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# NEW YEAR'S NEWBIES

Affiliate owners offer advice on how to handle the rush when January and February bring prospective clients with fitness goals for 2016.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL



“But I’m always honest  
with them that it’s a long ride.  
It’s not for one or two months.”

—Gabriel García Merlos

At CrossFit Delmon in Bahrain, Ahmed Al-Sharaf tries to get new members to become part of the community as soon as possible.

New year, new you—now at a discounted rate!

It’s a phrase global gyms around the world know well as they seek to draw New Year’s resolutioners who have pledged to get in shape.

Many CrossFit affiliates, however, take a different approach.

“I learned from experience I cannot lower the price ... because it attracts the wrong person,” explained Juria Maree, owner of Reebok CrossFit Enduro in Singapore and a member of CrossFit’s Seminar Staff.

The same is true at CrossFit Meek in Mexico.

“We don’t do promotion,” said affiliate owner Gabriel García Merlos. “We feel like it will attract the wrong type of people.”

Still, a new year brings new clients with goals of being more active.

For Maree and Merlos, what’s most important is ensuring new athletes are a good fit for the community.

“Honesty is the first part, but the second part is that you have to connect with that person, and that’s why the ‘why’ is so important,” Maree said.

So when new members say they’ve joined because they want to lose weight, she digs deeper: “Why do you want to lose weight?” she asks.

“You have to have the courage to have the dialogue with that person instead of telling them everything’s going to be OK—having a dialogue with that person that is heart to heart instead of just opening their wallet and (saying) ‘give me your money.’”

At CrossFit Meek, Merlos has been known to give prospective new members free trials that are as long—or as short—as they wish. This method, he explained, operates as a filter.

“Some of them figured out for themselves that CrossFit is not what they are looking for,” explained Merlos, also a Seminar Staff member. “But I’m always honest with them that it’s a long ride. It’s not for one or two months. Some of them get it, some of them don’t.”





Juria Maree of Reebok CrossFit Enduro in Singapore said she works hard to form connections with new members to ensure they're a good fit for the community.

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In Bahrain, a small island country in the Persian Gulf, Ahmed Al-Sharaf sees CrossFit Delmon’s absentee members reappear at the start of the new year.

“They usually drag one or two of their friends to come in,” said the affiliate owner and Seminar Staff member. “That’s usually where we see the newer members.”

What follows is a simple definition of CrossFit, a physical assessment and then a short workout.

“So we don’t try to be too aggressive with anybody coming in,” Al-Sharaf explained.

If all goes well, he tries to integrate the new athlete into the community “as soon as I can.”

He added: “The sooner I get them integrated with everybody else, the more likely they are to commit.”

This involves simple actions, such as insisting athletes stretch together rather than separately.

At Reebok CrossFit Enduro, Maree has a handful of members who voluntarily act like Sherpas for the newbies. They check in with them after workouts, providing something as simple as a fist bump or lending an ear for whatever is on their minds.

“We might have some people leaving, but it’s highly unlikely because of the results they’re seeing,” Maree said.

High intensity might be too much for them, she continued, but the number of people who stop coming because of that is significantly smaller than the number of people who stop coming after being given a discount.

When it comes to the New Year’s crowd, the bottom line is to be honest and understanding, affiliate owners said.

“People really want to change, but sometimes it’s hard. ... We have to realize that,” Merlos said.

Also essential: having a good time.

“The most important thing for the coach with an affiliate is to (create) a fun hour ... that’s going to make it easier, way easier to stick with the training.” ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.