

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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Coach, Counselor or Both?

CrossFit trainers find they're building athletes and relationships at the same time.

By Brittney Saline

December 2014



Courtney Rybicki

It was a rare warm November evening in Fort Wayne, Indiana, when Maureen Randall quit the workout.

Beats were dropping from the speakers at CrossFit Praus, but for once, the self-described class jokester wasn't dancing. The date marked 22 years since the night she was raped. She had been just 14 years old.

Usually, she spent the anniversary locked indoors. Tonight, she tried to squat.

Silently, she wrapped her thumbs around the barbell in a snatch grip. She pulled. The bar floated up and she caught it above her head. But as she set her feet to sink into a deep overhead squat, her mind went dark, flashing back to the night of the assault.

The bar crashed to the floor.

"I broke," Randall recalled.

Affiliate owner Amanda Burge watched as Randall discarded her barbell and sat down outside the open garage door.

"I knew at the end of that WOD I needed to block out the rest of the box and focus on her," Burge said. "I knew she must be battling with something pretty rough to have quit."

After the clock had gone dark, Randall still sat, her head buried in her hands. Burge had a choice: Walk away, or dive in.

She dove.

"She and I had a long conversation, and we bonded there," Randall said. "It's amazing what sore muscles and emotion can do."

In that spontaneous heart-to-heart, Randall confided more to Burge than she had to anyone else, recounting the assault and revealing the bulimia she had battled ever since.

"She needed to get that load off her chest, and I was just there to allow her to do that," Burge said.

The conversation was the beginning of a mentorship between coach and athlete that extends beyond class to texts, phone calls and post-workout discussions about how Randall can use CrossFit to help overcome her past.

"Any time I need her, she's there—no questions asked," Randall said. "A lot of people coach and then they leave. With Amanda, that's not how it is."

As CrossFit coaches around the globe teach athletes to redefine themselves in the gym, they often become teachers of more than movement. As athletes struggle with everything from poor mobility to poor self-image,



Anne Duncan

Amanda Burge (left) has found that sometimes athletes need an ear as much as they need a lifting cue.

coaches are faced daily with the challenge of walking the line between coach and counselor.

For Burge, it's a no-brainer.

"We're not just puppet masters who program hellacious WODs," she said. "We're people, and we want them to know we're here for them. They trust us with their lives during a WOD, so why would they not trust us with their lives outside of CrossFit?"

Fitness: More than Physical?

The connection between physical training and psychological development has been recognized since the early days of CrossFit.

Coach Greg Amundson—the "Original Firebreather"—was one of the first pupils of CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman. Founder of the CrossFit Goal Setting Course, Amundson often quotes his mentor when working with athletes who are eager to learn the secret to a faster Fran time.

"The greatest adaptation to CrossFit takes place between the ears," Amundson said. "That's from Greg Glassman."

According to Amundson, the mind and body are intrinsically connected. Every choice to go back to the barbell or hang onto the pull-up rig for one more rep will shape athletes' attitudes.

"What you're doing is you're seeing the glass as half full," he said. "When that principle is felt in the gym, it's understood in the life of the athlete."

Coaches, Amundson said, are called upon to help athletes recognize this connection.

"What I've found is that I am in demand not because someone wants to learn the points of performance in the squat but because they want to learn the relevance of the squat in their life," he said. "What the trainer has to be prepared for is those moments when what the athlete really needs is life coaching, not physical-fitness coaching."

Still, not all are prepared to take on such a role. That's the difference, Amundson said, between a trainer and a coach.

"To refer to someone as a coach is like referring to someone in the martial-arts world as 'sensei'—a master, a sage," he said. "If the goal of the trainer is to become a coach ... then very quickly they will notice that people are more interested in help outside the gym than help inside the gym."

He continued: "The coach might not have the answer, but chances are they know who does. It's about having the

professionalism to know they're not a doctor but to give this person what they can best: compassion, love and a referral."

Joe Stewart agreed.

"I think as a leader in a CrossFit box, you are assuming the position and responsibility to help people with building better health and fitness," said the owner of CrossFit Caro in Caro, Michigan. "And health is physical, emotional and spiritual, not just triglycerides and how much you can squat."

A former social worker and emergency-services specialist, Stewart said that coaching a client's mental and emotional health can be as simple as "getting to know your people."

"Not just their hip mobility, but you understand their character and demeanor," he said. "You can tell when something's on their mind. Sometimes it's just opening the door and saying, 'Hey, I'm available.'"

Stewart always made himself available to Daniel Younk, a 21-year-old intern at his affiliate.

Mourning his mother's death and struggling with unemployment, Younk was depressed. His volatile temper



Mackenzie McHugh

Good coaches realize the connection between the body and mind, and they use it to help athletes improve.

estranged him from others, and just living through the day demanded prodigious effort.

"Before CrossFit, I hated the world and had no faith in people whatsoever," he said. "I could see no goal worth achieving and no dreams worth fulfilling, and there wasn't a damn person worth fighting for or saving."

Dropping from 150 lb. to 125 lb. in a matter of months, Younk ran obsessively, calling it "penance." But when Stewart, an old hockey teammate, convinced him to try CrossFit, he learned exercise could be more than self-flagellation.

His first workout was Helen, 3 rounds for time of a 400-m run, 21 kettlebell swings and 12 pull-ups.

"It was horrible," Younk remembered, laughing. "It completely destroyed me, and it was awesome. I was physically spent and I felt so much better."

Stewart taught Younk to use CrossFit to work out his aggression, assigning slam-ball workouts when he sensed Younk's temper rising. But it wasn't just the workouts that improved Younk's outlook. He said it was conversation with Stewart that had the greatest affect.

"He's completely open to talking to you," Younk said. "He not only gives you an outlet physically, (but) he's there for you. He's got plenty of stuff to do, but he'll sit there and listen to you talk."

Having someone who would listen taught Younk how to speak. Formerly suspicious and quick to anger, he is now more trusting of both friends and strangers.

"Just give a shit. Just care."

—Joe Stewart

"I can have a conversation with someone without thinking how stupid they are or how they are going to use what I say against me later," he said. "Because of CrossFit and because of (Stewart), I'm more open. I don't see the world so pessimistically anymore."

It's not that coaches should try to replace the expertise of a trained counselor or therapist, Stewart said.



Mackenzie McHugh

A former social worker, Joe Stewart (right) pays particular attention to the mental state of his clients.

"If someone is having serious depression or suicidal ideations, they need professional help," he said. "I don't think a trainer should be doing therapy in their gym, but a therapist and a life coach are two entirely different things. It's just having a genuine passion for caring about others. Just give a shit. Just care."

Transparent Coaching

Sometimes mentorship looks more like confession than counseling. Coaches who are forthcoming about their own challenges naturally invite vulnerability in their athletes.

Emma Moberg, owner of CrossFit So ILL in Carbondale, Illinois, struggled with anorexia and compulsive running for 10 years before she discovered CrossFit. So when she noticed 26-year-old Kelli Levek going for long runs before and after the workout each day, Moberg pulled her aside for a conversation.

"I know that this is a recipe for disaster ... because I used to be the same way," Moberg said. "If talking (about the) hell that I put myself through and the damage I did to my body can help just one person start to think differently about their habits, then it's worth sharing."

After Moberg confessed, Levek followed suit. In high school, she had been hospitalized twice during a two-year period of consuming little more than grapes, cola and coffee and running for several hours each day.

Though professional treatment and therapy nursed her back to stability, aspects of the disease remained, even after becoming a CrossFit athlete just more than two years ago.

"The idea of just working out for a 10-minute workout was really hard because I was used to running for hours," Levek said. "I would run, and then I would go to CrossFit. I wasn't getting stronger, and I was still struggling."

Intimately familiar with Levek's anxiety, Moberg offered an alternative. Any time Levek felt the need to do an extra workout, she could stay after the workout of the day—but only to lift.

For the first time, Levek trusted that she didn't need to punish herself for every calorie she ate. The evidence was before her, in the form of her coach.

"I really looked up to her before because she was so strong and confident," Levek said. "When she told me she had



Courtney Rybicki



Courtney Rybicki

Kelly Barcol (with goatee) offers life coaching at CrossFit Winnersville to help athletes care for all aspects of their health.

been through the same thing, it made me think I could someday be like that."

Moberg never thought twice about speaking so candidly with her client. For her, being a great coach means being a role model.

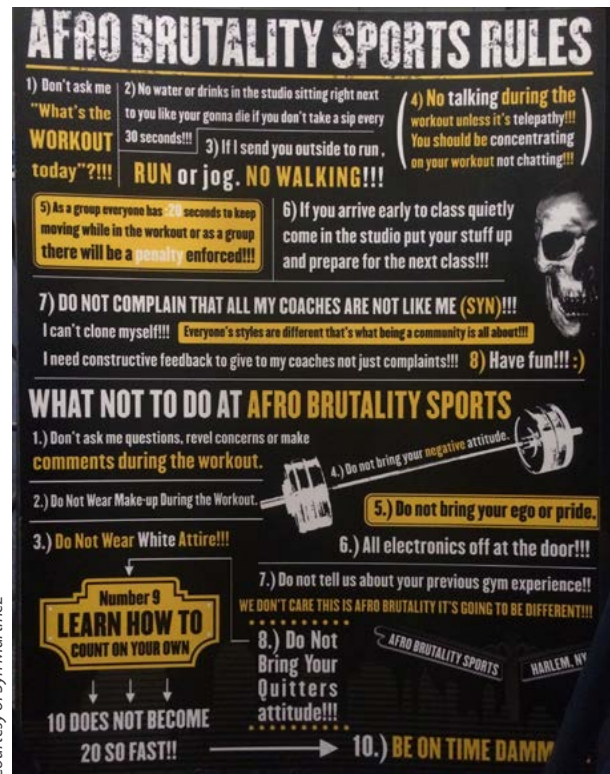
"It's the only way to foster trust," she said. "If we expect our members to believe in what we're teaching—that (CrossFit) will help them be better at life—then we need to set an example ourselves."

