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The Pursuit of Excellence

Ben Bergeron recommends affiliate owners focus on the things that really matter. The rest, he says, will take care of itself.

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All images: CrossFit New England

From my early days as an affiliate owner, I have been driven by the adage that the “blind and relentless pursuit of excellence” is what determines success. This stunningly simple and profound recommendation that Coach Greg Glassman spread to the affiliate community years ago was one of the original things that drew me to becoming a CrossFit affiliate owner.

I believe in the pursuit of excellence and have centered my entire business on this concept. At first glance, the notion of excellence can seem broad, general and vague. Sure, excellence is a noble goal worthy of any business owner’s time and effort, but how does the pursuit of excellence drive the day-to-day operations of an affiliate? I believe understanding this concept can direct decisions, establish core values and competencies, and ultimately determine the success of an affiliate.

The pursuit of excellence, in regards to operating a world-class CrossFit affiliate, has everything to do with your current members. It has to do with their happiness inside and outside the walls of your gym. It relates to their growing confidence and their acceptance as a part of your community, and it has to do with their health, wellness, fitness and results. In other words, the pursuit of excellence is the pursuit of improving the lives of your members.

This seems simple enough, and it is. Just don’t confuse simple with easy. A lot of distractions will tempt the affiliate owner’s attention away from his or her members.

The questions and issues surrounding an affiliate owner are endless.

Should we be using Mindbody or Zen Planner?

How can we attract more new members?

What are we going to do about the new CrossFit gym that just opened up 1 mile away?

What is the competition charging?

Are there other revenue streams we can take advantage of?

While your answers to these questions will certainly affect your business, they will have little effect on the excellence of your business.

Every business operates with limited time, energy and money (especially young affiliates). The pursuit of excellence refers to pouring as much of your resources as possible into the areas of your business that will have the biggest effect on your existing members. Don't focus on the trivial, don't focus on the competition, and don't focus on getting more members. Instead, give everything you have to your current members.

Think of it using a lesson presented by Stephen Covey in *First Things First*. Imagine you have a large, empty mayonnaise jar. Fill the jar with golf balls. You would agree that the jar appears to be full. However, if you took a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar, with a couple light shakes the pebbles would roll into the open areas between the golf balls and the jar would now appear full.

Don't focus on getting more members. Instead, give everything you have to your current members.

But what if you picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar? Of course, the sand would fill up all the remaining space, and the jar would finally be full. Or would it?

Grab a couple of beers and pour them into the jar.

In the CrossFit world, the jar represents your business as an affiliate owner. The golf balls are the important things: your community; the relationships you have with your members and coaches; the health and happiness you deliver to them every day; and your integrity as an owner, boss, and coach. If everything else was lost and only these things remained, your business would still be successful.

The pebbles are the other things that matter, such as your programming, the continued education of your coaching staff, your ability (and the ability of your staff) to see and correct movement, the ability to run fun and effective classes, and clean bathrooms.

The sand is everything else, the small stuff.

Now recognize that if you put the sand into the jar first, you would have no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for your business. If you spend too much time and energy on the small stuff (marketing, worrying about new affiliates opening up, complex pricing structures, non-compete contracts, membership software, break-even analyses, cash-flow projections, etc.), you will never have room for the things that are truly important to your business and result in excellence.



Put the members first and everything else will fall into place.



If you focus on delivering your very best to your clients, you can expect to have a great many clients.

What you should be doing is pouring all your resources into the areas of your business that are critical to the happiness, health and results of your members. Don't stress about the sand. It is merely noise that is distracting you from your true pursuit.

Spend time with your members before and after classes. Talk to them about things besides pull-ups, deadlifts and running. Spend time with your coaches. Invest in their success as much as you do your own. Make small gestures to let your members know you care about them. Listen to them completely and sincerely. Always use their names and look them in the eye. If they have an ill family member, send flowers. Take your coaches out to dinner frequently.

If it's going to improve the experience of your members, you need to do it.

Focus on the golf balls first. These are the things that really matter. The golf balls are the priorities and core values of our business.

Every day you walk into the gym, you should be thinking, "Them not me. Them not me. Them not me. What can I do today to improve my members' experience in my gym and their lives overall?" Don't think about how you can make more money but what you can do to make their lives better. Maybe it's spending an extra 15 minutes with a coach or member to help him or her grow and improve. Maybe it's fixing that broken rower or leaky faucet. Maybe it's hiring another coach, getting a bigger space or adding showers. Maybe it's addressing that "problem member" who seems to always be cutting reps or making other members uncomfortable. If it's going to improve the experience of your members, you need to do it.

Remember, pursuing excellence is simple—not easy. It's easier to get distracted by the complexities of your business—like implementing a six-month advertising campaign—than it is to deal with a coach or member who isn't meeting expectations. Focusing on the golf balls is the essence of pursuing excellence. The rest is just sand.

And I know what you're thinking: "I get the golf balls, the pebbles and the sand. But what about the beers?"

In the parable, the beers are there just to show you that no matter how full your life and business may seem, there's always room for a couple of beers with friends.



About the Author

Ben Bergeron, along with his wife, Heather, is the owner and operator of [CrossFit New England](#) in Natick, Mass. Ben has been coaching for more than 15 years, is a member of the Level 1 Seminar Staff and coached his affiliate team to a first-place finish at the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games. He is the creator of the Business of Excellence (B.O.X.) Seminar, which helps affiliate owners turn their boxes into world-class affiliates.