

# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

## March 2015

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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL VIRTUOSITY

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## Virtuosity 5: Therapy

Ryan Saunders explains how CrossFit principles help him work past post-traumatic stress disorder in his garage.

By Ryan Saunders

March 2015

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Ryan Saunders

There isn't a couch, a clipboard or a computer. There's not even a counselor, a psychiatrist or a stack of medication prescriptions.

For combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), my preferred setting for therapy is my own garage. Here, the typical scene of a therapist's office is replaced with a crude assortment of steel and iron strewn in front of a whiteboard.

While there are many forms of treatment available for PTSD, the one that keeps me going each day is CrossFit. It provides a positive and productive means to deal with the unsettling effects of combat. For me, I've found the therapeutic value of CrossFit lies in its most basic definition: constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity.

The constant variation has helped me deal with some of the lingering effects of combat. In a war waged against a faceless enemy, the danger lurks in the shadows and not on the open battlefield. The fight often feels one sided; sniper fire, IEDs and mortar attacks often come from unseen enemies. Still haunting me are the feelings of anticipation and the confusion of an unknown threat.

As those memories and emotions surface, I find peace in the fact that CrossFit provides me with the opportunity to step into my garage and confront a specific challenge—to prove myself against it by putting my physical and mental strength to the test. The constant variation assures that I am testing myself fully. In a way, it drags the enemy from the shadows and lets me face it head on.

The functional movements of CrossFit have become the tools I rely on to satisfy my need to continually improve my physical ability to perform. The unpredictable nature of combat has instilled this need in me, and CrossFit has proved

to be a positive form of post-combat transition. While the time it takes me to place a breaching charge is less relevant to my life today, my functional ability is just as important now as it was in hostile territory. Any opportunity to create healthy links between then and now is welcome.

Performing at high intensity helps me to release trapped emotions and built-up stress, but it's CrossFit's approach to it that has been most beneficial. With CrossFit, proper technique always precedes an increase in intensity. This places a demand for control—a level of steadiness within the rage of the storm. When transferred to everyday life, this serves as a lesson of tremendous value for me.

Through constant variation, functional movements and high intensity, CrossFit has transformed my workouts into invaluable therapy sessions. It gives me the day-to-day strength needed to move forward. It promotes confidence despite the destructive potential of PTSD. It gives me hope.

From a perspective forged with CrossFit, PTSD is just another benchmark Girl taunting me from the record board—calling me out to improve, to stay focused and to keep fighting.

While the couch, clipboard and psychiatrist have value, nothing compares to a therapeutic garage session.



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### Submission Guidelines

To be considered for publication, authors must satisfy the following:

1. Articles must be original, unpublished works. Authors of selected submissions will be supplied with legal documents to be filled out prior to publication.
2. Articles must be submitted in Word documents attached to an email. Documents should not contain bolding, italics or other formatting. Please submit in Arial font.
3. Articles can be 500 words maximum.
4. Each article must be accompanied by at least one high-resolution photograph to illustrate the story. The photo can feature the coach, the affiliate, the community—anything that illustrates the article. Photo guidelines are as follows:

- A. Photos must be original and owned by the person submitting. Photos taken by others may be submitted provided the owner has given permission.
- B. Photos must be in focus, well lit and free of watermarks. Minimum file size is 1 MB. Please review your camera's settings to ensure you are shooting high-resolution images. Cell-phone photos and thumbnails are not accepted.
- C. Photos must be attached to the email as JPEG files. Do not embed files in Word documents. Photo file names should list both the name of the subject and the name of the photographer in this format: SubjectName-PhotographerName.jpg. Examples: JohnSmith-JaneDoe.jpg or CrossFitAnyTown-JimJohnson.jpg.

Virtuosity@crossfit.com is open for submissions. Tell us why you train where you train, and do it uncommonly well.



# WILLPOWER: *YOUR SECRET WEAPON*

BY ELEANOR BROWN

The authors of a bestselling book suggest willpower is a finite but renewable resource.







We use willpower to stay focused throughout the workday, and it's not surprising we sometimes give in to the lure of cookies on tough days.

