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## Getting Too Comfortable

CrossFit Games champ Jason Khalipa says lifting heavy takes a special environment.

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By Jason Khalipa

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Courtesy of Jason Khalipa

Several months ago, I competed in a powerlifting competition in Northern California. As a CrossFitter, I knew going in that my numbers would be nowhere near the numbers the powerlifters would put up, especially those wearing gear. But I wanted to take myself out my comfort zone and put myself in an atmosphere that would hopefully help me set a few new personal records.

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*Khalipa on his way to a PR at the 2009 CrossFit Games in Aromas, Calif.*

The lifting experience was amazing. I ended up setting two new personal records, but more importantly I walked away with a new respect for the amount of weight some people can lift, and the experience had a lasting effect on me.

After the meet and the PRs, I asked myself a question: "Did I get stronger than I was a week ago when I tested these lifts or was it truly a mental thing?"

I decided it was absolutely all mental, just like much of CrossFit.

I watched guys throw around weights that I considered heavy with ease, and it changed my perception of the load completely. I walked up to a 540-lb. deadlift like it was 315 simply because two minutes earlier I had watched guys hit 700 like it was nothing. This instantly changed my perception and truly made me believe that the load I was about to lift was "light weight."

The experience was amazing, and I now have a much better understanding of just how important lifting atmosphere and lifting partners are in deciding how heavy you go on any day.

### **Stuck in a Rut?**

Sometimes we just get too comfortable in our workouts, and that can have negative effects, whether you're rowing 500 meters at the same pace every time or always trying to hit 20 rounds of Cindy and no more. Getting too comfortable can certainly affect how you lift heavy objects in a group setting. Just as a powerlifting competition has a certain atmosphere, so does a small group working together on the same rack.

As a gym owner, I do everything I can to offer the best possible coaching, programming and community. Just like any other owner, my goal is to help our members get as physically fit as possible as quickly as possible and provide a way to sustain this healthy lifestyle. At CrossFit Santa Clara and CrossFit Mountain View, our programming is simply CrossFit. We go long to short, heavy to light and try and hit all major barbell lifts in a week. One of our goals is to constantly lift heavy objects, acclimating our members to the movements and helping them understand what it means to "go heavy."

Going heavy is a staple of CrossFit, and I have watched it help hundreds of my athletes perform tasks they never thought possible. Once the initial shock factor of lifting heavy is over, it is now time for the athletes to truly push themselves. Please keep in mind that the athletes I'm talking about are not beginners but members with a decent amount of experience and familiarity with the movements. Here's where the issue of getting comfortable comes into play.

On a daily basis, we encourage our athletes to work in small groups to push each other and make new friends while lifting and doing team workouts. Very few things have been as valuable to our members' success than the community they belong to and the support system around them. However, over time I have seen a trend start to emerge in certain groups and individuals.

At first I never really concerned myself with who went to what group. If the class had 15 people and we only had seven racks, we would simply split up accordingly and make it happen. Lately, though, I have found too many of our athletes getting too comfortable while lifting heavy. They will, more often than not, group themselves with people they can outlift or who are not at their same physical level. Is this intentional? The athlete may say "no," but I would have to disagree.

Although these groupings might happen due to a bit of insecurity in not wanting to look bad, I do not feel that it is the athletes' intent to make others look bad. It's more likely that they want to stay comfortable where they are. Many of you might also know this type of athlete as the "coaching" type, the kind who will often do half as many lifts as the others because he is coaching technique and lifting the same weights as the group with ease.

In my opinion, athletes who never get out of their comfort zone while lifting heavy will never get the true benefits of the activity and will always remain stagnant. At best, they will progress at a much slower rate than their potential and athletic ability would dictate if they were pushed a little. In CrossFit, I liken it to the I-always-do-95-lb.-for-power-cleans problem. People just get complacent in their advancement when they get past a certain level.

To push them out of complacency, I am constantly telling people they are stronger than they think they are. How else can the individual prove that to him- or herself without getting out of the comfort zone?

### Khalipa's Deadlift

In 2008, Jason Khalipa had a deadlift of 425 lb. By 2009, that number had increased to 485.

At the 2009 CrossFit Games, the '08 champ had a terrible performance in the first event, a brutal trail run around the hills and roads of The Ranch in Aromas, Calif. At one point he was collapsed on the ground, unable to move, and he finished 72nd out of 74 athletes.

About an hour later, Khalipa was one of the first competitors to climb the deadlift ladder that started at 315 and ended at 505, with lifts coming every 30 seconds. About 10 minutes later, Khalipa had 505 locked out in front of a host of screaming fans. It was a huge PR after a brutal 7-kilometer hill run.

In 2010, Khalipa bumped up the record to 535 while lifting next to Dave Lipson—who pulled 635—in Dave Castro's garage. You can watch that lift [here](#). Khalipa also PR'd his squat in the same session.

In 2011, after being unable to hit his PR numbers for a while, Khalipa bumped up the deadlift with 540 in a powerlifting meet that took him out of his element but put him on a platform where 700-lb. deadlifts were coming up with ease. Once again, he PR'd his squat as well.

—Mike Warkentin



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***Competing is one way to push yourself to new levels.***

Just like the environment helped me hit two personal records at the powerlifting competition, coaches need to replicate a similar environment in their box and in the small-group setting. That environment will push the athletes further and take them out of their comfort zones to a place where bigger gains can be made.

As a coach, I can encourage an athlete and have had great success in doing so. However, I have seen a much greater benefit for the athlete when the encouragement and motivation come from within. The mental switch in athletes is almost recognizable from across the room as they watch another athlete perform an amazing task. It is our job as coaches to provide the environment necessary for each individual to find this motivation.

Since coming to this realization, I have taken a much deeper interest in who goes to what group. I get to know each and every member of my gym, and this makes distributing each athlete to a proper group easy to execute. I have had very little—if any—negative feedback with this. The athletes who used to work together still get to chat before and after their workouts, but during the workouts they now have an opportunity to make new friends who will push them to new heights. Since implementing this philosophy, the PRs have drastically improved.

This issue I have outlined seems so simple and obvious, yet for years our coaching staff and I have passed it up. I hope that others can recognize the value in creating the right atmosphere so they too can watch their numbers go through the roof!



### **About the Author**

*Jason Khalipa is the owner of Khalipa Inc. Athletics, home of CrossFit Santa Clara, CrossFit Mountain View and Triune BJJ. He was the 2008 CrossFit Games champion, finished fifth in 2009 and won the Spirit of the Games award, and was a top 16 finisher in 2010. Jason is also a part of the Crossfit HQ traveling seminar staff and donates his time working with local police departments and military groups.*