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## For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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**Dear Suzanne,**

Hello fellow pet lover - Although we didn't set out with this goal in mind, the articles in this issue are all examples of the old saying of how you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. We hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

Best,  
Suzanne and Dan

- Cat Piece:**  
**How to Create an Attack Cat**

### **Dog Piece:** **"Leave It" Gone Wrong**



training techniques or developed good

At a recent pet event in Denver we had many opportunities to watch people with their dogs. While it was obvious people really loved their dogs, it was also obvious that too many people hadn't been instructed in good

In their relationships with people, most cats take a "live and let live" approach. Cats usually do not show aggression toward people over food, toys or space the way dogs sometimes will. While some cats may hiss, growl, bite or scratch if we try to pet them or pick them up, they generally do not go out of their way to control our behavior. A recent case of cat aggression we worked with definitely does not follow this pattern.

Fritz the Cat had, on several occasions,



dog handling skills.

We watched one woman with a service dog in training attempting to teach the dog not to approach or greet people. It's understandable that service dog owners would not want their dogs pulling them all over the place to go say hello to other dogs or people. However, we cringed at the sequence of events we observed in this training.

The dog was a naturally friendly young Labrador. With tail wagging, the dog would approach anyone within reach. The happy anticipation that was easily seen in this dog's demeanor about the prospect of meeting a new friend was heart warming to watch.

The trainer would allow the dog to take a few steps toward someone, then in a harsh voice command "LEAVE IT" and yank back on the dog's leash. The disappointment and confusion evident on this dog's face was hard to see. Not only is this an inefficient way to teach the desired behavior, it also teaches the dog to anticipate unpleasantness when people approach him. And this method certainly wasn't giving the dog clear information about what he was supposed to do when he spied a potential new friend. At best, the most he could learn was DON'T MOVE or brace for a yank. What a tragedy, especially when so many other more appropriate training choices are available.

For example, why not make the approach of a person become a conditioned cue for the dog to look up at its handler? Easy enough to do, especially with a helper and a clicker. Start by teaching a "watch me" behavior, maybe initially luring the dog with a tidbit to look at the handler and click and treat when he did. After fading the lure so that the dog was reliably looking up at the handler in response to the words "watch me" then introduce a stranger.

To this untrained Labrador, a stranger

attacked her owner's boyfriend, Carl, as he slept. This was not playful behavior, and Fritz was biting hard enough to send the man to the hospital. Fritz had also learned to control Carl's movements. If he didn't want Carl to go into a room, or get too close to his owner, Fritz would simply stand stiff and still in front of Carl, and block his way. Being a wise man, Carl knew better than to try to walk around or past Fritz, having had Fritz attack and bite him if he continued to move toward him.

Why would Fritz show this offensive behavior? Most aggression that cats direct toward people is defensively motivated. Offensive types of aggression include territorial, predatory and perhaps the poorly understood "don't pet me anymore" syndrome; although this behavior could easily be defensively motivated instead.

Turns out that Fritz had previously nipped Carl when Carl was petting him (not the severe biting he was now doing), and Carl had responded by popping the cat on the nose with a couple of fingers. While some cats may be intimidated by this action, Fritz wasn't one of them. This only caused Fritz to escalate his aggression, to the point that Carl learned to back off. For Fritz, aggression became the best strategy to get Carl to leave him alone. Because this strategy worked so well, by the time we saw Fritz, he was now using aggression proactively rather than reactively.

Using corporal punishment as Carl initially did, is a risky business, and not something we recommend, because it so often results in an escalation of aggression. Even remote punishment for Fritz's behavior would be counter productive, because Fritz had already decided Carl was a bad guy and not to be trusted. Repairing the relationship between Fritz and Carl will require an attitude change from both.

Carl had already recognized that he needed to try to make friends with Fritz, so the trick would be convincing Fritz that Carl was really a good guy after all. Lucky for Carl, Fritz has a secret weakness. Fritz loves spinach. So Carl is becoming Fritz's Popeye the Spinach Man and Fritz's only source of this delectable treat. Of course we initiated other temporary

was the cue to go toward the person. For the stranger to become the cue to look at the handler is an example of operant counter conditioning. The same cue evokes a behavior that is counter to the one being displayed. The training sequence would be for the approach of a stranger to be immediately followed by the "watch me" cue. At this intermediate step, the dog is being counter commanded to look up at his handler. The verbal cue is also slowly phased out and the dog clicked and treated for automatically looking at its handler when he sees a person walking up.

