

WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T TRAIN CATS

Whoever says you can't train cats just doesn't know. Training involves establishing strong ties between cause and effect, and cats learn quickly. Training brings results.

As creatures of routine, cats develop habits that may seem peculiar to us. Proper training demands that we identify those habits and exploit them to our advantage.

Let me illustrate with a case study on Maudie Nell's training.

Consider the routine of feeding. When Maudie Nell is hungry, she invariably pulls at my legs with sharp little claws until she has my attention. Effective training has taught her that I will immediately stop whatever important activity has me occupied and open the kitty food.

Following breakfast, the routine continues. She flings herself onto the blue throw rug and flips around until she has my attention. Then I stop whatever important activity has me occupied, locate the kitty brush and give her a good brushing.

Then it's time to go outside, so she runs to the door and waits for me to open it. If I don't come quickly, she rattles the blinds until she has my attention. Then I stop whatever important activity has me occupied and open the door.

Since Maudie Nell doesn't meow like normal kitties, she's learned to rip at the rubber weather stripping (what's left of it) when it's time to come back in. Then once she has my attention, I stop whatever important activity has me occupied and open the door.

Having closely observed her habits, though, I've learned to leave the door slightly ajar so she can nudge it open herself with a strong thrust of the nose. That way I don't have to be interrupted from my important activities to let her out a dozen times every morning. Eventually I'll figure out an easier way to get the door closed, too.

At night, Maudie Nell heretofore has snoozed on her kitty bed until around 2:00 a.m. Then the rattling of blinds would awake me to let her out, and the popping of weather stripping would awaken me again to let her in.

Desiring to break this objectionable habit, I now put her into the large kitty cage in the garage so we can both get a good night's rest. Maudie Nell has learned my routine, however. When bedtime draws near, she stealthily slinks off to some inaccessible recess under a piece of furniture. Then I stop whatever important activity has me occupied, locate and extract her, give her some supper, speak kindly to her and put her in the big cage.

So training cats is almost like training humans. Just establish a strong cause-effect relationship between actions and consequences so that good habits are reinforced and bad habits are avoided.

Admittedly, I sometimes evaluate my shortcomings in getting life to work on my behalf. And I suspect that Maudie Nell has been a better student in her training than I have. Finesse? No. Persistence and results? Yes. Perhaps I should study her technique more closely.