

How to Develop Great Relationships With Your Cutting Horse Helpers, Part I



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Understanding Everyone's Roles



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One of the things I love about cutting is how much we help each other in the show pen.

But, with the opportunity to help each other comes challenges.

Sometimes as a non-pro, you may find it tough to develop an easy-flowing, helpful communication with your helpers.

Here are three examples of things you may have experienced. Two herdholders say two very different things at the same time. Or, one or more helpers chatter so much that you can't think. Or, a helper uses a loud voice, and your body freezes.

As in all relationships, all we have control over are our thoughts and responses to situations. So, with that in mind, in Part One of these helper articles, I have outlined three key ideas to help you lay the groundwork for great helper communication.

The first is what I believe to be the ideal scenario of a cutter's working relationship with helpers ... and then, a look at your helpers' varied roles ... and, finally a description of your roles.

The Ideal Situation

Your herdholders and turnback people not only help you have a successful run, but in the best case scenario, they are an integral part of your team.

Ideally, they want you to win, and are a huge part of your support system. This is big!

It doesn't mean that someone who is not particularly "connected" with you won't do a good job helping you. I'm not saying that.

But, when you show in an area consistently, you can develop great relationships with your helpers over time. When you KNOW they want you to do well, and they give your run that extra effort, it can take your game to a whole new level.

What I'm talking about is the power of a team vs. isolated individuals doing routine jobs. You are key to developing your team by communicating with them, complimenting them, and thanking them.

A Herdholder's Job

Herdholders do four main tasks:

- 1.) They help you move cattle.
- 2.) They are like two extra sets of eyes to help [find a specific cow](#) ... or to help you see which cow is winding up out front and center, (if you cut for shape).



- 3.) They help you make good decisions. They help you consider to make a move ... or not. They can help you be aware of something that just developed ... say, behind you.
- 4.) They often coach you while you work a cow. This can be anything from reminding you to relax, to walking you through you cow work, blow-by-blow.

A Turnback Person's Job

Your turnback helpers do most of the things stated above, although they are not usually as involved in finding cattle. But often, especially if they know your pre-chosen cow, they can help you spot it in the [middle of the arena](#).

They also have the following five tasks:

- 1.) They sometimes help clear cattle on a cut.
- 2.) They attempt to help you keep the cow you're working in the middle of the arena, at just the right speed.
- 3.) They make critical decisions about how much pressure a cow can take before it starts doing things you don't want ... like going too fast, or trying to run down your throat!
- 4.) They try to keep cattle from going to the walls, or up the middle of the arena.
- 5.) When synchronized with your thinking about when to quit a cow, they back-off the pressure so hopefully the cow stops, or turns away, so you can quit.

Your Role

Ultimately, no matter how much your helpers try to assist you, you're the person who has the most responsibility.

This is an important fact, because I often hear people blame their help for [a bad run](#).

Helpers are human, so sometimes they do make mistakes. While those mistakes certainly can be costly, it's unusual that a herdholder or a turnback person's error cost you significantly.

It's important to know that your role in the herd, as opposed to working a cow, IS significant.

In the herd, you are ultimately responsible for a big percentage of what goes on during a cut.

As your skills grow, you will be able to move cattle in strategic ways to make good cuts ... with or without the help of your herdholders.

And please know, you DO make the final decision for your cuts, no matter how much clear, or muddled input you receive from your herdholders. This is a critical fact to grasp. (I understand it's a challenge when you receive conflicting information, but you still do make the final decision.)

What you do have control over changes when you WORK a cow.

You can ride your horse to a position to stop a cow, when possible.

However, you cannot do anything to control a cow if the cow drifts, or runs out of your horse's sphere of influence. This is where your turnback helpers' response is solely in their territory.

If a cow is going wide open towards the judge's stand, there's nothing you can do except make a decision to wait, and let your turnback people bring the cow back ... or, quit.

The above facts are critical to help you sort out decisions about choosing your helpers.

In Part II of this article, I will explore answers to these questions:

How do you choose who will turnback, and who will be in the herd?

What is the difference between choosing help when you know most of the people at the show, vs. when you are out of town, and you don't know people?

If you have so much power in the herd, do you know how to develop it, while at the same time utilizing the resources of the two people who are beside you in the herd?

Do you know how to communicate with your helpers before, during, and after your run?