

Applying the “Replacement Concept”

By Tim Doud
Diamond Creek Mules
Cody, Wyo.



As mule owners, we are always looking for ways to improve our mule's performance. One of the best ways to do this is using the “Replacement Concept.”

So, what is the “Replacement Concept?” Simply put, it is replacing a mule's unwanted behavior with wanted behavior. But, the first thing we must do to achieve success with this is to eliminate the word “don't.”

We get in the habit of telling our mule don't do this, don't do that; don't move when I brush you, don't walk off when I put my foot in the stirrup, don't bray at the other mules, etc. This can be tiring. After finding that saying “no” to your mule does not work, some people in frustration will jerk on the reins, slap him, etc.

We would never tell our child “no,” then hit them. If we did, our child would stop wanting to be with us. This is the same with our mule. If learning is not fun, or worse yet is painful, our mules will no longer want to learn or even be around us.

If we encourage ourselves to use “don't” enough, our mule will start showing unwanted behaviors. He may become jumpy, run away from you, become head shy, etc.

We must retrain ourselves to replace the unwanted behavior with something we want our mule to do. So, if your

mule begins to walk forward and you want him to stand still; instead of saying “don't walk forward,” we will ask our mule to back up two steps. Instead of “don't bray at the other mules,” we will ask our mule to disengage his hind quarters.

By replacing the unwanted behavior with an exercise we want, he will, over time, stop the unwanted behavior. He will learn that if he begins the unwanted behavior, an exercise will immediately follow.

You will also begin to see many other benefits from using the “Replacement Concept.” Your mule will stay calm and relaxed, not scared or frightened. He will also become more confident and trusting of you.

The same applies to you, the handler. You will begin to stay calm and relaxed, not mad because your mule is performing an unwanted behavior.

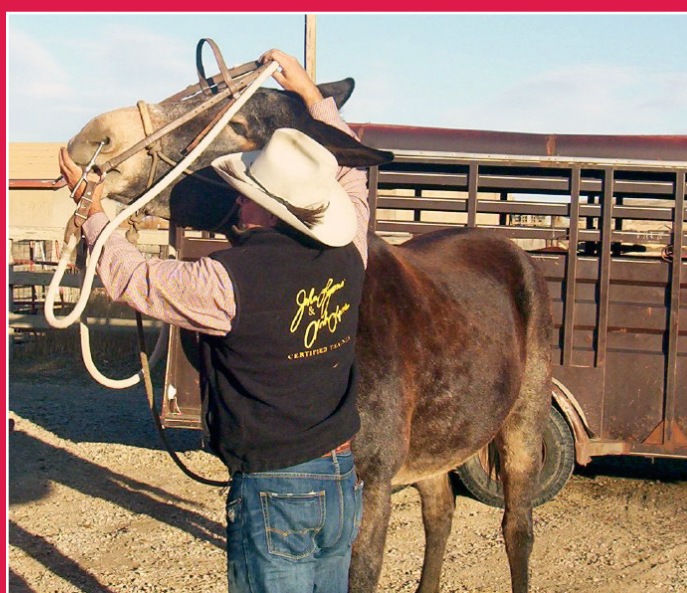
By replacing an unwanted behavior with a wanted behavior, you will get better performance from your mule during the exercises you are practicing. By that I mean your mule is giving you the opportunity to teach him the exercise without being easily distracted and performing unwanted behaviors.

So, to put the replacement concept into motion, take a look at this example and fit it into your everyday lessons.

If you have a mule that will not stand still, every time he moves, spend 10 or 15 minutes asking the mule to do something. For example, if my mule will not stand still, I will ask him to walk forward five steps, then backwards three steps, then disengage his hind quarters in both directions, and then move his shoulder two steps over, etc. Soon the mule will be saying to himself, “Just let me stand here.” You are not punishing the mule for moving, so do not get aggressive. Calmly ask the mule to move in the direction you want. Be sure that after the 10 or 15 minutes, your mule is calmer then when you started replacing the unwanted behavior. If he is not, work a little longer.

You also do not want to repeat the same pattern each time. If you do, he will memorize your pattern and begin a new unwanted behavior. Choose exercises that he knows well and use them to “remove” his unwanted behaviors.

Remember to always fix any problem in a safe environment. After the mule is responding to your cues in a safe



As TIM bridles Hannah, she pulls her head away



When Hannah raises her head, Tim calmly begins working on ground exercises to replace the unwanted behavior

environment, move to a place where the mule will raise his emotions a little, but still respond to you.

The “Replacement Concept” will allow you to take a negative and turn it into a positive. Soon your mule will always be looking to you for directions. Once your mule is responding to your cues consistently, go back to your original exercise. You are building a partnership with your mule.

Soon you and your mule will always be acting positive. If your mule shows any unwanted behavior, you will calmly say, “No problem, do this instead.”

To reach Tim Doud and Diamond Creek Mules you can visit www.diamondcreekmules.com or call Tim at 307-899-1089.



After 10 minutes of ground exercise, Hannah stands calmly as Tim puts the bridle on her