

## Physics Not Force

Handling and Training...Physics not Force  
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When I laid eyes on my first llama in 1981, I was a fiber artist looking for a new wool animal. Alpacas would have been a good match for me but back then alpacas were only a gleam in the eye of livestock importers. Even llamas were still really new and there was precious little available about how to handle them. The day my llamas were delivered my camelid coach puffed himself up and gave me the facts of life with llamas, “Well little missy, llamas don’t like to be touched on the head. These animals will never get close to you.

When you want to catch ‘em, wave your arms around and haze them into a corner, cut em off don’t let ‘em run by you, show ‘em who’s boss and grab them around the neck. Tie ‘em up low and tight when you need to do anything. You wanna trim their toenails? If you should get their foot in your hand, don’t to let go no matter what! “ That is the way you handle a camelid and that is that. I handled my llamas this way more or less successfully (a few wild trips around the pasture hanging on for dear life and a few unceremonious landings in the dung pile) for about five years until I happened to meet a remarkable horse trainer... Linda Tellington –Jones (inventor of TTEAM and the TTouch).

I originally attended one of Linda’s TTEAM clinics to learn how to train my huge and intimidating thoroughbred stallion... that I did not— thank you very much—chase into a corner and grab around the neck! The llamas were only a ruse to get Linda to visit my farm. Back then llamas were very unusual and worthy of a private visit from a world renowned horse trainer - my mere horse would never have helped me pull that off! Ironically, I didn’t really expect much from Linda’s work with my llamas she was a horse trainer and I already knew all there was to know about llamas or so I thought.

Linda did some very simple things with my llamas... massaged their heads and mouths and wait...they liked it! My wildest llama closed his eyes and almost went to sleep as Linda gently worked with his lips and gums. “No this can’t be true” I gasped, “these animals hate to be touched on the head and you certainly can’t touch their mouths!”

What dawned on me that day was that I was the one limiting my relationship with my animals. Sure, I was disappointed that my llamas shied away from me and wouldn’t let me touch them unless I had them cornered but I was told and believed that, llamas were just that way. Linda helped me to see MY behavior from my animal’s point of view. Of course my llamas didn’t come up to me, I was forever cornering them and grabbing them. Any sane llama would steer clear of my arms. I began to see that llama behavior was a reflection of the way I behaved instead of a fact of nature. I began my studies with Linda Tellington-Jones that day and my life was forever changed. I attached myself to Linda for the next ten years eventually becoming a TTEAM practitioner and instructor.

When it comes to understanding your alpaca's behavior and how you impact it, you must understand and distinguish between handling and training. As someone whose full time occupation is teaching people how to work with llamas and alpacas I find it is really important to distinguish between the spirit of these two words. From the animal's point of view they are the same thing but from our point of view it is useful to think of them separately.

Training an animal is when you teach him to respond to a signal or a cue. It requires repetition and consistency. Handling is when you accomplish a task with an animal that does not require the animal to actively participate. Examples of training would be: teaching an animal to respond to signals on a lead, obey verbal cues when off lead or pick a foot up in response to a specific signal. In each of these instances the animal must understand the signal or cue and actually do something. Handling requires skill on your part and the acceptance but not the participation of the animal. You are handling when you give injections, administer oral wormer, shear, herd or groom. In fact you are handling when you put a halter on an animal. In fact even haltering is much more about your skill as a handler than it is about training... the animal does not need to actively participate.

In order to become a good handler you must focus on your own competence. You must practice with intent. The attitude of "let's just get it over with" can get you into real trouble. Handle animals badly and you will train them to do bad things... they will learn to wrestle, evade and challenge you. Handle your alpacas well and most of your training job is accomplished at the same time.

Young alpacas figure out pretty quickly that humans are very important and have capabilities that they do not. We enter their world as a very powerful presence. Most of the time we do good stuff. We clean up the poop and give out food and water. Until you demonstrate otherwise your alpacas will assume that you are the "Great & Powerful Oz"...until you inadvertently let them peek behind the curtain.

When I work with or handle an animal I want to create the impression that I am the Goddess. The all-powerful but understanding being that takes care of everything. I want to use techniques and tools that help to preserve that impression. I refuse to chase or try to outrun an alpaca, and I refuse to wrestle or otherwise try to physically best them. The great and powerful Goddess would never deign to engage in those types of activities. The real truth is that I won't resort to those tactics because I am inferior in these ways. My animal students, however, don't need to know the reality of my limitations. What do you think your alpacas say to themselves when you try to out run them? The word pathetic jumps to my mind. Don't go there.

