

WHEN THE SKIP HITS THE FAN

Try changing your perspective to connect with athletes who are struggling with a movement.



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“Do something different. Take off one shoe. Try chewing gum. Maybe lose your underwear for the next set. Or put on a second pair.

“Just do something different.

“Anything.”

Coaching can be exasperating at times, and tough situations sometimes push trainers to their wit’s end and beyond.

For every athlete who learns the false grip and starts crushing sets of muscle-ups 30 seconds later, there are 50 who require dozens of cues, hundreds of attempts and months of struggling before they finally earn a view from atop the rings. Other athletes fight with movements for years, some utterly baffled even long after they’ve acquired far more than the requisite strength.

When an athlete shows little or no improvement for a lengthy period, coaches are forced to play the long game, never knowing which sledgehammer strike will split the stone. Good coaches swing relentlessly from different angles, using everything from the most precise verbal, visual and tactile cues to abstract, “Star Wars”-style advice in the vein of “try so hard, you should not.” But even the very best of us can reach a point where we silently decide a particularly challenging client will never accomplish his or her goal.

At that point, I think you need to hit the reset button.



As CrossFit coaches, many of us can perform all the CrossFit skills. Perhaps we can't snatch 300 lb. or do 50 unbroken handstand push-ups, but we can snatch reasonably well, we can pump out good numbers of handstand push-ups, and the arsenal is full of pistols, bar muscle-ups and so on.

In some cases, these skills came easily, and in other cases they were acquired over time through hard practice. Either way, it's almost inevitable that the master eventually loses the perspective of the student and becomes a poorer coach for it.

So become a student again. When you reach a point of utter frustration as a coach, stop being a coach for an hour or two.

Having trouble teaching an uncoordinated athlete to do double-unders? Try triple-unders yourself. Spend 60 minutes straight whipping your legs raw just to reacquaint yourself with the frustration your athlete is feeling.

Tasting frustration will alter your perspective and recharge your empathy.

If triple-unders come easy, try quads. Got bar muscle-ups? Try doing them strict. Great at handstand push-ups? Try free-standing for reps. Mastered everything in the gym? Try sketching the "Mona Lisa" or playing "Eruption" by Van Halen.

Feel overwhelmed, confused and baffled for a while. The purpose is to get frustrated enough that you feel exactly like your client does when the rope snaps him in the ass for the 2,000th time. Tasting that frustration on the other side will alter your perspective and recharge your empathy, allowing you to coach with more patience and creativity.

If you've ever felt interest in a client waning due to a lack of progress, I'd suggest you're ready to start teaching double-unders again only after you've failed at triple-unders and thrown the rope into the ceiling fan a few times.

At that point, you'll understand exactly where your athlete is at, and you might find you're actually the reason she's stuck there. ■

About the Author

Mike Warkentin is managing editor of the CrossFit Journal and founder of [CrossFit 204](#).



Who knew functional movements could be so therapeutic?