Coaching, Not Coddling

Dennis Lesniak says coaches should not be surprised when clients look to them for help with more than their squat.

"Really, that's what you signed up for," said the owner of CrossFit 716 in Buffalo, New York. "You're in this business to change people's lives, and you're going to have to help them overcome physical, mental and psychological boundaries that they didn't know they'd have to cross."

More than once, Lesniak has encountered an athlete overcome by tears mid-workout, a reaction he says is natural in the presence of demanding physical stimuli.



Syn Martinez of CrossFit Harlem encourages his athletes to get fit and get out, and he does it in his own special way.

"We put up all these walls ... and when you're physically tired, those walls break down," he said. "In the heat of the moment, you're physically exhausted and whatever you're holding back comes up."

What the coach does next, Lesniak said, "is different based on the coach's experience and background ... we make sure they're OK, and we keep going."

Still, there is a difference between coaching and coddling, he said. Athletes are expected to meet him halfway and put in the effort he prescribes, whether physical or mental.

"I want to help people, but they have to understand that it's a lot of work, and we're not there to hold people's hands," he said.

You won't find Syn Martinez holding any hands.

At CrossFit Harlem in New York City, New York, the workout changes every hour, the rep count rises for each interruption, and the rules prohibit talking during the workout. There's little time for pep talks.

"My rule for my gym is really get rid of whatever's frustrating you or ailing you before you get there," Martinez said. "When you're here, you're under my tutelage, you're gonna listen to me for 45 minutes or an hour, and you're gonna go home."

In fact, he's designed his program to give athletes the tools they need to get fit and get out.

"People come in for a year or two years and they move on," he said. "I've done what I can to try to embrace that. I just don't believe in people being there for years. You come, get what you can and then move on ... it's like teaching someone to fish."

It's not that Martinez doesn't believe in helping people deal with their emotions. He just prefers to teach those lessons purely within the context of fitness.

"I preach mental toughness," he said. "The way you are in the gym is the way you are in life."

Athletes might come back from a 400-m run to find Martinez has changed the workout from front squats to thrusters. Got a problem with that? Now you've doubled the rep count for the whole class.

Meanwhile, Martinez looks on in silence. Martinez is not one to dish out applause and affirmation, so struggling athletes can expect a singular response if they dare doubt themselves.

Courtesy of Greg Bishop



While some coaches choose to focus only on the physical, others work for mental and emotional connections. The right approach is the one that helps the athlete perform at his or her best.

"I say, 'Work harder,'" Martinez said. "You may see me do a high-five or a thumbs-up, but most of the time I'm pushing them to earn my respect."

Martinez recognizes that his athletes sometimes need a hand when dealing with the emotional baggage that comes out in the gym: Like Lesniak, Martinez has seen athletes break down in tears mid-thruster. But apart from a hug and a quick word of advice, he doesn't want them leaning too much on him for support.

"I'm always open to listening to what's going on with people and their problems and issues," he said. "But I try not to get too involved. I try to put the pressure on them to understand what's going on with them ... I don't want to own it and take it home with me."

Still, it's a balance that's hard to find, said Martinez, who has gathered a loyal following of athletes despite his challenging demeanor.

"I became that quarter pounder with cheese that you knew what it was going to taste like," he said. "There's a hidden dependency that I didn't know anything about. I just thought I was a gym owner running classes, and I became more than that."

Coaching Outside the Box

Wherever coaches draw the line, the fact remains that time is limited. Teaching back-to-back classes, managing administrative duties and cleaning chalk—or worse—off the floors can make in-depth one-on-one conversations with athletes rare.

"My rule for my gym is really get rid of whatever's frustrating you or ailing you before you get there."

—Syn Martinez

So when Kelly Barcol opened CrossFit Winnersville in Covington, Kentucky, he added an official life-coaching program to his affiliate's offerings. Other affiliates have done the same thing.

"There's only so much you can do in a group setting," Barcol said. "Sometimes there are things people need to talk about that not everybody needs to know."

A pastor for 11 years before affiliating, Barcol saw an opportunity to integrate his passion for both the soul and the body.

"I had seen a couple (of) times where a new person broke down in tears, not because of a coach yelling at them but just because they weren't succeeding or doing as well as they thought they should," he said. "So that sparked the idea that there's something going on in these people that needs to be brought out, and it's not in the box with the group class."

According to Barcol, life coaching and physical training are mutually beneficial.

"We can help people get strong physically, but we also want them to have a better marriage or finish school," he said. "And we can help people with things outside the gym that will help make what they do inside the gym better."

"We can help people get strong physically, but we also want them to have a better marriage or finish school." —Kelly Barcol

Athletes who are interested in guidance beyond the gym floor meet once or twice a month with Barcol or his wife, Polly. Sessions, which are held either over the phone or at a coffee shop, typically revolve around goals in three areas: the gym, family life and professional life.

First, Barcol begins with a question.

"What's one thing you've wanted to do for a long time?" he said. "From there, we compile a list of all the things you could do to achieve that goal."

It's not about dishing out advice, Barcol said. It's about asking questions.

"We believe that the athlete has everything inside of them that they need to succeed," he said. "But sometimes they just need a coach to pull it out and help them take steps to achieve those goals."

Life coaching has helped CrossFit Winnersville athlete Danielle Roberts to find balance between attending college, working two jobs and training as a Central East Regional hopeful.

"He's holding me accountable," Roberts said. "It's not all on myself. I have someone else there to tell me to get things done, and it helps a lot."

While most of the athletes in Barcol's life-coaching program come to him for help with time management and personal goal setting, sessions occasionally reveal areas in which the athlete could benefit from professional help. In those cases, Barcol is careful not to overstep his professional bounds.

"If it looks like a person is stuck emotionally or psychologically, we (give) a referral rather than be the person who thinks we can help everybody with everything," he said. "And then we follow up."

Connecting the Dots

Two years have passed since the night a tragic memory and a tough workout forged a deeper bond between Randall and Burge.

"She took me under her wing and believed in me, and I blossomed," Randall said.

It wasn't that Burge had all the answers, Randall said. It was that she was willing to listen.

"You don't always want someone to solve your problems," Randall said. "She taught me that it's OK to cry. She'll sit there silently while I cry, and she doesn't feel like she has to fix everything."

Today, Randall is working on paying it forward. A nurse by trade, she aspires to become a CrossFit Level 1 Trainer and to use CrossFit to teach others the self-confidence she learned from Burge.

"Having someone believe in me and tell me it's OK and mentor me was huge," she said. "If I can do something for just one other person, that will make my life complete."

As for Burge, she said it was all part of a day's work.

"I still rest on the fact that (being a) CrossFit coach ... simply gives a way to develop a trusted relationship," she said. "We can teach you how to deadlift and how to pace a WOD, and we can build muscles, but we're doing you a disservice if we don't help you connect the dots."



About the Author

Brittney Saline contributes to the CrossFit Journal and CrossFit Games website.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Breaking the Sound Barrier

As CrossFit gyms penetrate higher-traffic areas, some neighbors are struggling to adjust to the new levels of energy and noise.

By Chris Cooper

December 2014



Ian Wittenber

"You're going to have to trust me here. Get out of your car, and I'll drive it. Promise I won't steal it."

It's winter in New York, New York. Jarrett Perelmutter has interrupted his coffee run to help a stranded motorist: A Ford Explorer is stuck in the filthy snow outside a laundromat. Sockless in his trademark golden shoes—leopard-print

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Chuck Taylor knockoffs this time—Perelmutter pushes the truck, jumps up and down on its rear bumper, and digs through the frozen slush with a borrowed shovel. Finally, he commandeers the car, rocking it forward and backward, missing other cars by fractions of an inch. After 20 minutes, the car is free, and the owners peel away into heavy traffic.

“Courtesy of Brick CrossFit!” he calls after them.

The face of Brick CrossFit NYC, “J.P.” is a six-time world kickboxing champion who has won battles with his fists, feet and brain. He’s persuasive, and he can even coax cynical New Yorkers out of their cars. In the ring, Perelmutter never faced anyone he couldn’t beat.

But Manhattan could be his toughest opponent yet. As Perelmutter and other affiliates are learning, you can’t fight city hall.

From the Ground Up

The floor at Brick CrossFit NYC looks the same as that in any CrossFit gym: painted concrete. But buried in the floor are special springs that absorb shock, and small gaps have been cut around each support pillar to stop vibrations from spreading to the building above. At a cost of US\$200,000, it’s perhaps the most expensive floor in CrossFit. It isn’t decorative and it doesn’t enhance performance. It’s just indicative of the civic hoops Perelmutter has had to jump through. What’s more, it wasn’t enough to satisfy his neighbors, who later used acoustic studies to allege Brick was in violation of noise bylaws.

“When I originally decided to come to New York, the scale of my project was going to be much smaller. I thought it was going to cost \$1.2 million. It’s actually going to be \$1.6 to \$1.7,” said Perelmutter.

That extra half-million won’t be spent on more plates or paying coaches; the lion’s share will go to lawyers.

The Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) in New York regulates land use for development and construction. In 1991, it created a Physical and Cultural Establishment Permit requiring gyms to meet specific physical conditions to acquire the right zoning to operate.

“First, you have to show that you do more good than harm for your immediate community,” said Perelmutter. “You have to show you’ll be a positive asset to the neighborhood. Second, you have to prove there won’t be any illegal activity. This all started from all the porn happening in the massage parlors in the 1980s. Third, you have to meet all the guidelines of safety: sprinklers, fire routes—that kind of stuff.”

It’s all routine paperwork, but new businesses working for a BSA permit face a catch-22: “Do we go through the BSA process and take eight months to build out or do we try to sneak through without going through it, build out in four months and hope we don’t get caught?” asked Perelmutter. “And then you sit around every day biting your nails, waiting for an inspector to show up and fine you.”

The first step in Perelmutter’s bid for a BSA permit was to hire an attorney to put together a plan describing the actions and services of the businesses. The lawyer also acts as an advocate at a Community Board meeting attended by residents.



Allison Trusheit

Located next to a recording studio in North Hollywood, California, CrossFit Synapse started receiving noise complaints almost immediately.