I get many calls and emails from people with the same sad story. They tell me, "My alpaca was so easy and so cooperative until he turned two years old." It is true that adolescent animals behave like adolescents, however this period of time also coincides with the attainment of new physical prowess. If you have been "having your way" with your young alpacas simply because you could make them do your bidding physically,

don't be surprised if they change their minds when they get big enough to beat you at your own game.

In my training clinics and writing I focus primarily on handling (i.e. teaching you, the human) for three very important reasons.

1. Being a good handler makes you a better trainer.
2. In the case of alpacas you are more than likely outnumbered by your animals. It is more sensible and attainable to teach yourself handling skills rather than training each animal individually.
3. There is very little we actually want our alpacas to do. Essentially, we want our alpacas to do one of two things: stand still or move. We want them to stand quietly while we do the things that need doing, and we want them to walk politely on a lead going where we go. None of this requires self-directed or self-motivated behavior on the part of the animal.

In the beginning of this article I said it is important to understand the difference between handling and training. Now that you do, let me explain why it is so crucial to differentiate between the two.

Practice makes \_\_\_\_\_?

How would you complete this phrase? I would be willing to bet that the first thing that popped into your mind is "Practice makes perfect." Many traditional animal training philosophies begin with the premise that animals are creatures of instinct and learn only by repetition. Your animal must have practice. You are instructed to repeat a lesson over and over consistently until your animal student "gets" it. In this way you will eventually condition the animal, and he will behave correctly.

Let us apply this logic to the task of haltering. Remember as you read this haltering is a handling issue!

You trap your alpaca in the corner and hold him around the neck. The animal throws his weight into your arm so you brace yourself and hold on. Next he throws his head around wildly, sticks his head as far away and high in the air as possible or dives low and leaps up very suddenly, catching you in the chin. You have been told that you must not let the alpaca win. Show him who is boss and finish what you start!

So you keep chasing that elusive head around until you snare the nose and clip the quick release buckle before your animal student can break away. Since you didn't have time to check it, the halter may or may not be comfortable or even safe. The process took five minutes. You got whacked in the chin; you are madder than a hornet; but you'd better take that halter off and put it on again three more times. After all consistent repetition is the key to training. WAIT. STOP. RECONSIDER.

What are you practicing? What skill are you perfecting? It appears as if you will become an expert at holding an alpaca, chasing it's head around, getting hit on the chin and snapping a halter really fast.

More to the point: what is your alpaca going to master? What has your alpaca learned about you? Based on my years of camelid observation, animals become quickly skilled at fighting and avoiding the human. I have met alpacas that were so effective at escape and evasion they could join the Marines.

Animals are not halter trained. Humans learn how to put on halters. This explains why so many new alpaca buyers think the seller has misrepresented an animal's training level because they can't halter the alpaca as easily as the seller.

You and your animal student will only perfect a skill if... you are practicing what you want to do—not what you don't want to do. So does practice makes perfect? Not necessarily.

Practice makes permanent.  
So be careful what you practice.

I suggest that what you really want to practice is putting a halter on a relaxed animal that is standing quietly. You want to practice teaching an animal to stand in balance with his head still while you buckle and properly adjust the halter.

The key point is that your alpaca already knows how to stand still. It is your job to get him to do it. Haltering is a handling issue. If you're having trouble accomplishing a handling task, you are the one that must learn the new skills.

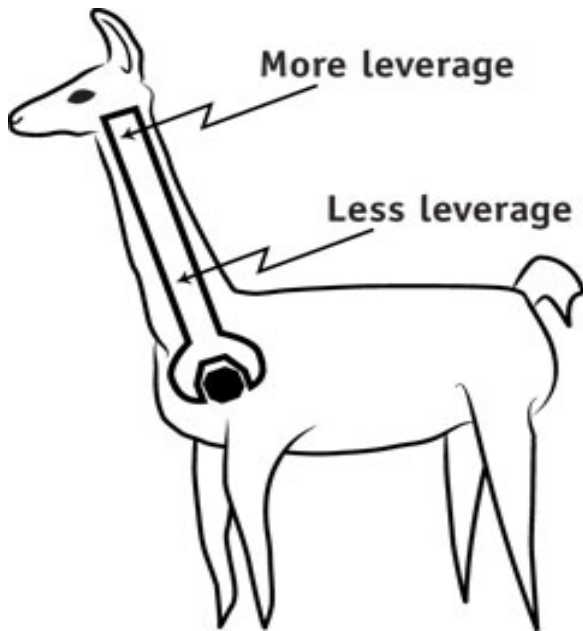
As a young woman heading to college my dream was to become a veterinarian. Alas, physics and I didn't get along and that one bad grade torpedoed my chances of a career as a veterinarian. Ironically as a teacher of animal handling I find myself teaching... physics! Effective animal handling is largely a matter of using and understanding leverage, balance and center of mass. By way of review...

