desire. Only experience will teach us to recognize the difference.

We can't expect the horse to give us our desired response if we can't communicate what it is. They haven't learned to communicate our way in the last thousand years but there is record of people being successful in communicating with the horse in a way they understand. We need to be open to what may work for them, not arrogant and forceful of what we want to make happen. There is a point at which the pressure we may apply with the reins passes from being a respected signal to being a resented signal. No one knows where this point is except on a case by case or step by step basis.

When asking our horse to do anything, there are different levels of response that we should look for. Be aware of the processes that take place before the full force of the pull is delivered and the horse gives us a full response.

The first level will be acknowledgement; this is when the horse realizes there may be a signal coming and may evaluate or prepare to respond. This may be a time that may pay off for us to wait and feel for a change in the horse instead of dragging or pushing them through the maneuver. Wait and see if they

can find it and follow through on their own. If they can, it may feel good enough to them that the experience could promote them to look forward to doing it again when you give a light signal.

The next level is when the horse prepares to respond; they shift their weight, reposition their body, or in some way alter what they were doing in a positive or desirable way. This is definitely when we want to do as little as possible. Get the job done, but make it as good of an experience as possible for the horse to encourage them to take the same avenue next time we present the situation again.

If we do not recognize and encourage our horses' small efforts, the next level is when the horse feels they cannot find a comfortable solution to escape the pressure they are experiencing. They can push against our hands, alter their head position, which can alter their balance, which may make it difficult for them to be collected and easy for them to drop their shoulders, when they are distracted enough to get off balance they are probably distracted enough to forget about working a cow or any other project we were trying to direct their attention toward.

At this point based on their past experience and to some extent genetic makeup, they respond with confusion, fear, frustration, anger, resentment or other emotional responses all of which could need to be responded to by us individually. What may cause confusion or fear in one horse may cause frustration or resentment in another. This is why it is important to diagnose the specific problem properly before prescribing a cure and be sure you are treating the cause and not the symptom.