Ian Wittenber



Bureaucracy and red tape dramatically increased the costs of getting Brick CrossFit NYC up to code, and some issues are still outstanding.

"If a hundred guys show up to oppose your business, you're screwed," Perelmutter said. "But if your community BSA meeting is called before you open, you generally don't have an opposing party. No one knows you exist. You don't have a footprint yet."

Brick's Community Board meeting wasn't organized until after its opening date. This would prove to be an expensive mistake.

On a beautiful New York autumn day before Brick opened, Perelmutter wanted a bonding experience with his future coaches, so he organized a workout with three of them. After dragging four rowers into the street, Perelmutter and his staff set up to try the half-marathon rowing event from the 2013 Reebok CrossFit Games.

"The gentleman ... came out on the street, walked toward us and said, 'Hey, don't you guys have enough space to do that inside?'" Perelmutter recalled. "But then he just got into a car and left. No big deal."

When the resident returned an hour later and found the Brick coaches still rowing on the sidewalk, he became irate.

"He was saying, 'Are you sure this is even legal? You guys have permits for this sort of thing? You should feel lucky I don't call the city on you,'" Perelmutter said. "I turned to one of my coaches and said, 'This is the opening of Pandora's box.' I knew."

At 5:45 a.m. on opening day, Aug. 1, 2013, Brick unlocked its doors just as its telephone rang. Though they didn't yet have a full permit, Perelmutter was forging ahead, fully expecting to be granted a BSA permit in short order.

The tenant on the phone made a complaint claiming he was disturbed by noise while walking his dog. Then he hung up.

Over the next several weeks, similar calls began to pile up. Perelmutter alleges a campaign was being orchestrated by some of the tenants above.

On Nov. 14, 2013, his opponents raised their game based on acoustic studies. According to the Community Board's Dec. 10, 2013, [report](#), residents had hired an acoustic consultant who issued three reports between August and October. Brick hired its own consultant, who issued a report in October as well. The Community Board report noted that both consultants had found noise levels to be above code limits.

Brick was [sued by the condo board at 257 West 17th Street](#). The lawsuit was filed with the [Manhattan Civil Supreme Court](#). The suit noted Brick was “lacking the legally required physical culture establishment permit for the operation of such a business, for which a violation has been issued by the New York City Environmental Control Board.”

The suit also alleged that Brick’s noise-abatement plan, to be completed between Oct. 31 and Dec. 1, 2013, was not on schedule.

Brick representatives showed up in court with their attorney and met with the judge, who was less than impressed with the situation, according to Perelmutter.

“The judge says, ‘Listen: if there’s a sound problem, fix it. I don’t want to be bothered in court with this kind of bullshit,’” Perelmutter said.

The Community Board’s Dec. 10, 2013, report was a unanimous condemnation of Brick, but not a permanent one: It recommended the BSA deny an occupancy permit until certain conditions were met.



Allison Truscheit

Coaches at CrossFit Synapse were threatened in front of clients, and NRG Recording Services eventually filed for a temporary restraining order.

It noted, “Brick gym has been operating illegally without the required special permit since August,” and went on to list six conditions for approval. First and foremost, noise would have to be brought in line with the New York City Noise Code. Other conditions related to gym members’ blocking of the sidewalk while jogging and the implementation of a communication system between Brick and the building residents.

With new noise data and the recommendations of the sound engineers in hand, Perelmutter [spent an additional \\$250,000](#) to add an acoustic drop ceiling and floor padding. He built special portable platforms with custom Rogue mats that would absorb the shock of dropped weights. In October 2014, he replaced all the rubber matting in the gym with thicker rubber and cut long tracks in his slab to dampen vibration.

“There’s about 21-30 days for the floor (renovations), so we figure around the new year we’ll be done,” Perelmutter said in November 2014. “Once it’s all said and done, the BSA signs off on the document.”

Perelmutter’s best hope is now a temporary certificate of occupancy. But a year after the original suit, Brick is still in court.

“We should have opened up, gotten our certificate of occupancy, and got slapped with a fine for not getting our BSA approval. It would have been between \$500 and \$1,000, and it would have taken 12 months before they even came back to us. Now we’re millions of dollars into this deal,” Perelmutter said.

Dropping a Beat?

Jimmy Lujan and Allison Truscheit’s original gym shares a wall with a synagogue. They don’t have noise complaints. But when they opened their second—CrossFit Synapse in North Hollywood, California—they were surprised with complaints from their new neighbor, a recording studio. The two businesses are in separate buildings whose foundations meet underground.

NRG Recording Services began complaining their microphones were picking up vibrations from dropped barbells soon after Synapse’s opening on Aug. 10, 2014. Emails escalated to meetings between lawyers, and musicians

Ian Wittenber



It's possible this Brick CrossFit NYC athlete is making a sweat angel on the most expensive floor ever put in an affiliate.

entered the gym and threatened the coaches in front of clients. Finally, NRG filed a temporary restraining order, which would have forced Synapse to cease operations.

Given only 24 hours to build a case and appear in court, Lujan and Truscheit were still able to convince the judge to deny the restraining order.

"The judge ruled they (NRG) have an idiosyncratic business," said Lujan. "A normal person wouldn't be bothered by what we're doing."

Synapse's case was aided by a letter from the rabbi with whom they share a wall at their first gym, in Tarzana, California. Twenty-five members, including a sheriff and a war veteran, wrote declarative letters in support of Synapse CrossFit.

Eager for a story mentioning NRG clients such as Jay-Z, Kanye West and Miley Cyrus, media rolled out to Synapse after a lawsuit was filed in Los Angeles Superior Court. The ABC7.com story was a surprise but had a silver lining, according to Lujan.

"They said in the interview that they didn't have a noise issue. They're picking up reverberations through the ground," he said. "But in L.A., there are zero ordinances for vibration, only ambient sound, which they admit they don't have problems with."

NRG's complaint also rests on Synapse CrossFit's presenting a "public nuisance." Truscheit is optimistic they don't fit the "nuisance" classification either.

"A judge would rule us (a nuisance) if a reasonable or ordinary person would find us to be a nuisance," she said. "But their business is so specific and outside the realm of 'normal,' they can't have a nuisance claim. It's up to them to isolate themselves."

Adding to Synapse's case is their proximity to—and shared foundation with—another recording studio near their Tarzana gym.

"The Tarzana location (Synapse Strength and Conditioning) is between a synagogue and a massage place," Lujan said. "There's another recording studio, bigger than NRG, 200 feet away on a common slab. No issue."

While Synapse's case looks good, Truscheit and Lujan are still forced to deal with legal fees, the time required to fight NRG's lawsuit and the inconveniences caused by strained relations between neighbors. Despite a friendly landlord who knew about CrossFit, they still face months of legal wrangling. Building owner Alfred Margoosian is also named in the suit.

"It's pretty damn exhausting," said Lujan. "It's hard when members see articles online and say, 'We didn't know you were involved in a lawsuit with Jay-Z.' We thought we'd already won with that last ruling."

He continued: "They haven't had any engineers come out to help them solve the problem. That would be cheaper than hiring lawyers, but no. They're just suing us."

"We're just a mom-and-pop CrossFit box," said Truscheit. "Two kids who got lucky. We're just trying to survive and take a paycheck every once in awhile."

Noise Heard Across the Continent

Hosts of business owners have run into noise issues and bureaucratic nightmares, and CrossFit affiliate owners are no different. While some have perhaps brought problems

on themselves by declining to do the appropriate research before opening, others have been choked by red tape. Things can get especially hairy when civic staff members confuse the rules. And it isn't always helpful when a mayor gets involved.

As reported in April in [The Valley Breeze](#), Mayor Charles Lombardi assured Ocean State CrossFit owner Mike Berling that he wouldn't need to apply for a zoning variance before opening his new gym. In fact, Lombardi had called Berling and invited him to open a gym in his town, North Providence, Rhode Island.

When hundreds of people turned out for Ocean State's opening on March 29, 2014, a neighbor—Jay Metzger—was turned off. He filed a complaint about the "seismic booms" emanating from the box. Metzger is quoted as saying the vibrations sounded "almost like a mortar shell." He claimed that one dropped barbell was enough to "shake my house" and keep his child awake.

As Perelmutter discovered at Brick CrossFit, one vocal resident's complaints can be louder than any bouncing barbell. The Department of Planning and Zoning served Berling with a cease-and-desist order 10 days after the gym opened. There was no hearing. They had seven days to vacate the premises or face a \$500-per-day fine.



Aaron Meredith

Ocean State CrossFit in Rhode Island before it was shut down just 10 days after opening.

"The city ruled against us. They shut us down. That happened in July. We lost the battle," said Aaron Meredith of Ocean State CrossFit.

During build-out, Berling had consulted with a zoning officer who retired just before the opening of Ocean State CrossFit. Suddenly a new zoning officer claimed Berling's business certificate didn't give approval for the facility.

In short, it was a bureaucratic nightmare.

Berling closed his gym immediately, but Lombardi wrote a mayoral declaration allowing the gym to remain open during his appeal.

In summer, the North Providence Zoning Board of Appeals denied the gym's appeal, prompting the gym's landlord, Rosemaria DeMarco, to say she and Berling would **sue the town**.

"We took a major hit. Our cash reserves are eaten up. Now I have a whole box worth of equipment sitting in storage," said Meredith.

He added: "It's 100 percent slimy, but that's the nature of (Rhode Island) politics. We will not be going back to North Providence.

Red Tape Is the Stickiest

Perelmutter is now involved with another location, Brick CrossFit Grand Central Station, as well as Brick CrossFit in Hollywood, California. He travels across the country regularly and is still in court over Brick CrossFit NYC. Still, he appears placid on the surface. He didn't want trouble, but he's up for the fight.

"You can't expect to borrow \$20,000 from your father-in-law, spend \$19,500 at Rogue and \$500 on T-shirts, and open a gym. It's not 2007 anymore," Perelmutter said.

