



Phoenix Equestrian Warriors
Rescue-Rehab & Restore Inc.

“Taking the Lead”

“A common sense training, teaching and desensitizing technique for all your horses, staff and volunteers.”

Taking the Lead Outline

Presented by Dawn Conley-Morelli

1. **Purpose of the presentation:** “Taking the Lead”
 - a) To provide program directors, stable managers, instructors, volunteers and riders with a method of leading their horses that will enhance the safety of their programs.
 - b) To enhance our horses happiness and cooperation through clear direction given by teaching the horse a position beside you, much like a dog heeling as opposed to being manipulated by a leader on the end of a lead rope.

2. **What** is the “Leading Method:
 - a) Method of teaching the horses a “trained” position beside the leader without physical restraint
 - b) This leading method enables the horse to be more content and depend on their leader’s guidance
 - c) Maintains the horses attention on the leader and vice versa

3. **Why** would you want to implement this into your program?
 - a) Safety in your program
 - b) This method of leading improves the behavior of our horses using positive reinforcement
 - c) Mentally stimulating for our horses so that do not struggle with mental fatigue and boredom
 - d) Provides quality movement from our horses due to the freedom of head and neck in a safe situation
 - e) Develops trust and bonding with horse and leader
 - f) Enables you to work through much more challenging situations with the horses in a safe partnership

4. **How** and where do you teach your horses
 - a) Leaders posture – look up shoulders square, lead rope natural and not tight, dressage whip in left hand, attitude of being in charge but kind
 - b) Use voice and make purposeful steps
 - c) If the horse hesitates then tickle them with the dressage whip behind you –while still looking straight ahead
 - d) If the horse gets in front of you, set a barrier in front of the horse by tapping them on the chest or forearm
 - e) Be consistent with your expectation of the horse to be in a rectangle beside you, using your dressage whip to set your boundaries... NOT YOUR LEAD ROPE.

5. **Progression**

- a) In walk on the left rein, with fence on your right
- b) On the left rein, with the fence on your right – Progressive transitions and transitions within the gait
- c) React to the horses reactions
- d) Come off the rail, change rein, repeat as above
- e) Add distractions and still insist on the same expectation of leading

6. **Desensitization** methods while implementing the leading method

- a) Add an able bodied rider, add a bumping leg from the rider, hand clapping, noises and sudden or slightly aggravating behaviors
- b) Add drums from volunteers
- c) Add flags
- d) Add ball throwing
- e) Take the horses to a different environment such as a trail or a special event
- f) Look for opportunities to reinforce the leading method

7. **Review important factors: (What, why and how)**

- a) Position and awareness of leader (shoulders square, definite movement)
- b) Practice and consistency with horses and volunteers
- c) Level of firmness in the initial stages of training the horses and volunteers
- d) Adding distractions
- e) Trusting your work and the expected behavior of the horse, without resorting to using your lead rope
- f) Progression

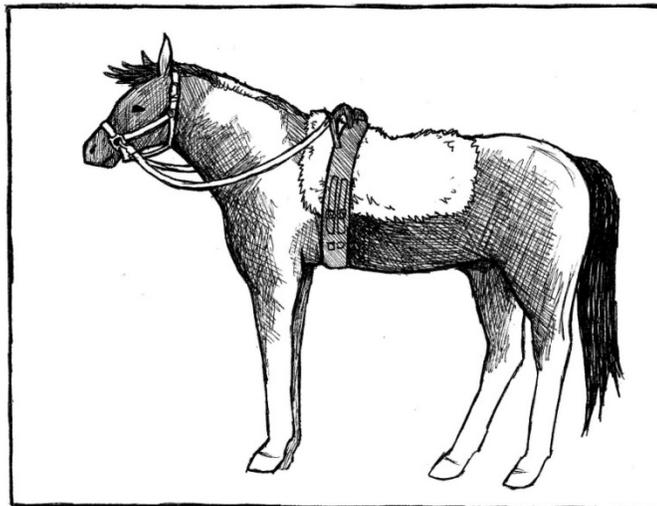
Benefits of incorporating the “Taking the Lead” method in your training program.