So let's say you've decided to give up sugar. On the first day, you skip your regular morning latte, evade the siren song of the doughnuts in your morning meeting, dodge the cookies in the lunchroom and turn down the candy at the checkout aisle of the grocery store.

And then, late that night, you head into the kitchen to do the dinner dishes only to find yourself facedown in a bowl of Ben & Jerry's, wondering why you don't even have the willpower to make it through one day of your resolution.

What went wrong?

We start our days, our weeks, our years with the best of intentions. We have great reasons for wanting to make changes in

our lives, but we just can't seem to stick to our goals.

And then we beat ourselves up, blame ourselves, tell ourselves we are weak, that we have no willpower.

But the authors of a recent bestseller are here to tell us differently. In “Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength,” research psychologist Roy F. Baumeister and New York Times science writer John Tierney explain there are multiple reasons you give in to that brownie, or the lure of the sofa instead of the gym, or a cigarette, or that desperate urge to check Pinterest instead of cleaning the oven.

And none of them means you're a failure.

## A RENEWABLE RESOURCE

Baumeister and Tierney's review of research on self-control shows us there are two things about willpower you must know immediately: "Your supply of willpower is limited, and you use the same resource for many different things."

We often berate ourselves for having “no willpower” when we promise we are going to sit down to read “Anna Karenina” and end up playing Candy Crush instead. But that is not true. We have willpower. We just demand a great deal from it.

Looking back on the example day above, in which we started out resisting lattes and ended up in a rendezvous with Ben and Jerry by the romantic light of the refrigerator door, we used will-power for far more things than we give ourselves credit for.

Yes, we used it to resist sweets, but we also used willpower when we made decisions at work, when we kept ourselves from arguing with a difficult co-worker, when we were shopping for dinner at the grocery store.

We tend to think of willpower as some sort of discrete power we call on only for lifestyle resolutions, but Baumeister and Tierney define its core as our ability to make decisions. And we make decisions all day, including the times we encounter desire, which is alarmingly frequently.

“Willpower” cites a German study that gave 200 people beepers that went off randomly seven times per day. When the beeper went off, the subjects were asked to record if they were experiencing or had recently felt some kind of desire—anything from a craving for sweets or a fleeting wish to take a nap to a pressing urge to tell a boss, honestly and in great detail, their true feelings about their job.

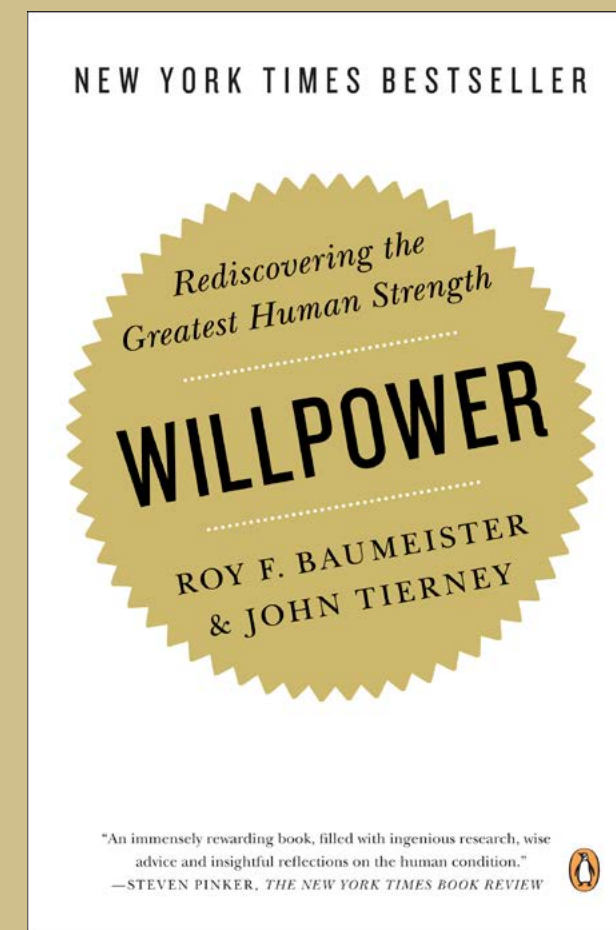
About half the participants reported experiencing some kind of desire each time the beepers went off, and another quarter said they had felt desire in the past few minutes.