While other affiliates' startup costs are far less than Perelmutter's, his comment is especially applicable when starting a posh 8,000-square-foot gym in Manhattan. Still, Perelmutter believes his example can be a lesson to new affiliate owners who aren't prepared for zoning and permitting requirements.



Allison Truscheit

While the odds are in their favor, Truscheit and Lujan are disheartened they ever had to hire a lawyer and go to court.

"We're all alphas here. We're in such a rush to prove that we can succeed that we're blind to risk. In a heightened state of emotion, you can make mistakes," Perelmutter said.

"It's OK to not know what you're doing when you start. It's OK to ask someone how they did it or take what they did and make it work for you. My phone is always open," he explained.

And he isn't bitter about the battle he's in. To him, it's all part of the game.

"With all the joy and pleasure comes all the stress and trials of great success," he said.



About the Author

*Chris Cooper is a CrossFit Journal contributor. He owns **CrossFit Catalyst** in Sault Ste. Marie, Canada.*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Seasons in the Abyss?

Every year, people gorge themselves over the holidays and derail their diets.
Does it have to be this way?

By Emily Beers

December 2014



Kim Bellavance

Three-time CrossFit Games athlete Ben Stoneberg is a cheater—a cheater on his diet during the holidays.

In fact, the athlete—whose fans call him “Stone Cold” Stoneberg—allows himself a couple of cheat days each week in the year, making the Christmas season an extreme version of standard operating procedures.

1 of 5



Christopher Nolan/CrossFit Journal

"I love food." —Ben Stoneberg

"I love food ... so I take full advantage when it is sitting in front of me," Stoneberg said. "My Christmas cheat meal consists of pretty much everything you can think of: turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, green-bean casserole. And dessert can range from pumpkin pie, cheesecake, cookies, chocolate."

The 27-year-old, blessed with what we can only assume is a turbocharged metabolism, doesn't believe cheat meals affect him negatively. He believes loosening the reins on his diet actually helps him.

"I honestly think having a cheat meal helps your body reset itself. Yeah, the day after eating a ton of very-good-tasting food doesn't make you feel great, but after that day I usually feel fine," he said.

If only the rest of the population could enjoy repercussion-free pizza—Stoneberg's all-time favorite cheat meal.

For most, the unfortunate truth is that throwing back a dozen of grandma's buttery shortbread cookies every other day in December will have consequences. In some

cases, doing so will mean losing the fitness gains of the previous 11 months and finding yourself regretfully singing "Auld Lang Syne" with a soft layer around your waist and a painful awareness that January will be a tough month at the gym.

So although delicious temptations relentlessly dominate the month of December, most coaches try to keep their athletes in check during the holiday season.

Mission Improbable?

To keep his clients on track this December, Kevin Cherrick of Cactus CrossFit in Scottsdale, Arizona, launched a diet challenge at his affiliate in November.

The purpose of the eight-week challenge, which he called Mission Impossible, is to keep people eating well during the holidays. To kick-start Mission Impossible, 44 athletes had their body composition tested with the Bod Pod, a device that uses air-displacement technology to measure lean mass and body fat.

One of the purposes of the challenge is to remind people to cook healthy meals for themselves during the busiest time of year. Participants are expected to learn three to five new make-from-scratch meals that will become part of their regular diet.

"That way if you get home and are hungry, you can cook fast and easy without thinking," said Cherrick, who charged each person US\$100 to join the challenge. "By the time January rolls around, shopping, cooking and eating healthy should literally be a no-brainer."

Participants score points based on how many new meals they cook during the eight weeks.

"The first time you cook a recipe you get one point, the second time you get two points, the third time you get three points. When you have cooked five unique meals, you get three bonus points, and seven unique meals gets five bonus points," Cherrick explained.

He added: "Everyone who joined this challenge has to post a picture of what they cook, plus a link to the recipe in a closed Facebook group so they have lots of recipes and reminders in their newsfeed."

Cherrick decided to launch the challenge due to a personal vendetta with cooking.

"When I get home and am starving, I literally cannot think or make a decision. My brain is out of glucose. So I make my egg breakfast every time. And I want my athletes to have a few easy, healthy meals that they know how to make no matter what," he said.

"I want my athletes to have a few easy, healthy meals that they know how to make no matter what."

—Kevin Cherrick

Cherrick believes a foundation of home-cooked, healthy meals will prevent diets from falling off the rails during a month of festivities.

"If they have (the foundation) set, they can eat crap at a holiday party and it won't send the world off its axis," he said.

At the end of the eight-week challenge, Cherrick will host a potluck to announce the winner. The prize is a free entry into the mobility seminar Cactus CrossFit is hosting in March. Ultimately, the contest isn't about who cooks the most meals or whose body composition changes the most. The real purpose is to help people create a foundation "so that their default status is healthy eating, and poor choices really are an exception," Cherrick said.

"We want to be process oriented in what we do, incentivizing what people have control of. And there is no better example of that than what we buy, cook and eat," he added.

Five Tips for Surviving the Holidays

Sherry Shaban of CrossFit Westmount in Montreal, Quebec, isn't hosting a challenge, but she's conscious of the fact that it's her job to help her clients avoid overdosing on booze, truffles and finger foods at Christmas parties. She offers five simple tips to her athletes.



Kim Bellavance

If you set firm limits for yourself before a party, you'll be less likely to unconsciously suck back an entire bottle of wine and write off the next day's workout.

"Stick to your training no matter what. Keep your goals in mind. Once your training goes out the window, nutrition does, too. And training reminds you to eat clean," Shaban said.

Her second piece of advice is about planning in advance. She recommends bringing healthy dishes to potlucks, for example. Her third nutrition tip covers setting a guideline for how much you plan to cheat.

"Limit yourself to a specific goal or a plan. If you plan to drink two glasses of wine, then you're less likely to find yourself drinking a whole bottle of wine and (eating) three pieces of cake," she said.

Shaban's fourth tip: Avoid showing up at a Christmas party already famished. Her final piece of advice covers portion control.

"If you eat a small meal before you get there, you won't be starving," she said. "And if there's finger food, grab a plate

Kim Bellavance



Eating a few slices at a party represents reasonable cheating for most people. Gobbling many slices each day during the holidays represents a bad pattern.

and put your food on a plate. It helps you put quantity in perspective. Otherwise you can lose track of how much you've actually eaten."

Shaban has found people who are new to CrossFit, and especially those who are new to clean eating, have to pay extra attention during this time of year.

"For people who have been training for a long time and (a clean diet) is part of their habit, getting through the holidays isn't a big concern, and they can even afford to cheat sometimes," she said.

If newer athletes follow her advice, Shaban believes they can avoid losing all their recent gains. And even if they do temporarily fall off, a new year and a fresh start are just around the corner.

Throwing Down in December

Colleen Kolobow is a member of CrossFit South Boise in Idaho. Like Shaban, she found people have an easier time keeping their minds off holiday temptations when they're thinking about their fitness.

She discovered this last year when she organized and hosted CrossFit South Boise's first Christmas Throwdown. All proceeds were donated to the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Foundation.

When she hosted the inaugural event, Kolobow had a simple goal: help her community. She volunteered because she had the time and energy to give back to the community, but in the process of supporting a good cause, she noticed the event helped people in her gym stay focused on their fitness goals in December. While she's all for imbibing and enjoying the holidays, Kolobow is also interested in helping those around her stay active.

Because last year's event was such a success, Kolobow brought it back for 2014.

This year's event took place on Dec. 6, and many CrossFit South Boise athletes competed. After the throwdown, grills were set up for a tailgate party featuring nutritious food and some cheat-night staples, Kolobow said.

They raised money and collected toys, and sweating together for a good cause helped people keep their minds on health and fitness instead of rum and eggnog.

Enjoy Your Favorite Cookie

We do CrossFit to make our lives better, and the holidays are a great time to enjoy and celebrate improved fitness and health. People take time off work to enjoy each other's company, and most don't want to be the antisocial person in the corner who refuses to have a drink or a cookie because of a 30-minute conditioning workout they're doing in the morning.

Lindsey Liddiard is the owner of Vantage Nutrition. A certified sports nutritionist, Liddiard works with many CrossFit athletes. Although she doesn't approve of an entire cheat month, her advice to clients is to loosen up and enjoy themselves over the holidays. More importantly, she advises them to avoid personal guilt trips.

"I'm all about letting people cheat a bit and enjoy life, as this life only comes around once. Holidays are about spending time with friends and family and enjoying your favorite Christmas cookie," Liddiard said.

That doesn't mean athletes should undo their belts and gorge themselves.

"It is all about balance, so it doesn't mean eating a dozen cookies, but it does mean eating your grandma's favorite cookie that she only makes once a year," she said. "And always remember if you slip up and have one too many (candies), don't beat yourself up over it. You won't lose all the positive gains that you've made."

Shaban agrees with Liddiard.

"It is all about balance, so it doesn't mean eating a dozen cookies."

—Lindsey Liddiard

"Associating food with guilty feelings should never be the case. If we feel like a piece of cake, have that piece of cake," Shaban said.

She believes sometimes a cheat night can be perfectly healthy.



Kim Bellevance

If you ate too many cookies yesterday, turn things around by heading to CrossFit.com and biting into the workout of the day.

"The odd celebration is positive and helps balance everything out, and then you're ready to be strict again with your nutrition because you can feel yourself feeling sluggish, recovering less and not feeling as well," Shaban said.

And even if you're left feeling sluggish for a while, Liddiard reiterated that your body will soon forgive you for a damaging night.

"Wake up the next day with a fresh start and a fresh mindset, head to the gym for a great workout, and have a healthy post-workout meal," she said.



About the Author

Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at CrossFit Vancouver. She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.



THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

THE DEATH OF DIVERSITY

Has the quest for perfect produce set us up
for catastrophic losses when disease strikes?

BY CHRIS COOPER



Food is naturally diverse, and crops protect themselves from disease and predators through tiny genetic differences. When **rice grassy stunt virus** threatened to wipe out rice paddies from India to Indonesia in the 1970s, its advance was halted when a resistant strand of wild rice was found and crossbred with plants on the front line.

