

chapter seven

What your stock can and should do well

Well-handled cattle on the range will...

- Stay together as a herd
- Stay wherever you place them for at least a day or more; leave the herd, drink, and then return
- Drive well as a herd with a little training
- Drive mothered up if you have pairs
- Trail up and down steep hills readily
- Cross bridges, creeks, and rivers

By using the right techniques, calm cattle will also move, speed up, slow down, stop and turn predictably .

Stock should have a measure of calmness before asking them to do something and remain calm after working them. Good riders work towards calmness and check for it constantly. If they aren't calm, the handler should immediately take steps to obtain it before continuing the job.

Using proper techniques, apply pressure by moving just within the pressure zone. Release pressure immediately after the cattle do what you ask, either by them moving away or you easing off. This is their reward. They learn only from the quiet moment of time after the release of pressure that what they just did profits them or not. Which it is depends on when you release pressure **and** wait.



Well handled, well settled cattle.
Handled by Tim Westfall of Wells, NV.

What your stock can and should do well

Quit forcing stock, hollering and yelling around them. Walk or ride in straight lines. Always watch them and set it up right. Quietly persist and let them do it.

You must adopt this method fully or the stock won't give you full control, and you'll be stressing them. You must believe in this method and have confidence that it works from day one.

Remember that cattle want to see what is pressuring them, go in the direction they are facing, and follow good movement. They want to be in a herd.

Laying the right foundation

A good horse for stock work must be supple and light. It must perform solid stops, have highly controllable gaits and be able to back up, side pass, and half pass well, walk and trot straight, and turn very well. All this must be done calmly and precisely.

This doesn't happen unless the trainer builds a solid foundation step by step.

Although getting a herd working well for you is easier than training a stock horse, few people invest much time in gaining knowledge about cattle or building a foundation in their herds.

Yet it takes far less time to get 1,500 pairs working great than it does to get the average colt to work well. Of course, this depends on your level of knowledge and experience, but **nobody** produces a great stock horse from scratch in 30 days. You can have a remarkably calm and responsive herd in a far shorter time than that, even with an average skill level. Your attitude, belief, and dedication must be good, however, or your herd will never be very good.

Before cattle will stay where you put them, drive well, etc, they must first be calm and responsive to basic techniques. Working well for you means

they will do the steps, the foundation of the things that you will require of them on the range.

Before you go out on the range, you need to check your herd to see if it is calm and responsive to these simple steps. Every herd is unique and will react differently in changing situations.

Placing cattle successfully is usually a good test that you have worked them right on the way there. If you skip a step or two, do things that bother them, or if they are still single-minded, they probably won't stay. Not long, anyway.

The steps: What stock need to do well before taking them out on range

Because cattle want to see what's pressuring them, there are techniques that are naturally easier or harder for them to respond to calmly in the beginning.

Techniques that are applied at a sharper angle into their sides (meaning you approach from more towards their rump) make it more difficult for them to see you as you pressure and as they move away. It's harder for cattle to move calmly.

Cattle **should** naturally respond to more advanced (difficult for them to do) techniques and move calmly once they are taking basic pressure calmly. I like to make sure they are calm enough, rather than assume it, by checking them to see if they are good at all the techniques I will use.

Cattle may also have trouble with a particular technique or movement such as going up the sides because of past bad experiences or for reasons you may not know.

If a herd has a solid foundation, is responsive and calm to all techniques and then has trouble going up or down a steep hill, across a bridge or river, all that's required is for you to position yourself properly to help the cattle do it and quietly persist.

What your stock can and should do well

The point of all this pressuring or working stock is to change the mindset of the animals through experiences, step-by-step, so you can be sure they will be responsive to all handling techniques.

One exception is that stock need to be trained to drive well. They need to experience that going straight, going at a comfortable walk, and staying together in a herd is profitable so you can drive them effectively.