\* Center of Gravity or Mass: The single point inside a body where all is balanced. To achieve balance, this center of mass must be inside (over) the area created by the supports (feet) on the ground. This center is created by a camelid's four feet touching the ground. When the force of one or more of the animal's four feet (supports) are changed, balance is shifted.

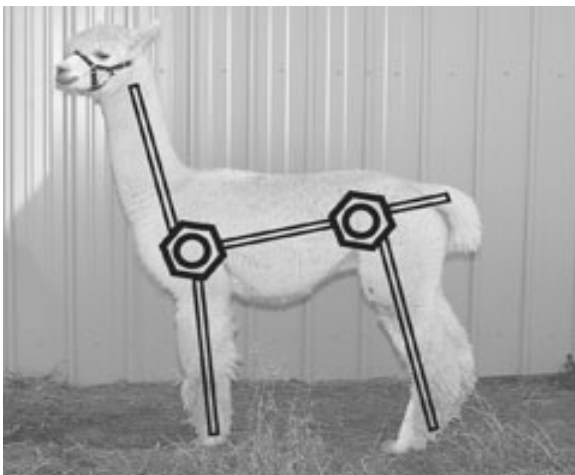
• Leverage: Any method that creates mechanical advantage. A teeter-totter is a lever. If one arm of the teeter-totter is longer than the other, then the long arm can balance the short arm with less force applied.

Maximum leverage is achieved when one applies any force at the maximum distance from the center of mass. The further from the center of mass/gravity that you apply force the more leverage you have over that entity—just as a long pole and a rock (the fulcrum)

allows you to lift a heavy object or a longer wrench works to un-stick a stubborn bolt.



The parts of the body that are the furthest from the center of mass are the parts of the body that will offer you the most leverage should you gain control of them. A camelid's center of mass is inside the rib cage near the heart (see drawing). Therefore pushing or pulling on parts farthest away from this center will most effect the balance of the animal. Animals instinctively know where and how they are the most vulnerable. It is no coincidence that camelids are sensitive around their tails, feet and head. These are the parts of the body furthest away from the center of mass, which offer a predator the most leverage. There are lots of theories about why camelids are more head-shy than other domestic species that typically wear a halter such as horses, mules and donkeys. Based on the laws of physics I believe it has a lot to do with their longer necks.



Camelids are extremely vulnerable to control of the head because it is just that much further from their center of mass. For this same reason I think it is dangerous to restrain a

camelid solely by tying the head, particularly if the animal is frightened or unaccustomed to being tied. Based on its different anatomy a wildly struggling alpaca tied by the head is much more vulnerable to injury than a horse.

My original camelid coach instructed me to avoid touching the head because llamas didn't like it. The fact is we must handle the head. First, in order to be effective at controlling the balance you need the leverage afforded by the head and so we must halter our animals. Second, you must work with your animal's head on a regular basis for herd management. Among other things you need to check the teeth, administer paste wormer, and apply fly wipe. By handling an animal's head responsibly you demonstrate that you are both powerful and trustworthy.

Never ask anything challenging of your animals and you will never be trusted. Many people believe that they can establish a trusting relationship by hand feeding their animals in an open area or by sitting in the barn as the animals meander around. While these activities are nice it would be wrong to assume that by doing these things you are making great strides in the trust department. In both of these situations the animal is in absolute control and can leave at any time. Nothing is risked.

Just as it is in human relationships, taking risks and meeting challenges together creates trust. Working safely with those areas of an animal's body that are vulnerable—the tail, the feet the head and particularly the mouth dismantles the barriers of fear.

Sometimes the most profound things are the simplest. Provided you now subscribe to the logic outlined in this article, change your behavior and always 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. Helping your animal feel safe will result in your animal's cooperation and you'll get your job done.

Balance is profound and comes into play when we herd, catch, halter, trim toenails, lead, shear, give injections or oral medications. Understand the role you play and the power of leverage and you are on your way.

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**Marty McGee Bennett**

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