

How Do I Get My Horse's Attention?

by Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

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A "give" is three things: recognition, response and control. First, a horse has to recognize the signal from the trainer, which is pretty simple. It could be anything: it could be picking up the rein, it could be putting your leg on the horse. That's your signal, your "cue." He first has to recognize that. Second he has to respond to it – and third, he has to give control of that part of his body over to you.

Horse trainer or not, I could walk by my horse all day and he doesn't have to even recognize that I'm here – and it would be a waste of my time to ask him to do anything. But if I took a stick and started poking him, then all of a sudden it becomes a whole lot more important to the horse that "I'm here." When you ask a horse to do something, a lot of other things are going to draw his attention and it's important that you become more important, no matter what it takes. As the trainer, the horse has to fully recognize that you're there. That's important, otherwise, you can't get to the next step: You can't get him to respond in a certain way.

You've all heard that you want to get your horse's attention first. That's nonsense. We don't care about the horse's attention; we really don't. When I ride, I don't expect the horse to think about me before he does something. Have you ever been on the trail with your horse when he did everything you wanted him to do? What were you doing? You were looking around, talking to people, enjoying the ride. Did you care for even one moment what your horse was thinking? No, you didn't, because he was doing exactly what you were asking him to do. You didn't care what he was thinking because there he was, walking down the trail, turning right when you asked him to turn right, stopping when you asked him to stop. You didn't care at all what he was thinking. You care when the horse either does – or does not – stop when you ask him to stop or turn when you ask him to turn. Getting his attention is a bi-product of training, of improving his performance. The better your horse stops or turns when you ride out on the trail, for instance, the more of his attention you get and the more control you have.



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When you first go out to ride, you're not going to have your horse's attention. Your horse is going to be looking at all the other horses and looking around the arena or objects on the trail. You're not going to have any "attention" whatsoever. We don't need his attention; all we ask is his performance. We need him to turn right when we ask him to turn right and to turn left when we ask him to turn left. As you ride, concentrate on making those turns better because as the turns get better you'll get more "attention."

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Teaching Your Horse To Stand Still

by Josh Lyons & John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

If you simply want your horse to stand still, and you keep picking up the reins to try and stop him – then the only thing that happens is that the horse gets aggravated. There's no possible way to make your horse stand still if he does not want to stand still. What if you tie him up? Can he still move? Of course he can. How about if you put him in a small two-horse trailer? There's no way the horse can move then, right? Wrong, guaranteed he can still move. What about cross-ties? Can he move around when he's cross-tied? Yes, he can. There is no way for you or I to physically to make this horse stand still. On the plus side, training is a lot easier with a horse that wants to move.

Training is all about control. Learning how to get control or gain control of your horse. So, let's say I want the horse to stand still but he starts moving. I've lost control, haven't I? How can I regain control if we know I can't make him stand still? Answer: Ask him to do something, even if it's just change directions or even to speed up.

If the horse is going at two miles an hour and I speed him up to four, then the movement has suddenly become my idea, hasn't it? He wants to think about everything else, and the longer I let him think about other things, the more he's going to do just that. So what I'm going to do is work my horse. I'm going to practice changing directions or changing leg speed. I'll say "Hey, give me your nose and change directions." The more adamant he gets about going his direction, the more adamant I'm going to get about going my direction. I'll drive him forward, work his neck and start to move faster.

Remember, we couldn't get the horse to stand still, but in about ten minutes you can have a horse that wants to stand still. In your training, work on being still by telling him to go. Say to your horse: "If you want to work on go, then let's go. Let's work on forward. Let's work on softening your neck, changing directions and following your nose."

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