

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

My First CrossFit Certification Seminar

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When I started CrossFit, I was deployed and had been on what I thought was a good rhythm for working out. I had a regular schedule that varied between a focus on runs, a focus on push-ups, and a focus on setting a bench press personal record (PR). In October, six months into my time in Baghdad, I was getting nowhere with any of my goals and, not surprisingly, my shoulders were chronically sore. I was primed for a better option. Enter CrossFit.

I did my first WODs in mid-January 2007, and the results since then have been remarkable. I'm significantly more fit than when I started CrossFit, and, just as important, I anticipate making significant additional fitness gains going forward. My shoulder pain is a fading memory. The muscular appearance I wear today is what I would like to have gotten from bodybuilding workouts in the past. I've regained the strength in pull-ups I had 18 years ago, and I've gained a feel for the kipping pull-up. I've learned how to deadlift, and love it. I've gained 10 push-ups and 10 sit-ups, and for the first time I "maxed out" both exercises on a Navy fitness test. While running perhaps a third of the miles that I used to run (very significant as I have grade 3 and 4 degeneration in all three compartments of my left knee), I cut 40 seconds on my 1.5-mile run for the Navy fitness test. Before CrossFit, I was aware of a couple of narrow weaknesses, and was making no progress on training to address them. Since CrossFit, I'm aware of a bevy of weaknesses—and I'm making progress on most of

them. The improvement in attitude and satisfaction as I pursue a quantum leap in fitness is remarkable. It is also infectious, and, much to my delight, my wife and children are enjoying CrossFitting as well.

That brings me to the Certification I attended in June 2007 in Vancouver, BC. When I first considered attending a cert, I wondered things like:

- What should I expect to learn?
- Is this just for folks who want to train others?
- Can old guys (athletically speaking), who are mediocre athletes, attend?
- Is there a test at the end?

I found no answers to my questions (although detailed information is now available at <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/certs.shtml> and at <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/faq.html> under section 8), but decided I would attend regardless. What I experienced at the certification was well-organized, well-presented, and very effective training.

The training was in three parts: presentation, learning and practicing movements, and a daily workout. Day 1 was dominated by hearing from Coach Glassman about the conceptual underpinnings of CrossFit training. His presentations made it clear that CrossFit came about by finding out what works empirically and using that information to develop conceptual models, definitions,

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and methodology that encompass those findings.

However, given CrossFit's open-source, performance-based approach, the concepts are also significant from the perspective that advancing a field of knowledge requires a theory (I attribute my understanding of this idea to Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*). A theory can be tested, evaluated, and then become the basis of further learning (whereas untested and untestable theories abound in the fitness/martial arts worlds and are not generally useful). With a testable theory to explain CrossFit's results, a practitioner can go beyond "monkey see, monkey do" and better evaluate the observed results.

Should you go to a certification? My answer is, if you want to learn to move your body better—much better—and especially if you are not located near a CrossFit affiliate, yes! You should also go if you want to be able to train others to do CrossFit. You should go to a certification if you want to be around a bunch of people who are as comfortable with pain as you are. And you should go to a certification to meet the really interesting people who have given birth to CrossFit.

The people who run the certifications are a remarkable group. Many of them are some of the powerful athletes on display for us in the videos, demos, and photos on CrossFit.com. But Coach Glassman has obviously selected his team with great care, and for more than their athletic prowess, because the group was just as remarkable for their sincerity and professional approach to training. The staff was very gracious while also being confident, competent, and demanding (without being demeaning). It's a powerful combination.

Aside from the staff, I met many people during the cert (I knew not a soul when I arrived on Friday night), and they were all good company. It seemed there was an almost even number of guys and gals, and most were aged 25 to 40, but there were a few even more seasoned than I was. I'd go back next weekend to do a WOD and hang out with them if I could; it was a weekend memorable for meeting a bevy of really grand people. As fellow CrossFitter Barry Cooper said to me when I was preparing for the cert: "Sure, it won't hurt to be in great shape for the cert, but it is guaranteed some 110-pound female is going to crush you. Because of that,

CrossFitters are characteristically humble." Well, Barry, some did, and they were!

So you must be thinking, "Enough of the pleasantries, did the cert make a difference in your training?" Yes, it did, in many ways. First, even though I've been lifting weights and squatting since 1980, and even though I had worked up to doing 400 air squats in 15 minutes before I started CrossFitting, I found out how little I knew about that fundamental body movement. I found out that even after reading Mark Rippetoe's articles carefully four times on my own, I was still missing big experiential chunks of how to tell what a deadlift should feel like. I can complete a front squat now, correctly, and without pain in my forearms/wrists. I found out how to do a dumbbell thruster correctly (so much easier than I was making it!). I can "feel it" when I do the Burgener Warm-Up correctly. I am no longer intimidated by squat cleans and have some clue about how to do them right. (The clean is a movement I detested but now am eager to learn, which brings to mind Coach's quote from the cert: "It's amazing how useless an activity can seem to be when you suck at it." It also leaves me eager to attend one of CrossFit's Olympic lifting certification seminars.) When people ask, I can say, "CrossFit is constantly varied, functional movements, performed under load at relatively high intensity and over relatively long distances". Most importantly, I can better feel when I'm using my body—especially my hips, my spine, and their coordination—correctly.

This has opened up a world of opportunity for learning and highlights how fundamentally applicable CrossFit is. Athletes of all ages, sizes, athletic abilities, and fitness levels need to master essentially the same movements. Knowing how to deadlift, one can efficiently lift objects from the ground the rest of one's days. Developing a fundamentally sound squat is a gateway to a lifetime of mobility. I predict that if you don't see it already, a cert (or perhaps the equivalent 16 hours of personal training with an expert CrossFit trainer) will give you an intuitive understanding of what functional movement means, and that understanding will help you sort out the exercise wheat from the exercise chaff.

The only downside of attending the cert is that I now know how poorly I had been coaching my training

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partner from Baghdad, the stalwart Captain David Pollock. Sorry Dave. I am glad you thrived in spite of my shortcomings.

I believe my new understanding of better movement will drive better performance, but I won't know until my next bouts with the benchmark "girls"; they are my measuring stick. The only one I've tried since the certification delivered a marginally positive result, with a nine-second improvement on "Fran." What is significant, though, is that I was able to complete much improved—legitimate—pull-ups, which meet what I now realize is the CrossFit standard.

So, that's (some of) what you can expect to learn. As for the answers to the other questions I had: "No, it's not just for those who want to train others." "Yes, old and/or mediocre athletes can attend." "No, there's no (written) test." So, yes, go to a certification, enjoy the CrossFit community through a greater depth of engagement, and learn to use your body better. As with the WOD, what are you waiting for? 1, 2, 3, GO!



Paul Eich, a.k.a. "Apolloswabbie," is relatively new to CrossFit but brought with him the baggage of over 30 years of uncoached weightlifting, cycling, and running. He was awarded instructor rank in Shotokan karate in 1997. A Naval Aviator with 18 years on active duty, his three most recent deployments were to the Central Command Area of Responsibility and included a tour launching combat missions from the deck of the USS Enterprise, flying combat missions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and serving with the U.S. Army on the Multi-National Corps - Iraq.