To ensure you have a solid foundation in the herd, you want all of your stock to do the following things calmly, consistently, and in about this order:

- Let you close enough to work them efficiently (half-mile flight zones are annoying).
- Move straight ahead at a comfortable walk when you direct pressure into their sides and keep going 20-30 yards.
- Slow down when you go up the sides with the direction of movement and stop when you go all the way past them.
- Speed up when you go by them against the direction of movement.
- Turn left or right when you pressure hips or the neck; when in a herd, turn when you go wide to the side from a position from the back.
- Be very comfortable going by you or other people. (I like every animal to be okay with me a maximum of three or four feet away from them, even in corrals or going through gates.)
- Drive well as a herd.

- Turn when one side is pressured to go faster than the other from a position from the rear.
- Go through gates, sort back at the gate and load into trailers well.
- Sort away from the herd readily with only quiet persistent pressure.
- Follow a horse and rider when they are driven toward them.
- Comfortable with being worked horseback or on foot.
- Move calmly away from herding dogs (if you work with them.)

I work my herds until they are consistently calm and responsive at doing each of these things, or until I'm sure they will do them. I test it further by asking them to do more difficult things well such as moving up and down steep hills and across water. They should also do these things when potential distractions are going on such as other people around, noise, etc.

Get straight movement first

You need to get movement in your stock so they can experience calmness about being handled (moving for you).

Start with moving straight ahead, which is easiest for most cattle. Don't try to turn an animal so it goes where you want. Just pressure so it can go straight, however it's facing.

When you have consistent straight-ahead movement, ask for good movement, which is a comfortable walk for that animal and one that will attract others to follow it.

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Then ask them to keep going straight at a comfortable walk for as far as you desire. You will gain control over direction later. Stock need to be worked to be sure they will go, slow, stop, speed up, or turn. Always get calm, consistent results with each step of the training before going on to the next.

If you're having trouble getting the desired response from some animals, always go back to a place in training where you **can** get calm movement of some sort and build from there.

If you can pressure one animal from the side and it goes straight away with good movement, then fine. If you try another and it spins away or takes off when you get even 100 yards from it, then you must go back to the beginning training steps. You might reward (back away from) the animal just for not spinning off and running or for just moving its head in line with its body (a first step in moving ahead). When it's okay with that, go to the next step.

The idea of all this is to get the stock comfortable or unafraid of being handled and gain some practice and skill in handling them.

When animals consistently give you a "yes" answer in every step of handling, training is much more positive for them. Trust will build quickly.

When you take a step-by-step approach and end the lesson on a positive note, you can leave the animals during any part of the training and come back later to pick up just about where you left off.

Experience with handling helps get the right approach more quickly, but there are some approaches to keep in mind until this experience is gained.

The most basic level to start training might be required with cattle that run wildly at long distances from us or have decided to fight us. They

have been pushed or stressed to the point where they feel all avenues are lost except to fight or flee.

The starting point with these animals is to show them you aren't aggressive and won't do the things that bother them. You need to approach un-aggressively, ask for the simplest thing they can do, then release pressure and relax for a time.

Steps in loading

The task of getting a cow into a trailer calmly breaks down to these steps:

Since sorting and loading is a more advanced thing for the cow to do than just going straight ahead in a field or through a gate, handle the cow so it is good in the field or corral first.

Do this by practicing and asking her to move ahead a number of times, speed up, slow down, and turn until all responses are comfortable and automatic. You can do this on the range while taking the animal to the trailer.

Pressure to get this animal into a trailer now isn't force, because now it will want to move ahead straight with good movement when you pressure it to.

If it doesn't go willingly into the trailer, it means you haven't taught the animal well or practiced enough so it is sure of how to relieve pressure. So take it around again and practice applying and releasing pressure for it to go, turn, and speed up until she is convinced she can respond calmly and naturally and nothing scary happens.

Continue working with the cow to get it better and better at responding until it is so comfortable with you that the trailer is no big added pressure. Inside the trailer becomes the place to be, because outside of it means you keep asking it to do something.