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VISITING OURS

When drop-ins arrive at your gym, coaches recommend a friendly, inquisitive approach for best results.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL



Ask questions. Lots of questions.

When it comes to coaching strangers, that's the advice from affiliate owners in some of the country's most visited spots.

Inquire about medical conditions, how long the athlete has been doing CrossFit, his or her home gym, among other things, advised Charlotte Psaila, owner of CrossFit Kapaa on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. In the winter and summer months, the 800-square-foot affiliate sees at least two drop-ins a day, she said.

"Pretend like they are newbies 'cause to us they are newbies," Psaila explained. "We've never seen them do anything."

Zach Forrest echoed those sentiments.

If the workout that day involves snatching, then the drop-in athlete will perform the same warm-up as everyone else, said the owner of CrossFit Max Effort in Las Vegas, Nevada. There, coaches interact with 10 to 20 drop-ins on weekdays, he said.

"We'll still review basic pull mechanics from the ground, basic squat positioning and receiving position. We're still going to treat them as though they're learning for the first time just to ensure they're on the same page as us."

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Same procedure at CrossFit 1727, though the young affiliate sees only about five drop-in athletes per month, said owner Joe Shea.

"They'll do whatever we're doing that day. They'll go through our progressions, our warm-ups and all that stuff," he said.

Shea's primary concern is that athletes stay safe and move through a complete range of motion.

Zach Forrest's CrossFit Max Effort in Las Vegas welcomes large numbers of drop-ins, so he's an expert when it comes to making sure visitors get a great workout.

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“I don’t change their style ... (I) just give cues. If they’re doing something that I feel is wrong, I’ll correct it,” he said. “If they’re just doing something slightly different, I’ll just let them be.”

Also important: Never assume anything, Forrest said.

Recently CrossFit Max Effort coaches didn’t find out until the middle of a back-squat workout that a drop-in had not only started CrossFit a mere two weeks earlier but had also broken his back in the past. They should have asked more questions sooner, Forrest said.

“They may say they’ve been doing CrossFit for two years, but we still build them from the ground up as if they’ve only been doing it for a week. And always, always, always ask for injuries,” emphasized Forrest, a member of CrossFit Inc.’s Seminar Staff.

For Jonas Grabarnick, hosting drop-in athletes tends to be more complicated.

His affiliate, CrossFit North Miami Beach in Florida, sees as many as 12 visitors a week from all over the world—Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Russia.

“There’s a lot of language-barrier stuff,” he said. “I grew up in Miami. I’m 42. I was born and raised here. My Spanish is not what it should be. My Portuguese ... my Russian and my French Canadian are even worse.”

Sometimes Grabarnick reverts to using his hands to communicate.

“We make it work,” he added with a laugh.

But before coaches even arrive at the point of teaching movement and providing cues, first things first: Be welcoming.

“The most important thing ... when it comes to their receptiveness to coaching is to be as friendly as possible,” Forrest said.

You have to gain their trust before you can start coaching them, Grabarnick said.

“(I don’t) really jump into the arena of adopting them as my athletes,” he explained. “I try to expand on what they’re already doing.”

Regardless of experience, no one wants to walk out of an affiliate feeling worse about themselves, Psaila noted.

“Keep it light and fun,” she said. “If a visitor were to do a horrible squat, I wouldn’t go and yell at them and leave a bad taste in their mouth. ... You want them to leave your gym feeling like you helped them.” ■

About the Author:

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

Located on the island of Kauai, CrossFit Kapaa is a hotspot for vacationing CrossFitters. Owner Charlotte Psaila said she works hard to ensure they have fun at her gym.

Charlotte Psaila