Modern strains of corn, wheat and fruit are bred for mass production. Top-producing crops are cloned and share the same strengths—and weaknesses—as their parents. As a result, they might be immune to some problems but more susceptible to others. When calamity strikes, entire harvests can be affected instead of just remote pockets of plants that share the same weaknesses. Ireland’s reliance on the Lumper variety of potato was a primary cause of the 1845 famine that led to a million deaths and 2 million displacements when potato blight ruined crops.

“Diversity is our protection as we face disease, whether you’re talking about corn or apples or cows or kids,” said John Bunker of FedCo Seeds. Bunker is known as “The Apple Guy” among farmers concerned with restoring crop diversity.

Our fields and orchards might produce more than they did a century ago, but many are more fragile. Whole varieties of fruit could be wiped out by a single unforeseeable problem. In the pursuit of plenty, is our table becoming less stable?

This tree might not produce perfect Red Delicious apples, but it might be resistant to diseases that threaten commercial trees with little genetic diversity.



Roots of The Apple Guy

As a young man, Bunker wasn't interested in the history of apples. He just wanted to eat. When he was 21, Bunker built a small cabin in the woods outside a small town in Maine.

"I wanted to get away from all that I perceived was wrong with the world," said Bunker, now 63. But he needed food, and when he realized his town was full of ancient apple trees no one picked, he started filling his larder with the apples. Then he built a root cellar and started growing his own trees, pressing cider and learning to bake.

"I'd always ask permission to pick the trees, and I'd start to meet people in these old homesteads."

At the time, many Maine households were multigenerational, with the kids at school, parents at work and grandparents home to chat with the young Bunker. They'd often talk about the trees while he picked.

"I'd hear these names, and I started writing them down in a journal," Bunker said. "Baldwin, Wolf River, Collins Sweet."

It dawned on Bunker that he was finding dozens of different apples beyond the McIntosh and Red Delicious varieties common in the grocery store. He started taking cuttings from his favorite trees and growing them on his own farm. As the

legend of The Apple Guy grew, FedCo Seeds was born, and now Bunker sells trees and apples for a living.

Apple trees grown from seed aren't replicas of their parents. Each is unique. Pioneers trekking through the wilderness or traveling upriver by schooner carried seeds, and some of the resulting trees didn't bear fruit. Some of the apples were good enough for animal feed, and some could be used for stock or cider. But occasionally a tree would produce fruit tasty enough to be eaten fresh or used in a pie, and its seedlings would be passed around to neighboring farms through grafting.

"When you graft, you take a little snippet off the tree you want to replicate, and you splice it onto another tree with roots," Bunker said. "That allows you to replicate the variety."

With sharing came the need for naming, and simple monikers such as "Snow" or "John's Favorite" were attached.

As the seeded orchard gave way to the grafted orchard to maximize yield of preferred apples, the resulting fruit created a saleable surplus. But a marketable apple needs a recognizable name, a middleman and a uniform appearance.

"Over time, the farmers began to grow a smaller number of varieties that could be pooled together and sold," Bunker said.

As the farms became more dependent on apple revenue, they discarded varieties that didn't produce a crop every year. Dessert apples—crunchy off the tree, sweet and small enough to fit into a lunchbox—were favored by breeders. Apples bred for pies, ciders or other uses were almost entirely abandoned.

"This is how we got the Braeburn and the Fuji and the Honeycrisp: marketplace desire," Bunker said.

Land-grant colleges built to teach agriculture, mechanization and military tactics furthered the consolidation of apple varieties. The schools worked to standardize a crop into distinct varieties, then patented or trademarked each and licensed its use to farmers to generate revenue. Farms began to specialize in certain brands and eliminate all others. According to Bunker, this practice has a downside: Each type of tree is susceptible to various diseases and requires fertilizers and pesticides to ensure it produces apples every year. When a new disease, insect or fungus appears, the orchards aren't equipped to meet the new threat.

"Putting all your eggs in one basket—or very few—is asking for trouble," Bunker said. "There have already been major scares in the U.S. around corn and citrus; there's another coming for bananas. If you look at the top 25 (apple) varieties sold worldwide now, the same parents (Golden Delicious, Cox's Orange

Pippin, McIntosh and Red Delicious) are in the parentage of almost every variety being sold now. Is that scary? Some say yes."

For example, many of those parent plants are susceptible to a disease called "scab." Prevention of the disfiguring disease requires spraying fungicides. Heirloom apples—grown closer to the wild on small family farms and regularly exposed to diseases—don't require the same treatment. Chemicals are expensive, and "scab" is becoming more resistant to those currently available to orchardists.

"No one thinks poisoned food is better, so they're looking for alternatives," Bunker said.

This has led many larger commercial orchards to seek out Bunker's heirloom varieties to breed into their crop. Some of these trees are resistant to "scab," though they lack dessert-like qualities.

Trees can live to be 200 years old, and Bunker still travels around Maine seeking them. Through grafting, he can reincarnate a near-dead tree. But apples might be the bright-red canary in the coalmine; other fruits are closer to extinction than ever despite laboratory efforts to "improve" them.

Tropical Race 4

You don't eat the same banana your grandmother did.

In the early 20th century, the Gros Michel was the world's most popular banana. By 1953, it was extinct, wiped out by a pathogen called Panama disease—specifically a strain called Tropical Race 1. Most other varieties of banana died with it. Among the surviving strains was the Cavendish, which is immune to Race 1 and now makes up 99 percent of the world's exportable banana crop.

But the Cavendish is highly susceptible to Tropical Race 4, a new strain of the pathogen. And as the disease spreads, the Cavendish might disappear entirely. This time, there's no ready replacement waiting.

Race 4 is soil borne and can travel in contaminated harvest machinery, tools and the clothing of migrant workers. It hasn't yet arrived in Latin America, where over 70 percent of the world's bananas are grown, but many experts believe it's just a matter of time.

Florida's citrus crop decreased by 28 percent in 2014, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service, largely due to a disease called huanglongbing in China ("yellow dragon disease"). It's caused by a type of bacteria spread by the Asian citrus psyllid, an insect, and there's no cure for what's referred to as "citrus greening disease" by Florida farmers. Growers have no choice but to charge more or sell their groves, and scarcity will drive long-term prices ever higher. Government agencies are currently attempting to breed a wasp to prey on the psyllids.

The so-called Green Revolution—the practice of breeding new genotypes to increase yield in the '40s to the '60s—caused a massive crop failure in the U.S. in the 1970s, according to [Oregon State University documents](#). The Texas Male Sterile (TMS) seed was resistant to most common corn diseases but not to southern corn-leaf blight. The disease swept through the Corn Belt in 1969-70, wiping out one-fourth of the annual harvest. The Oregon State document also claims wheat harvests were reduced by up to 85 percent in regions of India, Afghanistan and western Pakistan when imported monocultural crops were devastated by diseases to which native crops were immune.

Attempts to improve on natural selection and diversity have sometimes traded short-term gain for long-term fragility. How can an individual consumer help balance the food scales?



Marci Wallin Murphy

Heirloom varieties of apples can be found and bred into commercial trees to add diversity to the orchard.



Chris Cooper/ CrossFit Journal

In a strange twist, the future of commercial farming might be found on the back 40s of homesteads where someone planted a tree 150 years ago.

Following the Market

The pursuit of the perfect apple is driven by the lunch box: what will kids eat? What apple can be picked in Mexico in September and still look perfect in Michigan weeks later? Which has the most marketable name, like Honeycrisp?

Bunker believes large-scale commercial orchards will start growing more rare varieties to meet consumer demand.

"The public wants their food to be sprayed as minimally as possible," Bunker said. "They don't necessarily have to understand what it means to be organic; they just want less poison on their fruit."

The market for apple ciders has also been on the rise. Shanken News, which reports on statistics in the wine, beer and alcohol industry, said cider sales jumped **78 percent in 2013**. It takes about 40 apples to produce one bottle of cider.

Rising interest in specialty foods and cooking has also created a new awareness of apple varieties.

"I've been working with the people at Whole Foods in Portland, and I'm hoping they're going to offer four pie apples a year," Bunker said. "One in summer, one in August, one in September, one in November. People want that now. "

Governments are cooperating to store strands of native crops in the [Global Seed Vault](#), a repository located between Norway and the North Pole. Governments also provide industrial farms and seed laboratories with grants and tax breaks to produce specialty strands that unfortunately come with built-in fragility.

The simplest solution to maintaining crop diversity might be to buy food grown locally. Transportation, pesticides and susceptibility to disease are the downsides of large-scale farming. Smaller orchards on older farms are more likely to have a diverse genome. Their produce also requires less transportation and frequently carries less herbicide residue because small-scale farmers can't afford the chemicals or perhaps don't need them due to crops that are naturally disease resistant.

And local farmers can probably tell you all about the roots of their apples. ■

Corrects to clarify fungicides are used to control scab.

About the Author

Chris Cooper is a CrossFit Journal contributor. He owns [CrossFit Catalyst](#) in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Torpedo School 4: Up From the Depths

By mastering underwater swimming and breakouts after starts and turns, athletes can maintain speed off the wall and reduce race times.

By Adam Palmer

December 2014



All photos: Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

In previous articles I've talked about basic elements of freestyle swimming: turns and starts. The element I intentionally left out was how to properly transition from a start or turn without causing massive deceleration upon surfacing. This article was written to help athletes of all levels improve race transitions.

Breaking It Down

Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) governing rules limit underwater travel in competitive swimming races to 15 m (or yards for American short-course pools) on any single length. The total distance traveled underwater can account for up to 30 percent of a long-course race distance and 60 percent of a short-course race. Mastering the hydrodynamics between the wall and the surface can pay huge dividends in both speed and efficiency, equating to faster times. Independent of stroke, the basic principles for getting from Point A (the wall) to Point B (the breakout) are the same whether coming off a turn or after the start of a race. These principles can be broken down into three steps:

- Push-off and streamline—The push-off is covered in [Torpedo School 2: Learn to Turn](#). I'll focus on

the specific points for an effective streamline in this article.