- Consistent practices for both horses and humans of all skill sets
- Confident horses and leaders
- A system of training that makes desensitizing of the horse a positive experience
- Horses are able to be safe in a much larger range of circumstances
- Volunteers are given a common sense method of horse handling that can be taught regardless of their past experience with horses
- The horses happy mental state is maintained due to clear expectations
- The horses do not assert their dominance over the volunteers successfully because the herd boundaries are maintained between the horse and volunteers
- Cures and fixes problem behaviors such as the horse that pulls or drags behind, biting, cow kicking, invasion of space etc.
- Reduces fear issues and aggressive behavior due to dominance issues and flight responses.
- Allows the leaders to be engaged and attentive to the horse and vice versa.

Safety Principals First

- Make sure you wear closed toed shoes
- Refrain from dangly earrings or flapping coats
- Be aware of the horses body language by being observant of their eyes, ears, nostrils, posture and level attention to their environment (they are talking to you and each other – so LISTEN)
- If walking behind the horses, speak and stay close to the horses hindquarters, so as not to startle them
- Be aware of the horses blind spot located directly in front of them.
- Refrain from making non-purposeful sudden movements and loud noises
- Be in charge of the horse as it gives them confidence in you as their “leader”
- Ask for help if you are not sure of something or feel uncomfortable with any situation

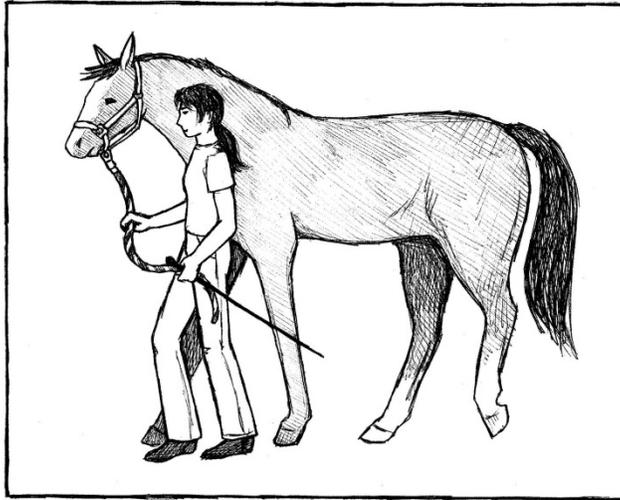
The Working Horse Theory



- Just as Seeing Eye dogs are considered “working” animals, the same is true for horses in your programs. From the moment a horse is removed from the stall, until it is returned after their lesson, that horse is considered to be “working”. This includes grooming and tacking.
- In order to maintain good ground manners with our horses, we must teach volunteers do not hug, rub the horse’s faces, play with their noses or partake in any other assertive forms of affection, while they are “working”.
- A pat on the neck and a word of encouragement is good – especially when appropriately timed as praise for expected behavior = positive reinforcement.
- Leaders need to stay in the present and engaged with the horse they are leading and the instructor to fully be a team member.

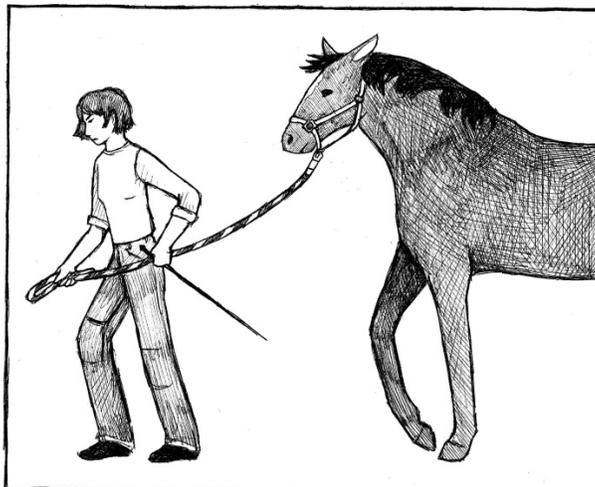
General Leading Volunteer Handout

- A Leader's first responsibility is the horse, but a Leader must also be constantly aware of the rider's needs, the Instructor's directions and any potential hazards in or around the arena.
- A leader must consider the placement of the Sidewalkers to make sure there is enough room along the rail and around obstacles for them to pass safely.
- A leader must be aware of the horse's natural tendency to respond to the environment with fear based reflexes in the form of "flight". It is our job as a leader to take the position of the "lead mare or stallion" in the herd by being confident and directing the horses attention to their job at hand.



