

## Calm, Quiet, Relaxation = Leadership and Balance

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Did you ever notice that when your horse is in the field, he spends a tremendous amount of time standing still, with head low? This is the resting position. When he's not grazing, he's resting. He's relaxed. I've heard over and over again from many different sources that horses are inherently lazy. I suppose that for a human, "doing nothing" does seem lazy. In the natural horse world, doing nothing is crucial to overall physical health and well-being. One must be fit to run fast at a moment's notice. Standing quietly is a horse's favorite position, outside of the grazing position, I suppose.

So then, why is it so difficult to get our horses to stand still on the lead line, under saddle, for baths, for fly spray, for mounting, for tying, for .....? Almost everything we do with our horse requires that they stand still. And yet, it seems we spend very little time telling them to be still and relaxed when with us.

Establishing leadership and partnership with your horse can be achieved in short order by showing your horse the "comfort" position. There are only two things in Equus that determine leadership – establishing space and directing movement. The space is determined by you when you tell your horse where to stand. The term "directing movement" includes NOT moving feet or grazing. The lead horse in the field doesn't just tell everyone where to go, he/she also says when to relax!

The standing still exercise is crucial for you and your horse. Those of you who watch me work know already that I spend at least the first ten minutes with a new horse simply standing still. I'm establishing leadership. If a horse moves a foot, I put him back a foot. If he puts a nose in my space, I push his nose out of my space. When the horse stands quietly and drops his head, I've already attained the majority of his respect. This is also a training exercise for us humans. We're very busy. We have agendas and tasks to accomplish. We have a habit of doing things *to* our horse, without seeking cooperation. If, though, we ask the horse to assume their favorite position, they will be less anxious and become accepting and engaged.

Learning to provide your horse with relaxation is not only a key for leadership, but is also the foundation for harmony in riding. A relaxed horse is a willing partner. A relaxed horse under saddle is engaged and physically balanced.

Oh – and by the way, please don't forget that tying your horse only limits how far they can move, and unless your horse already is willing to stand still quietly, ties will only promote more anxiety. You cannot force them to stand quietly. This exercise is one of leadership, and absolutely cannot be attained through forcing the stand. You must prove yourself worthy of their respect.