- Underwater kick or underwater pull-out—Breaststroke races exclusively employ the underwater pull-out, which will be covered in a separate article on the breaststroke itself. The underwater kick for butterfly is the dolphin kick. For freestyle or backstroke, athletes have a choice to make. They may choose to use either the flutter or dolphin kick. I'll go into the pros and cons of each, explain how to effectively employ the dolphin kick, and outline the optimal depth and distance to travel while underwater.
- The breakout—The breakout is the transition point from underwater to surface swimming. I'll discuss some key points to help create smooth transitions.



With a smooth transition, swimmers can carry their underwater speed in the stroke they use on the surface.



The streamline position is designed to limit drag, allowing an athlete to maintain as much speed as possible while gliding.

Streamlines

The streamline position is to swimming as the hollow position is to gymnastics: It's foundational.

Key Points of the Streamline

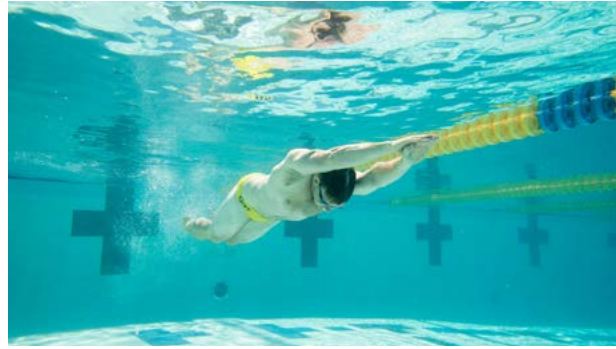
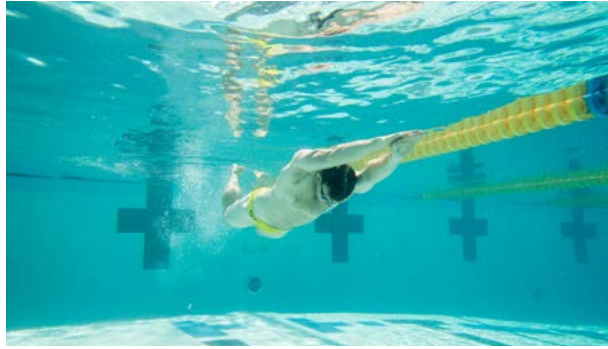
- One hand on top of the other—There are no hard rules about whether right over left or vice versa is better, but consistency is very important. Specific to freestyle and backstroke, if you are going to initiate the breakout with the left arm, the right hand should be placed on top of the left in the streamline to better facilitate a left-arm stroke after emerging. The key is consistent practice of one way or the other to build muscle memory.
- Activate the shoulders and squeeze—In a perfect streamline, the head sits slightly in front of or between the biceps. Activating the shoulders allows the greatest reach possible.

- Tuck the chin and keep the core tight—This helps streamline the body more and ensures the upper torso acts as one unit.
- Point the toes back—This action is essential to lengthening the body and putting the feet in the right position to initiate a kick for any of the competitive strokes.

The Dolphin Kick

The dolphin kick drives the butterfly stroke but is used in other ways in competitive swimming, specifically underwater. Without going into the mechanics of the butterfly stroke, our focus on dolphin kicking will be within the context of starts and turns prior to breakout.

A great dolphin kick requires flexible ankles and powerful legs. It is a whole-body movement driven by the head and core. The athlete's goal should be to quite literally mimic the movement patterns of a dolphin. With the flutter kick, the legs move independently, but in the dolphin kick the feet and legs stay together and operate in unison, acting



The dolphin kick effectively turns the entire body into a whip and can be used to generate significant speed underwater.

like a single fin. The propulsive force of the kick comes from the whip-like extension of the legs (3).

While not required, the kick may be augmented by subtle head and upper-body undulations (typically between 5 and 10 degrees from horizontal). It's important to remember this movement shouldn't be the main focus of the kick. Similarly, you don't need a lot of movement to significantly affect the kick. The rest of the body should be flexible enough to allow the upper-body undulation to translate down to the feet. As the hips extend, the legs and ankles should be relatively relaxed, which will allow the knee to flex to approximately 45 degrees with the toes pointed. From here, powerful hip flexion and leg extension add tremendous power to the dolphin kick. The finishing position should have the feet finish below the horizontal body (3), and the finishing position very closely resembles the hollow position in gymnastics.

Another way to look at the dolphin kick is to imagine a whip. Slight yet sharp movements in the grip result in a wave that travels down the length of the whip and creates a crack at the other end. This is fundamentally

how the dolphin kick works. With a human body, the effective length of our "whip" is limited to the length of our body. The head, shoulders and arms effectively act as the handle or grip. The up-and-down oscillations of the "grip" contribute to the kick through the physics law governing the conservation of momentum. Power from the leg extension (still a core-to-extremity movement when factoring in hip drive) augments this action.

As with the flutter kick, it's important to consider potential drag generated by an inefficient or weak kick. Generally, weak or lazy kicks will generate more drag and be less powerful and efficient than faster, snappier kicks. Unnecessary up, down or side-to-side torso movement will also generate detrimental drag. It's easy for swimmers to fall into the trap of neglecting the kick by being lazy. When observing world-class athletes, the fastest swimmers kick approximately 145-150 beats per minute underwater. As stated earlier, it doesn't require a large amount of head and upper-body undulation to generate an extremely powerful kick, but all great dolphin kickers kick aggressively and with high frequency. A great example is Michael Phelps' technique as seen in any of his individual-medley or butterfly races.

Underwater Dolphin Kick Vs. Flutter Kick for Freestyle and Backstroke

Underwater dolphin kick should be used if the athlete has a strong kick and is comfortable performing it in a race. If done well, the dolphin kick is significantly more efficient than the flutter kick underwater and allows the athlete to maintain off-the-wall acceleration prior to the breakout.

By comparison, Phelps is able to dolphin-kick underwater at approximately half the speed of an actual dolphin with a body wave that starts in the head and chest and makes a whip-like snap at the ankles. The wave increases in amplitude as it travels down Phelps' body to end in an ankle snap with a 0.75-m amplitude (1). This massive dolphin kick is one of the key elements that made Phelps a 39-time world record holder.

Developing the Dolphin Kick

Aside from practicing the dolphin kick off every wall during butterfly, backstroke and freestyle swimming, an athlete can develop the skill in a few other ways.

Drill—Swimming With Fins

The use of fins can aid in developing the proper rhythm. With fins, water displacement will be greater and body undulations can be more fluid. The result is a faster, more efficient kick. Fins can also help develop and improve ankle flexibility due to the additional stress placed on the joint as a result of the larger moment arm and surface area of the fin itself. Following a training session incorporating fin work, it isn't uncommon for athletes to have sore ankles. Fin work can be programmed with or without the use of a kickboard and in the same distances and intervals used for other sets.

Drill—Vertical Kicking

Another way to improve the dolphin kick is vertical kicking. Vertical kicking will improve both the speed and balance of a swimmer's kick. As a baseline, an athlete should first be comfortable treading in at least 5 or 6 feet of water with the head above the surface and the hands down to aid flotation. Additionally, this drill will be made easier by using fins until the athlete develops enough strength to perform the drill without them.

The arms may be up out of the water (more challenging)



A flutter kick may be employed underwater, though it's slower than a dolphin kick.



While the dolphin kick uses the legs as a single unit, the legs alternate in the flutter kick.



Weak or lazy kicking can increase drag and reduce speed.



The flutter kick is used in some strokes, so it should be practiced, but swimmers are encouraged to master the dolphin kick to maximize underwater speed.

or under the water (less challenging) while the swimmer kicks with toes pointed toward the bottom of the pool. Crossing the arms over the chest and keeping the body from moving forward or backward will help the swimmer focus on the balance of the kick. The most challenging version of this drill is with the arms in the streamline position overhead.

A Tabata interval would be an excellent routine to employ when training the dolphin kick in this manner. However, the intervals may be longer in duration if the goal is overall endurance.

Depth and Distance

Studies have shown that hydrodynamic drag at certain points below the surface is reduced relative to surface swimming. The optimal depth is between 0.4 and 0.6 m below the surface. This results in an appreciable 10-20 percent reduction of surface-level drag forces while traveling at speeds between 1.5 and 2.5 m/s (the velocities used in the study) for accomplished athletes (2).

Distance traveled underwater prior to breakout largely depends on the ability of the athlete. In a normal race, the distance is limited to no more than 15 m (or yards) on any single length, measured by an off-colored doughnut in the lane ropes. With that rule in mind, it can be very advantageous to travel the full distance underwater, provided aerobic capacity allows it and the athlete is comfortable and fast underwater. For skilled swimmers, the velocity underwater will be between 1.5 and 2.5 m/s depending on the stroke—higher than speed on the surface (5).

Off the final turn of the 200-m backstroke at the 2008 [Mutual of Omaha's Duel in the Pool](#), Phelps surged ahead of Aaron Peirsol by dolphin-kick streamlining nearly the first 15 m of the final length. Peirsol, the leader going into the final turn, had taken three or four strokes before Phelps surfaced. With a stopwatch on Peirsol, I calculated the peak speed of his underwater portions (both off the start and after the turn at the 50-m mark) as about 2.7 m/s, with the surface swim averaging about 1.7 m/s.

The graph below highlights two world-record performances by Brazilian swimmer Cesar Cielo. Note the peak velocity is seen at the 15-m or 15-yard mark, as the athlete has the advantage of both the dive off the starting blocks and the underwater swim. The velocity spike at the



Fins can be used to help a swimmer develop the correct rhythm for the dolphin kick.



Fins place additional stress on the ankles, and being sore after working with fins is not uncommon.