Leading in a *safe* and *correct* manner

- Position yourself between the ear and the shoulder area of the horse
- The horse must walk at the pace directed by the Leader
- The horse should not lag behind the movement or pull ahead of the leader
- The horse is taught to position themselves beside you wherever you go at whatever the desired pace
- Lead with NO tension in the lead rope



Leading in an *unsafe* and *ineffective* manner

The Role of the Leader

What is the role of the Leader?

The role of the Leader is to lead the horse while allowing the rider to make every attempt to control their horse whenever possible. The Leader does not speak to the rider or to the Sidewalkers and takes their direction from the Instructor.

Why? The riders should be listening to the directions of the Instructor. For this reason, we ask volunteers not to speak unnecessarily to each other or to the riders during the lesson.

What is the “Working Horse Policy”?

Like seeing-eye dogs, we consider our horses to be working from the moment they leave their stalls until they are returned to their stalls after they have completed their lesson(s). This work time includes when the horses are in the cross ties, warming up or waiting for a class to begin. Playing with the horse's faces or snuggling is considered inappropriate during these times.

Why? Invading the horses' "face space" encourages rubbing on people and can promote nipping and other bad behaviors. With so many different volunteers working with the horses, maintaining consistency with their handling is very important.

What is horse body language?

Horses use their bodies to communicate with each other. They use their ears, tails, legs and sometimes their entire bodies to get their point across. They use this body language with us as well so it's important to understand what they are trying to tell us.

Why? Understanding horse body language is essential for safety reasons. An angry or annoyed horse could be giving very clear signals and if ignored someone could get injured. A horse tells you just what its feeling with the position of its ears and the actions of its tail.

What is the correct body position for leading a horse?

The correct body position for the Leader is the area between the horse's throat lash and shoulder.

Why? It is our responsibility to be a partner with the horse, walking along in a relaxed manner beside the horse's neck with our shoulders square allows the horse to do his job as he has been taught.

What does the Leaders body language have to do with leading?

Leaders communicate with the horse by using their body language resulting in effective leading.

Why? Horses are herd animals and want a leader. The body language of a Leader tells the horse that the Leader is in charge of the situation. This requires the Leader's head to be up, looking where they are going with a sense of leadership.

What is the proper way to hold the lead rope?

The lead rope is held in the right hand between 10 -18" from the halter snap. There should be no tension in the lead rope so the horse's head moves freely. The Leader's right hand holds the remaining part of the lead rope, being careful not to coil the lead rope around your hand.

Why? Holding the lead rope in this way provides better control of the horse. A horse needs the freedom to move its head in order to maintain its balance. Having space from the halter snap, without tension in the lead rope, allows the horses head to move freely. Leaders that hang on or continuously pull on the lead rope causes tension in the lead rope. This tension is transferred to the horse. Coiling a lead rope around the hand is dangerous and if a horse pulls back a serious injury could occur. Also, if the lead rope hangs below the knees, it presents a tripping hazard.

What is the horse's "rectangle"?

Picture an imaginary rectangle around the entire body of your horse. All communication from the Leader to the horse happens in this rectangle. The horse must always stay in its rectangle when working.

Why? The horse looks for direction and confirmation from its Leader. The horse cannot be expected to know how to respond if it is not given accurate information through the body language and the voice commands of the Leader. If kept properly in its rectangle, the horse will wait for instruction because it feels confident and secure with its Leader.

What if the horse ventures out of the rectangle?

If the horse comes out of its rectangle, gently return the horse back into the rectangle. Be firm and repeat the action as many times as needed.

