



the

# Espejo

## project

### Let's Be Clear

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Photos by Brad Turk

**C**larity is of paramount importance when teaching. What did you mean when you said what I thought you said? What response did you desire from me? Likewise, horses crave clarity from their handlers. I ask my human students, "What response do you want from your horse *every time* you put pressure on the bit (or halter, or bosal)?" The question is intended to be thought provoking. We want a lot of "different" things when we put pressure on the bit: slow down, stop, change direction, collect. But what a muddle that is for the horse to sort out. The response has to be something that is a foundation for all that we will ever need from our horse. It must also be at the heart of getting the horse's attention and calming him down. Every time I put pressure on the bit I want the horse to yield to the bit and ask me "what do you want me to do with my inside hind?"

Yield. Whoo boy, that's a complex concept right there. Dr. Deb Bennett has produced excellent work on just exactly what is involved physically when a horse yields. It is very important knowledge for any rider, and I highly recommend her work. Ray Hunt would say that whatever we ask of our horses the end result should be "it shouldn't weigh anything." He would also say "it's a feel following a feel." For me when the horse is yielding to the bit, it feels like he is hovering above the bit. He has yielded at the poll, is quiet in the mouth, and has lifted the root of the neck. Most importantly, when I get a complete yield, the horse has yielded to me mentally as well. None of this can occur, either mentally or physically, when it has been forced.

The inside hind is such an important player in the true, complete yield. For the purposes of our discussion, the inside hind is on the same side as the active rein. When the horse

is bracing against the bit, that brace is being anchored to the ground by the inside hind. If the rider can time their request to coincide with the horse picking up the inside hind, then the rider is setting the horse up to succeed rather than fail. When I begin this work, I request and reward the horse crossing the inside hind in front of the outside hind. This is a submissive move for the horse since he is temporarily disengaging his full power at the moment of the crossover.

If the horse always yields, and gives me the say over his inside hind — I have everything. I can slow him by requesting a shortening of the stride, stop by stopping the hind entirely, turn him by stepping the hind up under his belly, collect by keeping the stride length the same and asking for more yield from the bit. I also have the horse's attention and the dialogue necessary to de-escalate charged situations. A gift of the true and complete yield is attention, and therefore relaxation and obedience — but I must be clear in communicating my request in an unambiguous and consistent fashion.

For the accompanying video outlining this technique, in addition to previous videos in Leslie's Espejo series, go to [www.arabianhorseworld.com](http://www.arabianhorseworld.com)





**(1)** Evora Cita (\*Emanor x \*Vienna MBF) This is Espejo's dam carrying herself in what I would consider to be the ideal carriage. She is yielding at the poll, the root of her neck is lifted (note the arc on the underside of her neck) and she is striding up underneath herself. Her self carriage is the model that I use in my work with horses. I cannot improve on Evora's carriage when it is her idea. My goal is to make clear to the horse that this is what is desired. After all, the capable horse can "put" herself together ever so much better than anything I could ever "create." My job is to set it up and get out of the way. **(2)** This photo was taken in the first session where I was asking Espejo to yield in hand (see video blog "Drifting The Hindquarters"). With my "rein" hand I am asking him to yield at the poll, with the tail of the lead rope I am asking him to continue to move forward. This is clearly a complicated request for a horse to decipher and he does not yet understand what I am asking for. Espejo is pushing against my rein hand by locking his poll joint, pushing with the root of his neck and his inside hind. **(3)** In a subsequent session, several weeks later, Espejo is yielding to my "rein" hand by flexing at the poll and lifting the root of his neck. He is also crossing his inside hind in front of his outside hind by responding to the pressure given by the tail of the lead rope. That pressure of the tail of the rope is directed to his barrel where my leg will be when I start riding him. The timing of my "leg" is as he is picking his inside hind up off the ground. If my timing is off, then I'm asking him to move a foot that is bearing all of his weight. That makes no sense to him, and to the rider it feels heavy and the horse is often accused of being resistant. I have the complete mental and physical yield here; note that his inside ear is on me, which is where his attention is, and he is in a very relaxed state of mind. Because he understands exactly what I want from him, I have not had to take all of the slack out of the rope in order to get a response from him. Likewise, the tail of the rope did not make contact with his side. This is a "feel following a feel." **(4)** Yielding in the same fashion at the trot. Even though it has been several weeks since I last worked Espejo on drifting the hindquarters, he is completely with the program. I keep a session like this very short, and never drill. I won't repeat this with him unless a very specific situation comes up where it would be helpful. **(5)** Espejo is very mildly dropping his outside shoulder. While difficult to discern, note that he is slightly over-bent. When the horse is not traveling functionally straight, and therefore is carrying more weight on one shoulder, he cannot lift the root of the neck and yield. I am preparing to step Espejo's inside fore "in" on the circle by taking the slack out of the "rein" and asking him to move the inside fore as he is picking it up off the ground. **(6)** Espejo is following my hand with his inside fore. **(7)** As Espejo steps his left fore to his left, this movement "picks up" his right shoulder. By applying pressure in this fashion every time he "falls out," I'm making it his idea to carry himself straight.