

# He talks to animals

He talks to animals and they listen. They hear the master's voice. Successful horse trainers do a lot of talking, become the horse's friend, and mentor. Through these monologue-type conversations, the horse gains confidence in his two-legged comrade and gathers knowledge of his routine. A horse has a natural fear of many things; his trainer should not be one of them. Soothing reassurances from a familiar voice tend to quiet nervous horses.

As the horse's knowledge increases, his curiosity is aroused and satisfied, he learns to accept and enjoy a life of service in harness or under saddle. He becomes accustomed to movements, actions, moods, personality, smell, voice, and feel of his trainer and has as much association with man as with his own kind for much of his life.

On our place, we had two kinds of horses - workhorses (harness) and saddle horses. We trained western cow horses to respond to command signals from reins, knee pressure, and positioning in the saddle. The rider's voice, therefore, benefitted rider more than horse when lonely cowpunchers had no one else with whom to converse. Real cowboys regarded anyone who shouted voice commands to his mount with scorn. "Get 'em up, Scout," and "Whoa, big fella," happened only on radio shows before the days of TV.

On the other hand, voice commands are bountifully important in handling horses under harness. Voice commands to horses are short, easily distinguishable, and loud enough for clarity. One-word commands commonly used are:

Whoa	=	Stop
Easy	=	Slow down
Back	=	Back up
Gee	=	Turn right
Haw	=	Turn left

Drivers give the signal to start in various ways:



## Center Stage

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voice (get up, giddyup, hyah, etc.)  
clucking with the tongue  
kissing sounds from pursed lips,  
or flicking the lines.

To encourage more speed, a driver might say something like, "Step lively, boys".

In early training, use of the lines (reins aka ribbons) accompanied voice commands and, in fact, drivers seldom drove their teams without use of lines. Celebrated stage drivers and muleskinners of old often used a more or less continuous diatribe when performing their duties with animals. They used these usually unclean discourses, however, more for benefit of showing off their talents to other persons than for imparting commands to their charges.

Teams used for the same task day after day become particularly valuable and executed their chores suitably with a minimum of spoken, or unspoken, orders. Those used for skidding logs or feeding livestock, learn to maneuver their loads through the woods or across feed grounds while their handlers' hook and unhook log chains or pitch hay. These horses know what to do and seem to take pride in pleasing their owner.

Teams pulling delivery wagons, such as milk wagons, learn the route, stop at homes of customers, and move on again without needing instruction. They and their drivers

work as a unit. Good horses kindly handled are a joy to watch.

Country etiquette requires that he in charge of a team should be the one in charge. Lookers-on or passengers should respect his ability and authority. Breach of this protocol can have undesirable results.

One afternoon my father, grandfather, and older brother hitched Buster and Beauty to a low-wheeled wagon and drove to a wooded pasture to gather a load of dead aspen trees for firewood.

The wagon accommodated a load four feet high or better because its low rack had stakes on the sides.

They headed for home with a full load. My father drove standing on top of the poles while my brother and granddad sat with their legs dangling over the side. Suddenly grandfather saw one of the front wheels about to drop into a hole. He shouted, "Whoa."

The horses, always on the alert, heard the familiar command and obeyed. My father, who could not hear, not expecting a sudden stop, lost his balance. Still hanging on to the lines, he jumped to the side to avoid falling on, or between, the horses. He landed on uneven ground, stumbled forward, and fell across a pine snag.

The result — a rib broken in two places, meant hospital time and convalescence with taped ribs. Nobody blamed the team, but grandfather...

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*"Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community.*

*It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age."*