Why? If the horse repeatedly comes out of the rectangle he may not believe your body language. Check yourself to make sure you are not giving the wrong information to the horse with your body language. If this doesn't help, half-halts can be applied to better maintain the horse in its rectangle.

What is a half-halt?

The half-halt is a communication method used in riding as well as in ground schooling. The Leader will use the half-halt manner e.g., squeeze/release, squeeze/release. This is repeated until the horse responds, backs off or moves due to the pressure. For the half-halt to be effective, the Leader must use correct body language and be looking forward where they are going with their "heart up" and shoulders straight. Examples of situations that may require a half-halt are: **1)** to prepare for an up or down transition; **2)** to maintain a desired gait/speed; **3)** a correction for inappropriate behavior; **4)** a gentle reminder to pay attention.

Why? The half-halt is an effective tool for the Leader in order to better control the horse during training of the leading method or when a horse needs extra reassurance. Leaders must remember the half-halt is NOT a tug of war, but a pressure and release technique that requires practice.

What is the correct halt position for the Leader?

The correct position for the Leader **at the halt** is either on the left side of the horse in a body position, parallel to the horse at a standstill or turned in front facing the horse at a standstill.

Why? It is the leader's choice to stand in front of the horse or to the side of the horse depending on the horse's response. It is the leader's responsibility to ensure that the horse's stands still when in the "halted position".

What voice commands do we give the horse?

The following are the main voice commands that are used which the horses understand: "**And Walk-On**", "**And T-rot**" and "**And Whoa**".

Why? Using the correct voice commands maintains consistency for the horses. Using the word **and** in front of the voice command prepares the horse for the command.

What is safe horse spacing?

Safe horse spacing is the distance between horses maintained by the Leader throughout the entire lesson. Safe spacing is approximately 2-3 horse lengths from the horse in front or behind you. When lining up or walking side by side, horses should be no closer than 1 horse length apart.

Why? Horses can get fussy when put too close together and could kick out which is very dangerous to the Sidewalkers. Also keeping a safe horse distance allows riders to be able to make circles or change direction without bumping into each other or making turns that are too tight which will unbalance the horse and the rider.

What is the correct way to take a horse around a turn?

In order to correctly take a horse through a turn, the Leader must keep the horse on its intended track while *maintaining the horse's speed*. In order to keep the horse on its track, *turn your shoulders like bicycle handle bars* while going through the turn. Extend your arm in order to keep the horse in its track. Use your body language and leading method technique so you will be able to keep the horse moving at the speed you've dictated through the turn. Refrain from pulling a horse through a turn. It is the job of the Leader to keep the horse at the dictated pace throughout the entire lesson.

Why? Leaders must use their body language, voice commands and half-halts in order to keep the horse moving. Pulling a horse through a turn will only hollow out the horses back and disrupt the therapeutic movement of the horse. A Leader must realize that a horse *should not be turned abruptly*. Always allow the horse to take at least 3-4 steps forward before attempting to make a turn.

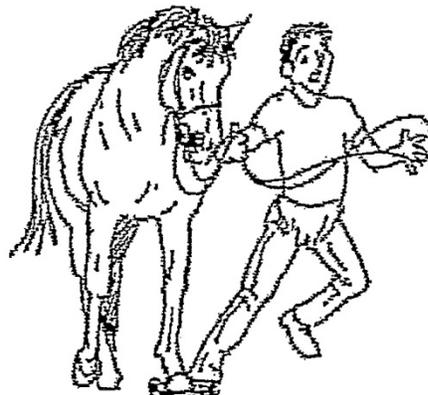
What communication should I have with the Rider or Sidewalkers?

Leaders should not participate in any unnecessary talking with the rider or other volunteers unless there is a situation or an emergency. Leaders are responsible for the horse only and are not to chat with the rider or the Sidewalkers.

Why? Each person in the arena has a specific job and must be allowed to focus entirely on that job. Unnecessary talking will confuse the rider and disrupt the Instructor's lesson.

