Think Pawsitive!

They say you can’t teach an old dog new tricks, and they’ll probably laugh you out of the room if you suggest that you can teach a cat ANYTHING. “Cat daddy” behavior expert Jackson Galaxy—known for Animal Planet’s “My Cat From Hell,” numerous best-selling books and a plethora of popular YouTube videos—is determined to prove the naysayers wrong. In conjunction with nonprofits Greater Good Charities and Petco Love, The Jackson Galaxy Project has developed “Cat Pawsitive,” a feline positive reinforcement-based training program for animal shelters and rescues designed to, in their words, “build new skills for cats as well as staff and volunteers, promote the human-cat bond, and help improve adoptability.”

Galaxy maintains that cats who have experienced the trauma of being taken out of a loving home (or other familiar environment) and placed in a shelter/rescue may be robbed of their “mojo” or “catitude”: that is, the natural self-assurance and territorial authority that comes with being a cat. These cats may become nervous, depressed or bored, thus less appealing to potential adopters. His program aims to give cats back their “mojo” and sociability through a variety of enjoyable and entertaining tasks.

Based on the principles of classical and operant conditioning, and taught via a specialized form of clicker training, these tasks fall into three categories: Capturing, Targeting and Luring. Capturing involves reinforcing activities a cat engages in naturally, such as making eye contact, touching a toy, rolling over, or head bumping. The trainer waits to see a cat perform one of these behaviors, then reinforces it by clicking and offering a reward (such as an irresistible treat or some petting time).

In Targeting, cats are reinforced and rewarded for interacting with a specific object that’s presented, such as a stick they can touch with their noses or a bell they ring with their paws. One of the classic Targeting activities is to teach a cat how to high five. Luring involves offering an object a cat must follow to complete a particular activity, like jumping through a hoop to chase down a treat, or sitting down—or up, also known as “sitting pretty”—in order to keep focus on a desired toy. In all task categories, the trainer presents a verbal cue, such as “sit” or “jump,” along with clicker reinforcement. A cat is considered to have mastered its task when it performs “on cue.”

"His program aims to give cats back their "mojo" and sociability..."

This year, a group of intrepid volunteers of the Robin I. Kroogman New Haven Animal Shelter have undertaken Cat Pawsitive training for the first time. It hasn’t been easy. Some cats are naturally more educable than others—while we’ve seen those who can master three tasks at a time, others need more training to “get it.” Sometimes our teaching methods need sharpening, and sometimes we don’t have enough time to give each cat the amount of training that would be optimal (two sessions a day, four days a week). However, nothing matches the joy of seeing these cats perform; it enriches our relationships with them. Happily, the cats really seem to enjoy training, too: We’ve seen shy cats become bolder, bored cats become more engaged with their surroundings, and cantankerous cats become gentler. Maybe they’re proud of themselves; maybe they’ll just do anything for yummy treats. In any case, it works!

On these pages, you’ll see some of the fruits of our labors. Hopefully, many more successes are to come. 💫

"Happily, the cats really seem to enjoy training, too."
Think Pawsitive! (cont’d)

Faster than lightning: Though beset with certain physical disabilities (limited vision, a bad hip caused by a car accident and digestive issues), Smudge is a hoop-hopping demon when in pursuit of her favorite fresh chicken and fish treats.

Harmony, a beautiful young calico, has a willful streak in her personality, but the discipline involved in learning to sit on cue—and the rewards earned when doing it right—have helped tame her inner lioness.

Gypsy, a quiet and shy torbie, comes out of her shell when given the opportunity to nose-bump.

You’re never too old—or young—to learn new tricks: When it comes to “sitting pretty,” robust Padawan Jason (at left) has nothing over senior Jedi master Percy.

The most fulfilling moments in Cat Pawsitive occur when our trainees get adopted. Here are a few meeting their new families (from far left): Percy with Mom and Dad; Jason, who joined a home with six siblings (three dogs, two cats and one 3-year-old human); Sophie, the first trainee to get adopted; and Captain Jack Sparrow, greeting his next chapter with a resounding “Aye!”
Look At Us Now!