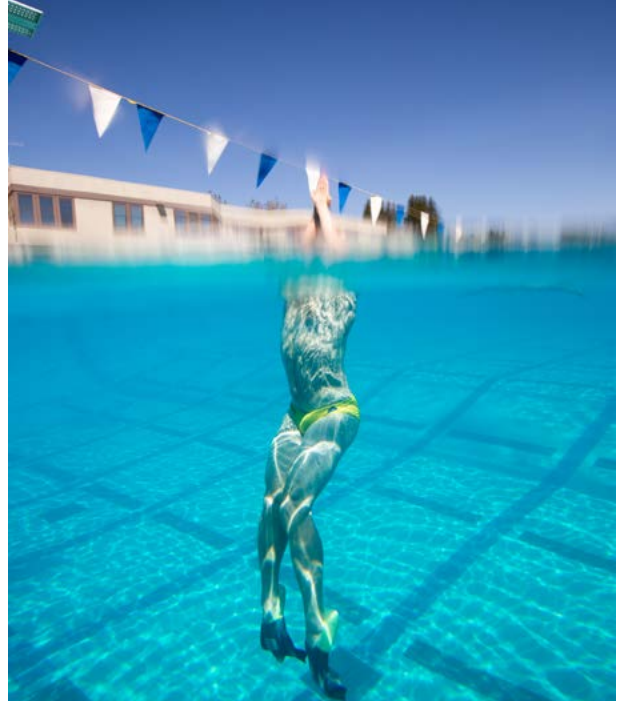
By displacing more water, athletes can generate significant speed with fins.



With a fluid transition to the next undulation, swimmers are able to carry their speed.



Vertical kicking can be made easier with fins.



Keeping the arms underwater reduces difficulty.



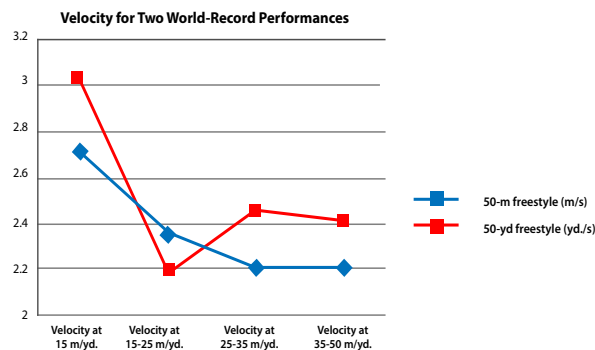
Vertical kicking will help improve the speed of the kick.



Tabata intervals can be employed to practice vertical kicking.

25-yard mark of the 50-yard race is due to the turn, push off the wall and underwater streamline, whereas there are no turns in the 50-m long-course race (4).

For novice swimmers, it is less common to see high speed after 15 m of streamlining, so it is best to transition to the breakout when the athlete perceives an overall loss in velocity.



In this evaluation of Cesar Cielo's speed at various points in two races, velocity is highest at the start due to a push off the blocks and a strong streamline. In a 50-yard race, velocity increases significantly after the turn as the athlete streamlines underwater.

The Breakout

The best way to develop smooth, fast transitions is practice through repetition. It's already built into your workout. Here are some key points to think about at each transition:

- The breakout begins an inch or two below the surface. This is an absolutely critical element, because if you start your breakout too early, you create drag. Start too late and you create drag. The best-timed breakouts allow arm strokes to optimally transition the speed from the underwater portion of the swim to surface swimming. As you get more and more comfortable, you will develop better spatial awareness in the water and will be able to tell whether you are 3 or 18 inches below the surface—or anywhere in between. This awareness comes from practice and time in the pool.
- The breakout, regardless of stroke, begins with an arm pull first. If you are using the dolphin kick during

a freestyle or backstroke race, try to begin your opening arm pull on the downbeat of the final kick or begin flutter kicking earlier below the surface.

- Maintain the body line and a neutral spine when breaking out to the surface. Always wait at least a few stroke cycles before taking the first breath for freestyle or butterfly (usually two or three). Popping your head out of the water on a transition is like putting the parking brakes on, and it creates a tremendous amount of drag.
- You've made the transition, now focus on stroke mechanics, breathing or pacing depending on the race distance.

The Need for Speed

Maximizing effectiveness off the wall, maintaining optimal hydrodynamics during underwater kicking and executing smooth breakouts through consistent practice are keys to fast swimming. Mastering these elements allows the athlete to move faster while using less energy. The fastest athletes use a dolphin kick for the maximum allowable distance on every length. This technique is difficult to master and maintain in an oxygen-depleted state mid-race, but it is something every athlete should strive to learn. Get the most out of your underwater swimming and your transitions, and I am sure you will see results.

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Timing your breakout is critical. If you are too early or too late, you'll create drag and lose precious speed.

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About the Author

Adam Palmer is an active-duty Air Force officer, CrossFit Level 1 certificate holder and the managing editor for *Reactive Training Systems*. Prior to discovering CrossFit in 2008, he competed at the NCAA Division 1 level and was a United States Swimming club athlete for more than 16 years.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL VIRTUOSITY

Virtuosity 3: Learning to Fail

CrossFit Auburn teaches a lifelong perfectionist how failure is often the first step toward success.

By Molly Dunham

December 2014



George Dunham

Somewhere in my youth, I developed the notion perfection was possible and I could—and should—attain it.

Perhaps it was my Type A parents or the fundamental religion they drilled into me, or maybe I was born that way. Anything worth doing was worth doing perfectly (4.0 GPA), and anything not done perfectly was worth avoiding (sports).

I was paralyzed by perfection, unwilling to take risks and afraid of failure.

1 of 2

Then one day I took a giant leap and tried a free workout at Auburn CrossFit. I was a middle-aged mom with a muffin top. I could barely run 400 m without peeing my pants, and I thought I'd never figure out the difference between a push press and a push jerk. A few weeks later, I stood in the middle of the box holding 85 lb. over my head and realized for the first time in my life that I had athletic potential. I was hooked. A year later, I was a competitor and a coach.

Fear of failure used to hold me back, but in CrossFit failure propels me toward success. When trying to find a one-rep max, I add weight and lift until I fail. It's only when I cannot lift the bar off the floor or over my head that I know my max.

Inside and outside the box, I no longer strive for perfection. It's unattainable. To achieve success in a workout, in new endeavors, in relationships and in day-to-day living, I do my best until I can do no more. The point at which I fail becomes my goal for the next time. My best continues to get better.

Chasing success is risky business. I will never beat my previous benchmarks if I don't take risks, whether it's stringing more pull-ups together, holding onto the bar for one more thruster or sprinting the last 50 m of a run.

"Do one more rep than you think you can," I tell myself when I think I've reached my limit.

Potential is limitless. Progress is inevitable. Also, muscle-ups are impossible if one doesn't jump up and grab those rings. It's risky, and scary, too, but being at the top of a muscle-up feels like being on top of the world.

I once read that magic happens outside your comfort zone. Though Auburn CrossFit is my home away from home six days a week, I can't say I'm always comfortable there. I sweat, bleed, curse and gasp for breath. I've even cried a few times. I'm often overwhelmed—in the best way possible—by what my body and mind are capable of doing.

CrossFit doesn't require perfection, just that I show up, leave my ego at the door and get down to the hard work of pursuing excellence. I have discovered the magic of my potential, outside my comfort zone and inside a box.



Submission Guidelines

To be considered for publication, authors must satisfy the following:

1. Articles must be original, unpublished works. Authors of selected submissions will be supplied with legal documents to be filled out prior to publication.
2. Articles must be submitted in Word documents attached to an email. Documents should not contain bolding, italics or other formatting. Please submit in Arial font.
3. Articles can be 500 words maximum.
4. Each article must be accompanied by at least one high-resolution photograph to illustrate the story. The photo can feature the coach, the affiliate, the community—anything that illustrates the article. Photo guidelines are as follows:

- A. Photos must be original and owned by the person submitting. Photos taken by others may be submitted provided the owner has given permission.
- B. Photos must be in focus, well lit and free of watermarks. Minimum file size is 1 MB. Please review your camera's settings to ensure you are shooting high-resolution images. Cell-phone photos and thumbnails are not accepted.
- C. Photos must be attached to the email as JPEG files. Do not embed files in Word documents. Photo file names should list both the name of the subject and the name of the photographer in this format: SubjectName-PhotographerName.jpg. Examples: JohnSmith-JaneDoe.jpg or CrossFitAnyTown-JimJohnson.jpg.

Virtuosity@crossfit.com is open for submissions. Tell us why you train where you train, and do it uncommonly well.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

"You've Gotta Try CrossFit!"

Referrals are key to running a successful box, and many affiliate owners have found creative yet organic ways to generate word of mouth that brings new faces into the gym.

By Emily Beers

December 2014



At CrossFit Tucker, before-and-after pictures showcase the dramatic effects of CrossFit training.

One of the founding tenets of CrossFit affiliation is letting the excellence of your training, your coaches, your facility and your community create referrals so you don't have to devote your life to lead generation and sales.

In other words, professional coaches help their clients achieve tremendous levels of fitness, and these clients naturally tell their friends about the gym.

That doesn't mean affiliate owners can't go out and "kill their own meat"—aka generate business leads themselves. A CrossFit community might feel like family, but affiliates are still businesses, and they survive by getting clients in the door and then getting them fit. The keys are creating organic, classy ways to generate referrals and educating new clients about CrossFit—all while focusing on providing great service to every athlete in the gym.

Setting the Right Tone: CrossFit Tucker

Interestingly enough, while referrals have often been considered the lifeblood of an affiliate, Luke Davis of CrossFit Tucker in Tucker, Georgia, warns owners not to get too stressed out about motivating their clients to bring friends. In his experience, Davis has discovered referrals don't always create the best clients.

"The way I look at things is that when people come to join my gym, I'm very honest with them and I tell them how hard it's going to be. I tell them, 'If you're not able to eventually train four days a week, this probably isn't the place for you,'" Davis said. "I don't necessarily want to waste their time and effort if they can't commit."

Davis suspects when a client refers a friend or family member, he or she often only talks about one part of the process.

"Often the friend has only talked about the good things, and he doesn't mention how hard it actually is," Davis said.

This rose-colored referral has led to situations in which the new prospect comes in wanting and expecting easy results but is sometimes unwilling to put in the hard work that's required.

"(The referred athlete) doesn't really understand the entire struggle their friend went through," Davis explained.