“Desire,” the study showed, “turned out to be the norm, not the exception.”

Adding up those responses, the study estimated “that people spend at least a fifth of their waking hours resisting desires—between three and four hours per day.”

Basically, using our willpower is a part-time job.

And we don't just drain our store of willpower by resisting desire. Looking at the example sugar-free day again, we only



**Roy F. Baumeister (left) and John Tierney**





Which would you choose on a tough workday?

had to avoid sugar directly four times (five, if you count the moment we succumbed to the call of the ice cream). If we had only been using our willpower for that, we might have been fine. But of course our day was much busier, so we used willpower constantly—forcing ourselves out of bed, making choices involving a project at work, not snarking at our spouse.

So by the time the Great Ice-cream Showdown came, our willpower was greatly reduced: Not only do we have a limited amount to begin with, but we had spent it on more than just avoiding sugar.

This is also why lengthy lists of New Year's resolutions often fail. We're using the same limited, exhaustible store of self-control for every one of those shiny new habits we're trying to build.

The longer the list of resolutions, the more likely we are to be standing in its smoking remains on Feb. 1, having achieved nary a one of our optimistic aims. We would be much better off going after one goal at a time rather than making a list of a dozen ways we really are going to change this year.

"No one," the authors say, "has enough willpower for that list."

The good news is that self-control is a renewable resource, and "Willpower" explains we shore it up in the ways we shore up everything else about our bodies: with good food and good sleep.

## THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT SELF-CONTROL IS A RENEWABLE RESOURCE.

In fact, food is an incredibly important part of willpower. Baumeister and Tierney cite a study of Israeli judges reviewing parole requests, noting the odds of a prisoner's receiving parole before vs. after a mid-morning break and a snack.

The results? Prisoners who appeared just before the judges took a break and ate something had a 20 percent chance of being paroled, but those who appeared after the judges took that break were 65 percent likely to be paroled.

This seems arbitrary at best and horribly unfair at worst, but it shows us something startling about willpower.



The longer you stare at this picture, the more you'll want that glass of beer.

### THE SURPRISING SOURCE OF SELF-CONTROL

Prisoners and dieters, listen up: Your brain (and your parole judge’s brain) works off glucose. You need glucose for thinking, for decision-making and for self-control. The authors put it simply this way: “No glucose, no willpower.”

And the judges needed willpower to make decisions about parole. As they moved through their day, making decision after decision, their supply of glucose eroded steadily. And because they still had work to do, Baumeister and Tierney argue, the judges’ brains were looking for ways to save what little energy they had left. So they defaulted to “the easiest and safest option, which often is to stick with the status quo: Leave the prisoner in prison.”

But give the judges a little snack (or lunch—the effect of that meal on the fortunes of prisoners was similar to the effect of a mid-morning break), and they rebounded.

The authors of “Willpower” cite study after study showing the link between glucose and self-control. People with hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) are “more likely to be convicted of a wide variety of offenses: traffic violations, public profanity, shoplifting, destruction of property, exhibitionism, public masturbation, embezzlement, arson, spouse abuse and child abuse.”

Children who ate breakfast “learned more and misbehaved less” than children who had nothing to eat, one study showed. But after a snack? The “differences disappeared as if by magic.”

Another experiment put student participants who had been fasting in a room with chocolate, radishes and freshly baked cookies. Some students were permitted only to eat radishes, some were allowed to eat the cookies and the chocolate.

After spending time in that room, the participants were given puzzles to work on. Unsurprisingly, the cookie-powered students, whose self-control had not just been strenuously tested, tried to solve the puzzles for two-and-a-half times as long as the poor, restricted radish-eaters, who’d used up their willpower-driven focus resisting the cookies and the candy—20 minutes vs. eight minutes.

This could seem like rotten news for dieters, who are relying on willpower to keep them from sweet temptations, but it actually offers some great information.

First, if you’ve ever started a diet with high hopes, only to find yourself succumbing inexplicably to a tasteless but sugary fistful of marshmallow Peeps, know that you are not a failure. It wasn’t necessarily a crisis of willpower; it might have been a crisis of glucose. Perhaps you’d used an unusual amount of self-control and glucose watching what you were eating, and when your brain ran out of fuel, it started searching desperately for a quick hit of sugar to keep going.