SAFFRON  BAILEY  JESSICA  AUTUMN & BRANDO  MAX  

MONKEY  DAISY  LUCY  AMELIA  

RIVER  MILO  LILY  AMBER  BAT GIRL  

MILO  SNOOPY  LOUIE  PERCY  BEAR  SONNY  THISBE
WE THANK YOU - IN MEMORIAM

Janice Abele in memory of Simon, “a wonderful Corgi.”
Anne Bailey in memory of Midnight.
Brian Blakeley and Teresa Freeman in memory of Kate, Nell-Bob, and Betty.
Sharon Bornholz in memory of “my beloved Carlos and Jersey Girl Raquel.”
Eileen and John Brannigan in memory of Chaz (AKA Gizmo, shelter grad) and “all of our loving pets, past and present.”
Thomas Brunelle and Marsha Silverman in memory of Charlie, “beloved doggie of Phyllis Wigham.”
Joy Bush and Tom Gilmore in memory of Peanut, “rescued from the New Haven Animal Shelter over 15 years ago. She was very much loved and gave us love.”
Marylou and Frank Conley in memory of Peanut, “dear cat of Joy Bush and Tom Gilmore.”
Edward Danaher in memory of Chummy Cat.
Anna Demeter in memory of Louis Santora.
Mary Drury in memory of Duffy.
Patricia Grandjean in memory of Paul Spinato.
Daniel Hopkins in memory of Bailey.
Peter and Kate Hvizdak in memory of Robert Child III, “our friend, mentor, and dog lover.”
Susan and Michael Keeney in memory of “my 2 grandmothers.”
Mary Molitor in memory of Bear.
John H. Morgan in memory of Leighton B. Carlson.
Patricia O’Brien in memory of “the dozens of dogs and cats I have had and in honor of Muffin.”
Sue Pannella in memory of Smookie.
Gloria and Jorge Perez in memory of “our beloved Tigger.”
Carol Perrotti in memory of Willie.
Marsha Rabe and Thom Brown in memory of Lucy, “beloved cat of Marylou and Frank Conley.”
Russ Reynolds in memory of Skipper, Kasper, Colonel, and Roscoe.
Ana Simeone in memory of Ralph.
Elaine Spinato in memory of Paul Spinato.
The Strom Family in memory of Robert Sidney Mirkin.
Dawn Tiedemann in memory of “my watchdogs in heaven, Tucker and Missy.”
Linda Turski in memory of ‘our beloved Humphrey and Oakley.”
Christine Weideman in memory of Hank Wesley Powell, “a dog lover.”

In memory of Paul J. Lukasiewicz
Duane B. Mellor
John H. Morgan

In memory of Peppina
Lynn and Jim Childs in memory of Peppina, “beloved cat of Marsha Rabe and Tom Brown.”
Marylou and Frank Conley in memory of Peppina, “dear cat of Marsha Rabe and Thom Brown.”
Barbara Kagan in memory of Peppina, “who loved and was loved by her people, Marsha Rabe and Thom Brown.”
Mara Lavitt and Hayne Bayless in memory of Peppina, “Marsha Rabe and Thom Brown’s cat.”
Marsha Rabe and Thom Brown

In honor of
Catherine Benedetti in honor of “all animals.”
Roger and Rachel Blais in honor of Ricky, “adopted 7 years ago – a member of the family.”
Howard and Edith Brown in honor of Lila.
Aishwarya Chowdhary in honor of “all the dogs and cats”
Joan Emmet in honor of “all dogs dropped off in neighborhoods.”
April Feathers and Fred Jungeblut in honor of “our cat Maggie, our sweet beauty queen.”
Patrick McCarthy in honor Karen McCarthy.
Joanne Milici in honor of Benny.
Veronica Stankowski in honor of Goliath.
Maureen Williams in honor of Clara and Nellie.
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Fall 2022

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Four paws way up to our adopters and supporters. We could never carry out our mission without you. We – and our shelter animals – are so thankful!

AmongFRIENDS contributors:
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