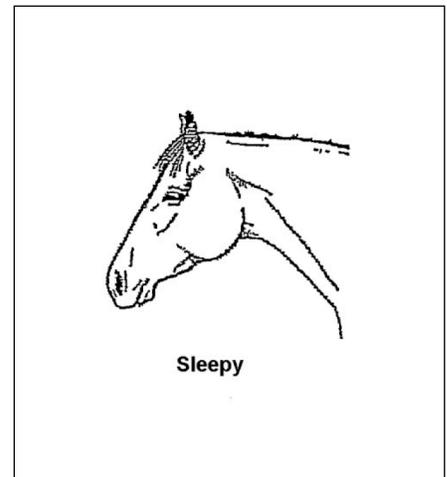
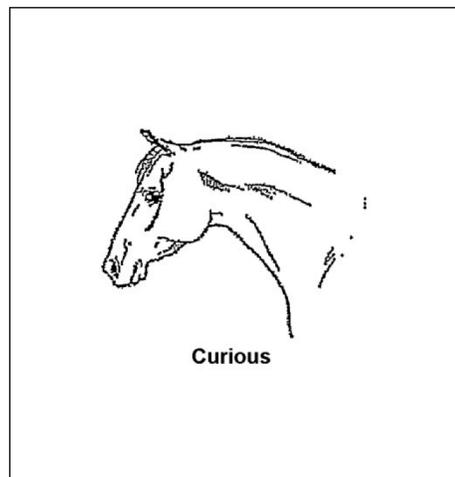
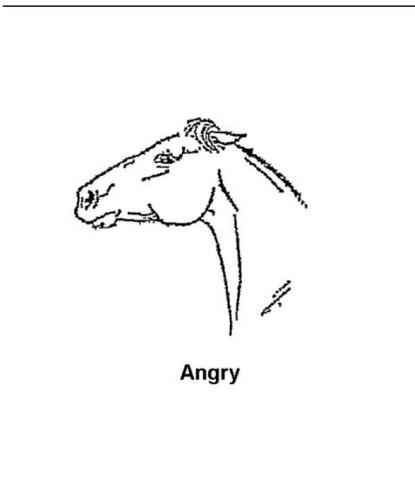
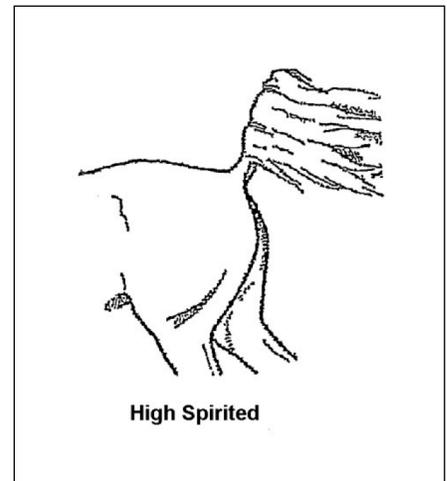
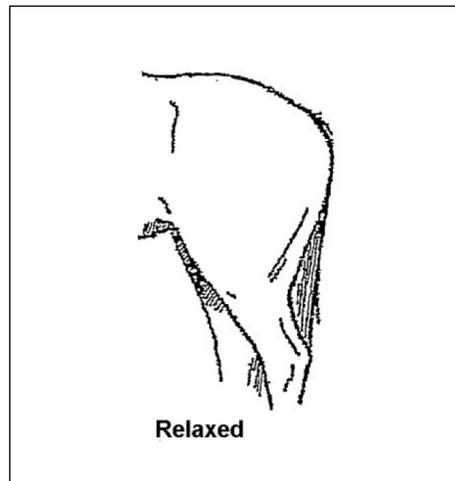
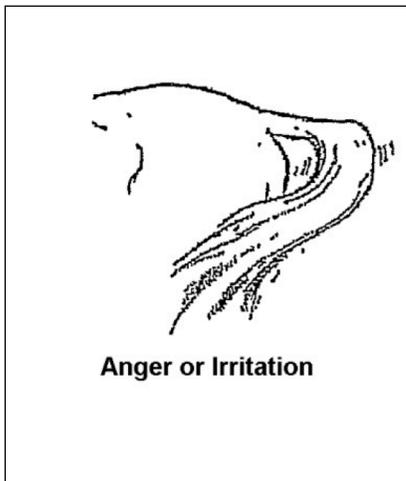
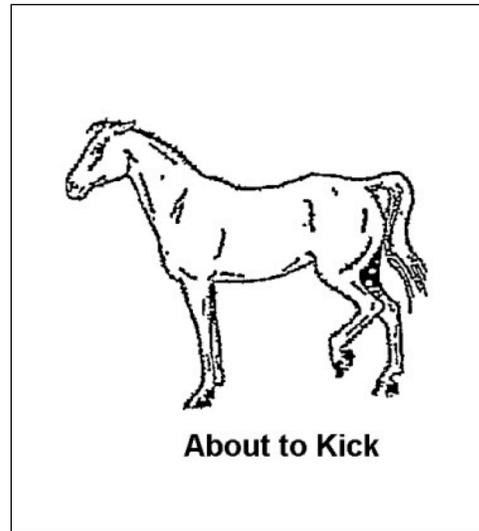
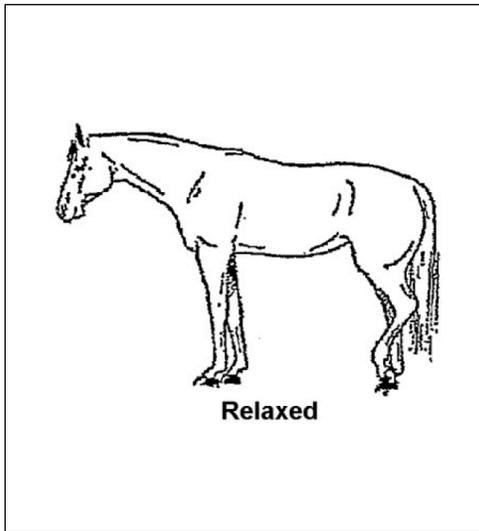
Turning Your Horse