Although some service dog training groups may not agree, we think that working service dogs should also be given permission to stop working so they can make friends. This is what keeps dogs sociable and prevents fear and aggression problems. We helped a sight impaired friend, who uses a guide dog, do just that and both dog and owner are happy with the results.

Using these and other types of counter conditioning and desensitization techniques effectively was the topic of our [recent telecourse](#). If you missed it, we'll have the session available on CD soon.



## **November Special** **Buy 2 get 1 Free!**

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management procedures as well, such as not allowing Fritz in the bedroom at night, to prevent further injury.

So far, Fritz and Carl are doing well. There have been no further biting incidents and Fritz is beginning to approach Carl again in a friendly demeanor. The moral of the story – Popeye always bested Brutus (for those of you too young to remember Popeye, ask your parents!).

### • **Our Piece:** **Making Medication Time Easier**



Our cat Buffett recently had his teeth cleaned. Home care after his dental included 10 days of liquid antibiotics and what can be loosely termed teeth brushing. So far the best we've been able to manage is putting a dollop of the gel on our finger and rub it around on Buffett's teeth and gums. He's tolerated the antibiotic drops, although we learned inadvertently first-hand they are quite bitter.

After either a dose of his meds or a tooth swabbing, Buffett wants to immediately get away from us. However, we've been gently restraining him against our chests while he sits on the kitchen counter. We talk quietly to him, rub his ears (which he loves) and release him in a minute or so after he has relaxed and is even purring. This helped to make the 10 days of medication much easier on both Buffett and us.

Allowing a pet to escape immediately after an unpleasant procedure likely has several effects. One is that if struggling results in

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release, then struggling is reinforced. The pet will then be more likely to struggle, perhaps even more intensely, the next time he is restrained, because he's learned struggling works. Secondly, the last thing the pet remembers is unpleasantness. If instead, he's held and cuddled as we did Buffett, he walks away calm and relaxed rather than agitated. By "sandwiching" an unpleasant event in between a minute or so of pets and cuddles, we should be able to mitigate some of the unpleasantness.

As would be expected, Buffett quickly learned to anticipate medication time. Although we tried to minimize them, he rapidly picked up on the contextual cues – Dad cuddling him on the counter at the same time of day, Mom walking up with a medicine dropper in her hands (which she tried to conceal until the last second).

To try and minimize this anticipation, we could have made it a point to do the exact same routine several times a day, without giving Buffett his drops, making it more difficult for him to figure out which was "real" medication time and which wasn't. The other side of this coin however, is that Buffett could have become wary of being on the counter at all. As it was, medication time was quite predictable, and other counter times were "safe", which is probably better for Buffett.

So the two take home messages are to provide for calm down time before releasing a struggling pet, and decide whether it's best to make medication or other unpleasant episodes predictable, based on you and your pet's specific needs.

- **What's New:**  
**Planning for the Future**

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## Quick Links...

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We spent last week in Nashville, delivering a day's worth of lectures at another National Animal Control Level I Academy. We also spent a day in a strategic planning session for Animal Behavior Associates. You'll see changes in our newsletter, websites and products and services mix next year.

We've had numerous requests for CD versions of our latest telecourses [Using Counter Conditioning and Desensitization Techniques Effectively](#) and [Dogs Who Don't Play Well With Others](#). We are working on this and will let you know when they are available, hopefully within the next few weeks.

Suzanne has been practicing her steel pans in preparation for a November 26th recital. This will be a combined recital of several classes, resulting in the largest steel pan band ever assembled in Colorado. We'll try to share some video with you next month.

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We had good attendance and good feedback from our presentations last month for VRCC (Veterinary Referral Center of Colorado) and the DAVMS (Denver Area Veterinary Medical Society). We are working on creating audio products of our presentations so stay tuned.