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EYE FOR AN AYE

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL

Zach Forrest, others share strategies for identifying suboptimal movement and helping athletes make positive changes.



It's all about delivery. Consider the effect of the "negative" cue "don't round your back" versus the positive phrasing of "pull your chest up."

When seeing and correcting athletes' movements, the most important thing to remember is to encourage, coaches said.

"We want to give them something to work towards—not something that they're doing wrong. That helps us keep it positive. Because correcting by its very nature is critical. You're telling someone they're not as good as they could be," explained Zach Forrest, owner of CrossFit Max Effort in Las Vegas, Nevada, and a member of CrossFit Inc.'s Seminar Staff.

"Some people respond well to being criticized and taking harsh corrections, but the majority of people do not."

At CrossFit Ireland in Dublin, owner Colm O'Reilly takes the same approach.

"I want to give them way more encouragement than correction."

Rather than pointing out errors, O'Reilly said he'll note what the athlete did correctly and then ask for more.

When teaching an air squat, for example, he might go with something like, "OK, good. Now let's get your knees over your toes."

And he understands there is a time and a place for all of his observations.

"I'll try to praise as publicly as possible," O'Reilly said. "And the criticism is as private as possible."

When it comes to doing the same thing during the throes of a workout, not much changes, coaches said. Still, trainers will on occasion stop an athlete while the clock is running.

"I'm not doing it to be a jerk ... I'm doing it to help their workout," said Carl Sandridge, owner of C Town CrossFit in Cleveland, Ohio.

He continued: "I'm going to do my very best to hammer home what you need to know so you can move safely first. ... As you move better, you can move with more intensity."

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Joe Shea, owner of CrossFit 1727 in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, said he likes to fix major faults and then focus on other mistakes later.

“So we don’t confuse them,” he offered.

And so athletes don’t lose a lot of time.

“Don’t stop them for a lecture,” O’Reilly emphasized.

But before any of that can happen, coaches must first establish a relationship with their athletes.

“I find that if you give people a reason why you’re doing it, they won’t freak out,” O’Reilly said of stopping athletes during a workout. “We’ve built up that trust where they know we’ve only their best interest at heart.”

For Forrest, instances of stopping an athlete during a workout are few and far between.

“The only time that I stop an athlete is when I think they’re blatantly ignoring me or being unsafe.”

Both he and Sandridge said warm-ups at their affiliates focus on one specific point of performance at a time when reviewing a movement.

Not only does it help the coach—especially a less experienced one—to avoid correcting numerous faults simultaneously, but it also allows the athlete to focus on one aspect instead of multiple, Forrest explained. And it provides data the coach can use right then or later.

“There’s never a time where you’re not analyzing movement and developing a game plan for that athlete,” he said. “You’re gathering information you can use later on in the class for correction.”

Seeing and correcting, Forrest added, are the two most important skills for a coach to develop.

“You’re only as effective as a coach as you can see and correct. The more that a beginner coach focuses on those specific two things, the broader of a foundation they have to grow from.” ■

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



Warm-ups aren't just for raising heart rates. Coaches say it's a prime time to instruct, note errors and make corrections athletes can use later in the workout.