The other aspect of this story is the fact that everyone's journey is different.

"What if (the new athlete) has tight hips? He might not get the same results as fast. It might take him three months (to achieve) what took his friend one month," Davis said.

He added: "When people sign up, I always tell them, 'Be very cautious of who you bring in with you.'"



Courtesy of Mark Nolan



Courtesy of Mark Nolan

By creating a tight-knit community, affiliate owners often find their clients want to bring their friends to the box for fitness and fun.

Courtesy of Adrian Reyes



Those who participate in Fit-it-Forward at CrossFit Hunger take on challenges such as teaching others how to squat.

This isn't to say Davis doesn't take in referred clients. He just makes sure he vets his prospects properly and educates them.

"If we're not properly vetting our new people who come in, it's a waste of our time and effort and resources," Davis said. "Referrals from members are great as long as they're willing to email me, tell me their goals and get behind it. If they're just coming in expecting immediate results ... they weren't really interested in working hard, and then they talk shit about it and drag others down."

For Davis, his focus will always be on promoting his current loyal members first. Bringing in new clients is a secondary priority. Recently, however, Davis has found a way to do both at once.

"I was posting the daily WOD one day, and I noticed a member had a profile picture up. He was doing an adventure race. He is in great shape now, and I remembered that he used to be overweight," Davis explained.

After that realization, Davis posted a testimonial from his client, complete with a before-and-after picture showing

the transformation. People in his community responded to the testimonial, and pretty soon more of his clients started sending him before and after pictures. So Davis kept it rolling by creating a [testimonials page on his website](#).

For Davis, his focus will always be on promoting his current loyal members first. Bringing in new clients is a secondary priority.

"The goal is to have everyone up there. It's their pride page," Davis said. "It's a good way to show their hard work and accomplishments."

The page is littered with comments about hard work, overcoming challenges and being humbled before succeeding, which sets the right tone and eliminates any perceptions that results are easily gained.

Davis said his testimonials page instantly drove new leads to his gym. He believes it's because the prospective member sees normal-looking people who have undergone serious transformations, which helps them get over their intimidation and fear of contacting a CrossFit coach.

Davis is pleased with the new business his testimonial page has brought in.

"We're struggling to keep up with the numbers (of leads) coming in," he said.

Despite the influx, Davis' priority remains the same: He's interested in quality leads and committed athletes—athletes who are focused on health achieved over time.

"You can get masses in the door. Quality members are hard to find," he said.

Davis' screening process for quality doesn't stop when someone steps through the door. He won't even let a new person give him a payment on the first day of training.

"I tell them, 'You need to go home and think about it.

I would rather you not be held here by your money or contract,” Davis said.

Because of Davis’ careful attention to finding devoted members, the clients who stick around at his affiliate are completely committed to a long-term fitness plan. Proof of this is the fact that 100 percent of his members competed in the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games Open.

As a bonus, this kind of commitment means collecting money from clients is never a problem. Davis doesn’t remember ever chasing down a client for a payment.

“I have people emailing me asking, ‘Did my new credit card work?’” he laughed.

That’s the kind of client Davis is looking to coach.

CrossFit Ann Arbor: Philosophy and Image

Doug Chapman, a former member of CrossFit’s Level 1 Seminar Staff and the owner of CrossFit Ann Arbor/Hyperfit USA in Michigan, believes you can give your business an edge in the referral and lead-generation

departments if you pay careful attention to your affiliate’s specific brand.

For Chapman, this means carefully deciding what message he wants put out to his local market via his social media and website posts. He believes a good message helps affiliates attract new leads, as well as referrals from current clients.

“You need to figure out your local market and have local brand awareness,” said Chapman, who has coached two-time CrossFit Games podium finisher Julie Foucher for her entire career. “This means consistently posting articles that are worthy of being linked to. To manage and increase your SEO (search-engine optimization) is to have articles people want to link to. It adds to the credibility of your website.”

Another part of tailoring his branding to attract new clients is taking the focus off elite CrossFit athletes on both social media and his affiliate’s website.

“We focus on the average person,” Chapman said. “Just because our programming can create high-level athletes doesn’t mean it’s geared to that.”



Ruby Wolff/CrossFit Journal

While Doug Chapman coaches Games athlete Julie Foucher, he says he gears the branding of his affiliate to appeal to the average person.



Luke Davis of CrossFit Tucker says his priority is promoting current members first. Bringing in new clients is secondary.

Chapman consciously uses social media to post pictures of the average athlete in the gym, as opposed to always featuring the Fouchers of the world. He said this attracts referrals more than promoting a CrossFit Games athlete would.

an introductory workout. Having someone they trust—the friend who brought them along—right there helps the new recruits feel more comfortable and helps bring people together through “communal suffering,” Chapman explained.

When putting together referral-generating initiatives like Bring a Friend, Chapman always stays away from offering financial discounts or giveaways.

When putting together referral-generating initiatives like Bring a Friend, Chapman always stays away from offering financial discounts or giveaways such as free months of training or free products.

"You don't go to the neurosurgeon and negotiate what it's going to cost. You want your coaches to be professional trainers," Chapman said.

While his online presence is designed to subtly attract referrals, Chapman is also a believer in certain more deliberate attempts to attract friends of friends. One way he does this is through his Bring a Friend program.

He added: "It would cheapen the product (to give it away for less). When you're really good at what you do, it would totally undermine your program."

"We host a seminar for people to bring their friends, and we explain what we do and why we do it," Chapman said. After that, his current clients put their own friends through

And for Chapman, he makes it very clear that his best referral generator has been and always will be the quality training clients receive at his gym. Chapman pointed to his gym's reputation and his clients' results as things that bring in more clients than any referral system ever could.

CrossFit Hunger's Hidden Success

Adrian Reyes of CrossFit Hunger in Corrales, New Mexico, launched a campaign to generate referrals last year. He called it Fit-it-Forward.

He used Facebook to release a fitness challenge each day for one week, and wrote an associated blog post for each challenge.

One of the challenges that was particularly successful involved his clients teaching someone they know how to squat properly and then submitting a picture of the experience. The result couldn't have been better.

Reyes said the impromptu lessons included "everything from large orientation classes at someone's workplace to multiple classes of students and teachers on a playground to complete and total strangers at a grocery store to ASL (American Sign Language) students and signing."

He added: "All the smiles and the happy faces. ... It was so incredibly inspiring."

The campaign generated more than a hundred leads for Reyes. That said, he admitted he didn't convert all that many into clients for one reason or another—mostly because many of the people didn't live in his area.

But Fit-it-Forward was anything but a failure for Reyes. While the program didn't create a lot of new revenue and members, the energy it created in Reyes' community—and the people it touched along the way—was invaluable.

"It was a heartwarming week to say the least," he said. "And thanks to the Internet and Facebook, it actually spread beyond the 505 (area code)."

He added: "It just felt good to know we were stimulating happiness."

To generate more happiness, Reyes ran Fit-it-Forward again this year with a different focus.

"We want to encourage participation from the (greater) health-and-wellness community in our area and don't want any gyms to avoid this because it's got our name on it," he said.



Courtesy of Derek Goff

A CrossFit community may feel like family, but affiliates are businesses and they survive by getting clients in the door and getting them fit.

This year's campaign took place in October. Reyes released challenges throughout the month on his Facebook page. Each challenge was accompanied by a video explanation.

The challenges reached beyond the realm of physical fitness this year, and they were partially a way to remind his members of the larger community outside the gym.

The broad range of challenges allowed for interpretation and creativity, and they were inspired by the book "How to Make Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie.

In one challenge video, Reyes urged business owners in the health-and-wellness field—chiropractors, Lululemon store managers, gym owners—to spread the challenge to other people in their lives.

His first challenge was simple: Hold a door open for someone. If you already do that on a regular basis, then your challenge was to get someone else to hold a door open.

Another challenge was to try to keep someone warm.

"How you interpret that is up to you," Reyes said in the video. "It can be donating a jacket to the homeless. ... You could take a hot cup of cocoa or cider to the crossing guard crossing kids at school," he suggested.

The overarching theme for Reyes was using the challenges to showcase the humanity in his community.

Through the Fit-it-Forward experience, the lesson learned is that referral-generating campaigns can have multiple goals. This year, Fit-it-Forward was as much about solidifying the current community as it was about generating new business. Any new leads it generated were a bonus to the energy it created.

That said, many affiliate owners agree these initiatives shouldn't be the prime focus, and word of mouth is generally still the biggest winner when owners are asked about how they obtain referrals.

Mark Nolan of Molon Labe CrossFit in Macedonia, Ohio, was curious to discover exactly what brought all his

current clients to his box, so he conducted a survey and received answers from three-quarters of his 100 members.

The replies showed that 1 percent of members came after seeing a flyer or advertisement he put in the newspaper, while 5 percent came in after randomly Googling "CrossFit." Another 12 percent joined his box after attending a local event Nolan sponsored outside his gym, while 15 percent were Nolan's friends prior to his opening Molon Labe CrossFit in 2012.

That left a whopping 42 percent who had heard about the gym through word of mouth. The other 25 percent didn't participate in the survey. In many cases, the word-of-mouth clients saw a friend's picture on Facebook, which may have piqued their interest. More often than not, though, the greatest motivating factor was speaking directly to the friend and having him or her vouch for CrossFit.

"(Facebook) helps get folks comfortable with the idea of CrossFit from a distance," Nolan said. But that Facebook interaction probably isn't enough on its own.

"Nothing compares to having your athletes get the results and then start talking to their friends," he said. "Face-to-face contact is still the best way to get folks in the door."

This is, of course, what CrossFit has always been about: spreading the message to others. And the best way to ensure your clients spread this message has always been to provide them with a great experience. When this virtuosity is in place, your athletes become more fit than they ever imagined they'd be, and going to the gym becomes the highlight of their day. Their energy becomes contagious, and others want to join them.



About the Author:

Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at *CrossFit Vancouver*. She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.



Courtesy of Adrian Reyes

When athletes get the results they're looking for, their energy becomes contagious and others want to join them.