Second, you can work to avoid that crisis in the future. The authors of “Willpower” suggest that thinking about powering your self-control as well as fueling your body will change the way you think about the food you eat. Baumeister and Tierney warn against eating foods with a high glycemic index that can cause “boom-and-bust cycles, leaving you short on glucose and self-control—and too often unable to resist the body’s craving for quick hits of starch and sugar from doughnuts and candy.” Instead, they recommend planning and arranging to have on hand healthier, lower-glycemic food options so your choices can be thoughtful instead of powered by low-blood-sugar desperation.

And planning, Baumeister and Tierney explain, is another fundamental of willpower.

### RECLAIM YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

**RescueTime**—Track the amount of time you spend on applications and websites so you know where your workday is really going.

**Freedom/Anti-Social**—Turn the Internet connection on your computer off entirely for a specific amount of time (Freedom), or simply block a list of sites you know kill your productivity (Anti-Social).

**Back to Work**—A podcast on productivity and business, with Merlin Mann and Dan Benjamin.

### WILLPOWER-BOOSTING APPS

**Commit** (iPhone)—Set a goal and then track how many days in a row you practice that habit. Daily reminders motivate you not to break the “chain” of positive activity.

**Lose It!** (multi-platform app and website)—Track your food and exercise, set goals, and reap rewards for achievements (such as pounds lost) and good behavior (such as daily tracking).

**EpicWin** (iPhone)—Turn your to-do list into a game: Chores become “quests,” and you earn points for each task, from cleaning the kitty litter to making the doctor’s appointment you’ve been putting off.





Precommitting to workouts by signing in for a week's worth of CrossFit classes can help you avoid ditching training during a stressful day.

## FLEXING THE WILLPOWER MUSCLE

When we set a goal, it seems easy. Of course we can quit smoking, give up sugar, save for retirement. We're excited and ready to begin.

But that confidence is evidence of "what the economist George Loewenstein calls the 'hot-cold empathy gap': the inability, during a cool, rational, peaceful moment, to appreciate how we'll behave during the heat of passion and temptation," "Willpower's" authors explain.

So if it's your day off, it seems reasonable that you'll have time for an hour of meditation during a workday, and when you're not actually sitting next to a hateful relative, it seems like a no-brainer to promise to be more patient with him or her.

But as we saw during our sample day, promises you make when all is well can be terribly hard to keep when you're stressed out and exhausted, especially if you're relying on willpower to get you through. We've seen how many demands we make on it and how quickly the resource gets exhausted.

Instead, you're better off figuring out ways to make what Baumeister and Tierney call a "precommitment."

They explain: "The essence of this strategy is to lock yourself into a virtuous path ... make it impossible—or somehow unthinkable—disgraceful or sinful—to leave the path."

## IF YOU PLAN HOW TO DEAL WITH TEMPTATION AHEAD OF TIME YOU NEVER HAVE TO STRUGGLE WITH TEMPTATION AND TAX YOUR SELF-CONTROL.

Precommitment frees up your willpower. If you plan how to deal with temptation ahead of time—packing healthy lunches and snacks the night before work, or having money automatically diverted from your paycheck into a retirement account—you never have to struggle with temptation and tax your self-control.

Planning does not make willpower unnecessary. But it does allow us to do something vital: preserve that self-control for extraordinary circumstances.

Analysis of studies reviewing behaviors of people with high levels of self-control demonstrated that one of the major differences was their reliance on habit.

If I use small bits of willpower to set a regular habit of studying for a certain amount of time every day, it doesn't take a heroic effort to get me to sit down at my desk when a paper is due. And then I've got lots of willpower available for the occasional unexpected encounter with a quesadilla.

Lots of tools are available to help us with precommitment, depending on how you work best. Baumeister and Tierney recommend a website called [StickK.com](http://StickK.com), which uses the principle of rewards and penalties to support our goals and allows us to choose a friend to referee our progress. Whether you're motivated by reward or penalty is up to you—a reward might be a massage at a specific progress point, and a penalty might be donating that massage money to a politician or organization you loathe if you fail to meet that goal.

