

The Directional Lesson

In the previous lessons we discussed techniques that can be used to correct disrespect or bad behavior. Round Penning and Bridle Work are effective means to get your horse to perform as you desire. The “Directional Lesson” is another tool we can use to gain control over our horses. In the Directional Lesson exercise we are asking the horse to move in a specific direction (basically forward, backward, to the right and to the left). The idea is to control the horse’s directional movement.

Begin by asking your horse to move around you in a circle on a lead line or lunge line to the left. The distance that your horse should be from you depends on your horse; it is important to be safe. The exercise is best performed if you are within 6-8 feet from your horse as this will give you the most control. Stand at your horse’s shoulder at a $\frac{3}{4}$ degree angle facing your horse. (fig 1) You will drive your horse forward at a slow trot by looking at the horse’s hip and taking the end of the lead line and making a gesture with it towards the hip. (fig 1 & 2) You may need to bump your horse’s hip with the end of the line and you may want to give a verbal cue by kissing or clucking. It is important that you are consistent with your cues. Your horse may want to bump into you or invade your “bubble”. If he does this step towards your horse, not away, look at his hip and make the gesture with the end of the line towards his hip. Be careful as you are sending your horse around you to not step backwards as this could translate to the horse that he is “chasing” you around which in horse behavior would be an aggressive movement in the pasture situation.



(figure 1)



(figure 2)

When your horse circles around you two to four revolutions ask him to stop by applying as much pressure on the line as is necessary to stop him and give the voice command “whoa”. If he doesn’t stop continue to apply pressure on the line, repeat “whoa” with added authority, and step towards his muzzle to create a perceived “barrier” to forward movement. When he stops, reward him, allow him to rest for a moment, and then drive him on again in the same direction. Repeat the circle-stop sequence until your horse is doing so with light control. Once he understands the exercise to the left, circle him to the right using the same technique. (fig 3 & 4)



(figure 3)



(figure 4)

Once you horse is performing the circle-stop exercise with consistency, you will ask him to bend his neck toward the inside of the circle and to stop and look at you when you stop him. This accomplishes two

things- first, he is in position to change direction when he is bending towards the inside of the circle, and two, he is focused on you instead of what is going on in his environment. To get your horse to bend towards the inside of the circle begin by continuing to apply lateral pressure with the line after you whoa him. When he bends his neck towards the inside of the circle it is important to release as his reward. Repeat the circle-stop exercise asking for more bend each time at the whoa, by applying pressure, until he looks at you with both eyes with little or no contact. What you do in one direction you do in the other.



Back



Forward Fig. 6

When changing directions you want to stop the shoulders from moving in the direction they are going with a step towards the front of the shoulders and use your lead rope to tap the horse on the shoulder to drive them in the other direction. When changing you don't want the horse to come at you but rather have them rock back onto their haunches, not into a back up, but to have them put their weight on the hind end. This will allow them to move their front end around without stepping into you. (Fig 3) Once your horse understands this you can ask for the turns more often. The back up is also important. You should be able to just step towards the horse to send them back but if they don't move backwards then you will need to stand next to them and apply backward pressure until the horse understands. Once the horse understands the back up you should just be able to step towards them and have them move backwards. (Back Fig. 5)

In the forward directional cue your body is positioned just off the shoulder and ahead a little bit. By putting a constant pressure on the line you are telling him to come forward- towards the pressure. Once he takes a step forward reward with a release of pressure. Build on this until you have him taking several steps forward. Point at the hip as a body language cue at the same time. Eventually all you will need to do is point and your horse will move toward you. (Forward Fig 6)

The final product goes like this: Send the horse to the right, send the horse to the left, send the horse back, have the horse come to you. When done properly it almost looks like a dance. This will really help in teaching your horse better manners but also where you are and to pay attention to you. This is just one more way to have better control of your horse.

In our next article we will continue with ground and foundational training by learning the proper "Sacking Out" and "Calm Down Cue" techniques. Continue to re-enforce the Round Penning and Bridle Work techniques, along with this new technique, the Directional Lesson. Once you have your horse performing these techniques consistently you will be ready to move on with your horse's training. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me at www.christapetrillotraining.com, info@christapetrillotraining.com or at 707-688-4358.