
THE CrossFit LIFE

Crossroads of Ourselves

Ryan Carbone looks at the origins of the words “cross” and “fit” and finds an unexpected deeper meaning.

By Ryan Carbone

February 2012



All images: James Carbone

Words are powerful. They can be employed in an incalculable number of ways to achieve any number of ends. They can motivate, inspire, make you laugh, make you cry, or cultivate your dreams or crush them.

1 of 2



At a crossroads, choose wisely and then hit the rails at full speed.

The power of words, however, rests on our capacity to understand them. If we understand the meaning of a word, then we can respond appropriately to its use. If we don't fully comprehend the meaning of the word, then we are simply left to languish in its mystery.

The more I thought about this, the more I realized that I have absolutely no idea what a lot of words actually mean. The only way to truly define these words is to look at where they come from. Delve into the origins of words, and you will unlock their vast potential.

Let's take the word "humility."

This is one of those words I've heard in varying contexts, but one that is difficult to define. Humility: the act of being humble? Try this on for size. The origin of "humility" is the Latin word *humus*, meaning "soil"—specifically rich, dark, organic soil. When a seed is planted in this fertile soil, it transforms into something greater. The acorn becomes the oak tree, and the pumpkin seed becomes the pumpkin. This fertile soil, or humus, has profound transformative and nurturing capacities, but only to the extent that the seed is willing to accept them. Humility is the capacity and willingness to acknowledge that we are always capable of learning and developing.

So let's take a look at the word "CrossFit." Greg Glassman defines CrossFit as "constantly varied high-intensity functional movement." This definition is adequate in defining what CrossFit is, but an etymological investigation reveals more.

The word "cross" is derived from the Latin *crux*, which—and this is no joke—loosely translates to "torture, trouble and misery." If you've ever done Fran, this definition seems spot on. Digging deeper, I discovered *crux* is derived from the Latin *crux interpretum*, which was used by scholars to mark a point in a text that was seemingly impossible to interpret. The literal translation is actually a "crossroad of interpreters."

The word "fit" is derived from the Old English *fitt*, meaning "an adversary of equal power." We all have an adversary of equal power we combat every day: ourselves.

CrossFit, by definition, is then the "crossroads of ourselves."

In the gym, we are confronted with the "crossroads of ourselves" when we decide if we are going to push through and finish the WOD or whether we are going to quit. CrossFit gives us the opportunity to cultivate that part of our being that doesn't give up and forges on.

This definition, "crossroads of ourselves," captures the essence that is CrossFit. To many, it is just the term that defines the fitness regimen we follow, but to me it is a term that captures a universal reality of our lives. We are perpetually standing at the crossroads of ourselves, and CrossFit, maybe in just some small way, can serve to remind us of that and cultivate our capacities to choose wisely.

Words are hauntingly powerful and have transformative capacities that few of us recognize. I challenge you in your WOD today, tomorrow or next week to perceive CrossFit not by its technical definition but by its deeper meaning. You won't be disappointed in your performance, and I'm predicting a PR.

