

Teaching the “Come To You” Cue

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We have all had it happen, the weather looks great and we decide to saddle up our mule and go for a relaxing ride. After grabbing the halter, we walk to the pasture gate only to see our mule running off in the other direction.

Our relaxing afternoon just turned stressful. We now have to spend our valuable riding time chasing our mule around the pasture until our mule decides “I’ll let him catch me now.”

But what if you could teach your mule to catch you? By teaching your mule the “Come To You” cue, you can.

Prerequisites to this lesson are basic round-penning exercises including moving forward, the “Go Forward” cue, and inside and outside turns. Tools you will need are a lariat or whip and boots for your mule to help protect his legs.

When teaching the “Come To You” lesson, the three things to remember are:

- get your mule’s feet to move
- get your mule’s feet to move consistently
- and finally, get your mule’s feet to move in the direction you want them to go.

As always, you will start by teaching the lesson on one side of your mule, then teach the same lesson on the other side of your mule. For this lesson, we will begin on the left.

Get Your Mule’s Feet to Move

With your mule loose in the round pen, ask your mule to walk forward to the left by cueing the hip to move. To do this, you will use your “Go Forward” cue in the same manner you have used it previously while your mule was haltered or bridled: focus on the hip and drive the hip forward with your lariat or whip. This is the first step of the process, get your mule’s feet to move.

Get Your Mule’s Feet to Move Consistently

Next, you want to ask your mule to continue moving forward. This is second step of the process, get your mule’s feet to move consistently. After you ask your mule to “Go Forward,” he will continue walking or trotting. If he stops, give the “Go Forward” cue again, then immediately give a

release. Continue this pattern until your mule moves forward consistently. You must allow your mule to stop in order for him to understand the cue to continue moving.

Now that your mule is moving forward consistently, you are going to begin asking your mule to move his feet in the direction you want them to go, which is the third step of the process. We are going to begin by asking for inside turns.

Inside turns are essential to the “Come To You” cue. Your mule is moving consistently around the round-pen to the left. When you are ready to ask for an inside turn, follow these steps: back up and kiss or cluck to your mule (this will open the door for your mule to turn inside). Once your mule begins to turn inside from the left, begin moving in the direction your mule WAS going (to the left and drive your mule’s other hip forward and to the right). Once your mule is moving consistently to the right, release the cue to move forward. After your mule takes several (10, 11, 12) steps to the right, repeat the process back to the left, and so on several hundred times. Now you have your mule moving his feet in the direction you want them to go. Remember, you don’t have to finish an exercise in one day. Take several days to teach your mule inside turns.



TIM has asked Eugene to turn and face him before progressing to the “Come To You” cue

Get Your Mule's Feet to Move Consistently In The Direction You Want Them To Go

The next step is asking your mule to turn and face you in the round pen. To ask your mule to turn toward the center of the round-pen and face you, ask him to go forward consistently, then back up as if you are asking for an inside turn, then stop. Do not drive the hip in the other direction. When you stop, you are telling your mule that he is also allowed to stop and wait for the next cue.

After your mule has stopped and is facing you, walk up to your mule and praise him. This is the next step in teaching him to come to you. Now, walk back to the center of the round-pen.

Next, send your mule off to the left and ask for several inside turns, but no more than 10. Ask your mule to turn and face you again. When he does, go up and praise him. Repeat this process until your mule is 100 percent consistent at turning and facing you. Once your mule is consistent, begin asking him to take a step towards you after he turns and faces you. Ask by taking one or two steps to your right and kissing or clucking to your mule. Stepping off-center of your mule will set him slightly off balance and he will need to shift his weight. Kissing or clucking will encourage the shift in weight and take a step in your direction to re-balance. Praise him!

Continue praising him for every step he takes towards you. Remember, we are initially looking for just one step. We will build on that.



After several hundred repetitions, TIM begins asking Eugene to take several steps toward him

You are always looking for your mule to improve, even minimally. Your mule may initially take a step to the side before he begins walking towards you. This is okay; he is trying to figure out what answer you are looking for. Praise him but be sure you praise him for making an attempt at moving towards you. If he does not move or make an attempt to respond to your cue, send him back out and do several more inside turns.

To continue the lesson, be sure your mule is consistent with one step, then ask for two, three, four, etc., until he is standing in front of you. Remember, give your mule a chance to respond to your cue, but do not ask three or four times before he responds. Give your mule a chance. If he does not respond by making an attempt to move “something” in your direction when you cue him, send him off.

Now that your mule is coming to you on cue – your kiss or cluck – begin moving yourself to different spots in the round pen and ask him to come to you from a stand-still position. Praise him when he does; send him off if he does not.

You can advance the lesson by taking your mule to another small enclosed area and working on the “Come To You” cue there. Try a corral or small fenced in arena.

Another way to advance the lesson is to ask your mule to trot or canter to you. Follow the same steps you did for the walk, just keep your mule trotting or cantering around the round-pen consistently before asking for the turn, face and step. Eventually he will begin taking a trot step towards you. Be sure you ask at the trot before you ask at the canter.



After a lot of practice, Eugene understands the “Come To You” cue that TIM has given. By kissing or clucking, TIM can ask Eugene to catch him instead of TIM catching Eugene

Now, when that nice day comes around and you want to take a ride, you can walk to the pasture and cue your mule to “Come To You” and he will come running! Enjoy your ride.

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

Also, check out our website (Training Page) in November and December for “Training Shorts,” Tim’s short training demonstration videos.

Finally, Tim is now scheduling mule clinics for January thru April. If you are interested in hosting a clinic in your area, book now by calling Tim at 307-899-1089.