

## **Balance and headwork**

Sometimes the most profound things are the simplest.

Provided you now subscribe to the logic that the long neck of the camelid provides an amazing amount of leverage at the head, try the following the next time you halter your alpaca and see if it doesn't make a difference.

Herd a few alpacas into a small container (9 x 9 or 10 x 10 feet is perfect). Decide which animal you are going to work with and approach this animal from behind the eye. Make contact with him on the midline of the neck with the hand closest to the alpaca and immediately bring your other hand up under the chin.



Concentrate on keeping the alpaca's weight evenly distributed over both front feet. Look at those feet and use the neck to redistribute the weight if necessary. This keeps your alpaca in balance and demonstrates to him that you are using the leverage you have to help him keep his balance and keep him safe.

Compare the two photos, in the photo on the right the handler has taken the alpaca out of balance using the neck, in the photo on the left the alpaca is standing in balance.)



Slide the hand under the jaw closer to the front of the mouth. Remember to breathe! Take a deep breath each time you move your hand closer to the front of the mouth. If the alpaca moves his head around, relax your arms and concentrate on using the head and neck to bring the animal back into balance. When the alpaca regains his balance relax your arms and just support the head very lightly with your fingers. This will not work if your alpaca feels like he is in the ring with Conan the Barbarian. Next, try sliding your index finger in between the front lips and just press on the upper gum plate (where the teeth would be in they had upper teeth). Relax and breathe.



The mouth work may seem a bit odd but I have seen over and over one session of mouth work change an alpaca's attitude about handling profoundly. If you find yourself wrestling don't proceed. Take it slowly; work with easier more trusting animals at first. Remember this is about your handling skill. It doesn't make sense to try to learn a new technique on a very difficult animal. To use a skiing metaphor, pick an alpaca that would be the animal equivalent of a bunny slope!

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