

# GO FORWARD CUE

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Training starts with an exercise as basic as moving forward. Teaching your mule the “go forward” cue is essential to everything he does. It is essential to walking, side-passing, loping, trotting, trailer loading, leading, crossing water, leaving a group on a trail ride to ride alone, jumping, moving cattle, barrel racing... and the list goes on.

Once your mule understands the cue to move forward, then you can teach him any maneuver with the reins and your legs. But if your mule ever locks his feet or is reluctant to move then you are missing this essential step in your training.

Has your mule ever refused to move when you ride or lead him? Do you ever find yourself constantly kicking your mule to get him to walk forward? The “go forward” cue is the answer.



**HOLD THE** rope or rein six inches from the halter or bridle

## **You ride the mule you lead**

Many people don't think leading and ground manners are important. They think that it is OK for their mule to have bad ground and leading manners, as long as he is fine under saddle.

However, if there are “holes” in your mule's leading and ground manners, then there will be “holes” when you are riding your mule and in his overall training. Period.

Many people will bring me a mule with riding problems. The mule will buck, run off, lock-up his feet, won't respond to the bridle, etc. In every case, I can see the problem when the owner is handling the mule on the ground.



**WHEN TEACHING** the “go forward” cue, tap the point of the hip, as shown here, to ask the mule to move forward

Most of the time, the problem can be fixed on the ground before I even get on the mule. I will never ride a mule that has bad ground manners.

## **“Go forward” cue**

This is why the “go forward” cue is essential to your mule's training. If this is not solid, then everything else will have holes. Your mule should go forward when you ask him to. It should not matter if you are asking him to walk, trot or run next to you on the ground. It also should not matter that you are moving through the pasture, walking into the trailer or running across a tarp.

To teach the “Go Forward” cue, you will concentrate on the point of the hip. If you get the hip to move forward, the rest of the mule will follow.

For this lesson, you will need a halter and lead rope or a bridle with a snaffle bit and a stiff dressage whip.

With the halter or bridle on the mule, stand off to the side of the mule at the shoulder. Place the free end of the lead rope over the mule's neck. Hold the lead rope about six inches from the halter or bit. Look at the point of the hip. Looking at the point of the hip is your first cue. This is called a “pre-



**TIM DOUD** has used the “go forward” cue to teach **Diamond Creek Angel** to follow him anywhere, including the tack room.

cue.”

If the mule does not move forward, kiss or cluck to your mule. This is your second “pre-cue.” The next cue is to take the dressage whip and gently tap the mules “point of the hip.” We want to encourage the mule to move forward, not beat or hurt the mule. We do not want the mule to feel any pain. Pain will only cause resistance in the mule. You want the mule to know that you will keep tapping until he moves forward.

The second the mule moves a foot forward, immediately stop the tapping and praise the mule. If the mule does not respond, tap a little harder. But be sure to stop tapping the minute the mule moves forward, even if for just one step.

It is important to stop the cue and praise the mule. This tells the mule he gave you the right answer. It will get the mule to try harder to find the right answer.

Be sure to understand how your mule thinks. He may try to move backward, left or right, or up or down before he tries moving forward. This is how he finds the right answer. Your mule can move in six different direc-

tions; up, down, left, right, forward or backward. When he finds the answer you are looking for, then you praise him. As you continue to reinforce the cue and continue asking, he will learn exactly what you are looking for and begin getting the answer sooner and sooner.

An immediate release will get your mule to respond quicker and try harder. After much practice, the mule will start to respond from your pre-cues. You will be able to teach your mule to “go forward” by looking at the point of the hip and kissing to the mule.

After the mule responds to your cue and you have praised him, ask the mule to “go forward” again. Go through your pre-cues and cues until the mule moves forward.

Work on getting your mule to constantly take one step forward. Then, after he is consistent with one step, begin asking the mule for two steps, then three and four and so on. By now your mule should be responding to your pre-cues, but be patient, this will take many repetitions.

You may be thinking, “How will this help me in the saddle?” When rid-

ing, you will use the same formula, but with your legs. Understand that this will translate to the saddle. Your mule will begin associating what you are asking with what you did on the ground and he will get the right answer quicker and more consistently.

While in the saddle, if your mule stops moving forward, concentrate on the point of the hip, then kiss or cluck to the mule. These are your “pre-cues.” A kiss or cluck tells the mule you want “movement.” You are asking the mule to move something.

Squeeze with your legs if the mule does not move forward. If he does not respond to a squeeze, you will start lightly bumping the mule’s side with your legs. Finally, you bump harder until the mule moves forward.

Just like when you were on the ground, the second the mule moves forward, stop the cue and praise the mule. If the mule is moving forward, leave your legs still.

However, understand that if you keep bumping the mule with your legs as he is moving, the mule will start ignoring your cues. This is called “burning the cue.” If you keep cueing your mule after he is doing what you’ve asked, then he will say, “Well, he keeps kicking me when I am not moving and when I am moving, so I guess it doesn’t matter what I do, so I will just stop moving.” Then, your cue is burned out.

Just like on the ground, If you are consistent with your cues, your mule will start to respond from your cue, then from your pre-cues.

So, if you are leading your mule and he stops and will not move his feet, go back to his shoulder and ask his hip to move forward. You now have a cue to give your mule to step into the trailer, walk up to the wash rack or cross a tarp, cross the river, and move forward. You will be amazed at how your mule will follow you anywhere.

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