

Preparatory Commands

Learn to prepare your horse before asking a command.

Have you ever driven with a navigator, when suddenly they look up and shout, “turn left!” How do you react? A typical response is to panic, over-react and lose trust in the navigator’s ability to get you where you’re going.

Now, how often do we treat our horses the same way? Without warning, we say, “Go! Stop! Move!” What if we gave our horse a little “advance notice” before we ask him to do something? This is exactly what a drill sergeant in the Army does whenever he says, “Company!” That means, “Pay attention!”

Try this: For ten minutes, be fully aware of everything you do with your horse and stop for two seconds before you do it. Bring up your “life,” which means engage your energy, your intent and put a vision of what you want in your mind’s eye, be sure you have your horse’s attention, and only then ask him to do what you want. Make this a habit on the ground and it will spill over into your riding.

The thought process alone will actually cause proprioceptive changes in your muscles, serving as a preparatory command that your horse will sense. So before you ask your horse to move a hoof, practice this technique. Bring up your life, focus on your intent, make sure you have his attention and then make the request.