- Extend your arm to keep the horse on track
- Look and walk with intention in the direction you plan to go
- When turning, *push* the horse away from you as opposed to pulling the horse towards you to prevent being stepped on accidentally



Horse Body Language

Spending time around horses, one becomes more adept to reading horse body language. Below are a few examples of the horse body language.



Horse Body Language

Ears

- When the horse's ears are laid flat back, it is usually quite angry and a bite or a kick may soon follow. Always pay close attention to the position of the ears!
- When the ears are pricked forward, the horse is curious or alert.
- When a horse flicks its ears around when being ridden, he is usually very attentive to his rider's wishes.

Eyes

- In a curious or alarmed state the horse's eyes will widen.
- When he is tired or resting, his eyelids will be droopy.
- Squinting denotes pain; it can also happen as a horse readies himself to attack or is setting in to be stubborn.

Head and Neck

- An outstretched neck usually denotes curiosity.
- If on the defensive or on the alert, the horse lifts and arches his neck and head.
- Nodding of the head usually denotes impatience.

Lips and Teeth

- When a horse is extremely relaxed, the lower lip can be droopy.
- When stubborn, the lips are tightly drawn.
- An alert horse will have some tension in his lips.
- A horse with barred teeth means business and will likely attack and bite.

Hooves and Legs

- As a threat, a warning to kick would be lifting the hoof off the ground and pinning the ears. ***However, merely lifting the hind hoof off the ground when the horse looks otherwise relaxed does not indicate a threat;*** horses often rest a foot while standing on their other feet.
- When a horse paws at the ground, it is most often a sign of impatience.

Tail

- When firmly clamped down, the horse is settling in to be stubborn or may be extremely annoyed.
- When swinging side to side in a relaxed way, the horse is calm and happy.
- When carried up and somewhat away from his body, the horse is alert and/or curious.
- When held straight up, the horse is usually high spirited and/or showing off.
- Tail swishing can mean either flies are bothersome or he may be slightly annoyed at another horse or at a person nearby.
- When the tail lashes violently at his sides, he is usually very angry or in a state of extreme distress.