## WEBSITES TO MOTIVATE YOU

**Quantified Self**—Part of a movement dedicated to "self-knowledge through numbers," Quantified Self curates articles and videos about people successfully improving their health and lives through data tools. Community forums also available.

**Mint**—Let Mint chart and analyze your financial habits. Track your spending by category so you can see where your money goes, or go a step further and set goals: saving for a large purchase or following a budget.

**StickK**—Increase the odds of achieving your goal by putting money on the line, enlisting a referee to keep you honest and inviting friends for support





When you're engaged in your work and derive great satisfaction from it, the lure of Facebook and Twitter is less powerful.

But if you don't like the idea of carrots and sticks, there's another school of thought. Daniel Pink, author of "Drive" (Riverhead Books, 2009), argues outsourcing our motivation to external factors might actually work against us. Pink believes that while extrinsic sources of motivation (paying children for good grades, offering prizes as incentives at work) might encourage us to work harder for short amounts of time, they remove any intrinsic drive we have to excel as a matter of personal achievement, short-circuit our creativity and "can reduce a person's longer-term motivation to continue the project."

Instead, Pink argues, we need to figure out ways to help people motivate themselves to excel. Pure, internal motivation, he believes, drives us to achieve the most. Our willpower is taxed less because we truly want to realize our goals, so the decisions don't drain us as much.

So maybe as adults we can figure out how to master our self-control for a higher purpose, but if Pink is right and carrots and sticks aren't the best way to strengthen our willpower, how can we teach our kids to learn to control themselves?

## ***RAISING CHILDREN WITH SELF-CONTROL***

Amy Chua's "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" (Penguin Books, 2011) ignited a firestorm of controversy when it was published. Chua, a Chinese-American Yale professor and mother of two daughters, wrote about her "Chinese parenting" style. Her rules for her daughters included no sleepovers, no play dates and up to three hours of music practice per day starting at the age of 5. The book also included an oft-quoted episode in which Chua rejected a handmade birthday card from her daughter, stating it was not her best work and demanding the child redo it.

While some of Chua's parenting strategies seemed shocking or cruel to Western parents, her children indeed turned out to be quite successful. Chua describes her method this way: "Chinese parents have two things over their Western counterparts: (1) higher dreams for their children, and (2) higher regard for their children in the sense of knowing how much (direction and criticism) they can take."

But Baumeister and Tierney take a different view: "Forget about self-esteem. Work on self-control."

There's a great deal of cultural discussion about children's self-esteem, but research discussed in "Willpower" demonstrates self-esteem is a byproduct of success, not the other way around. And that success comes, at least partially, from good habits of self-control.





Dave Re/ CrossFit Journal

According to the authors of “Willpower,” continually focusing on certain tasks can help train the “self-control muscle.”

The fact that Chua’s parenting cornerstones—“set clear goals, enforce rules, punish failure, reward excellence”—paid off is not surprising. Children, like adults, have the ability to strengthen their willpower through regular use and development of habit.

“Anything that forces children to exercise their self-control muscle,” “Willpower’s” authors argue, “can be helpful: taking music lessons, memorizing poems, saying prayers, minding their table manners, avoiding the use of profanity, writing thank-you notes.”

That doesn’t mean there is no room for childhood in children’s lives. Some valuable tools for mastering willpower can be found in play, from creating and sustaining an imaginary game of pretend to the discipline of sports to video games.

Wait. Video games? It’s true. Baumeister and Tierney think we have much to learn from game designers.

“They’ve refined the basic steps of self-control: setting clear and attainable goals, giving instantaneous feedback, and offering enough encouragement for people to keep practicing and improving.”

But however they learn it, children whose practice of self-control has given them a strong willpower muscle are ahead of the rest of us. They’ve developed good habits and therefore don’t have to rely on willpower as often. When they do need it, they haven’t depleted the store by using it on small decisions they could have made automatically through force of habit.

Just like adults, children have that single, depletable store of willpower they must learn to manage. And if we give them the same understanding of its pitfalls and powers, they can reap its benefits throughout their lives.

But just because we didn’t know the secrets of willpower all along doesn’t mean we can’t learn to use it better now.

### ***GIVE YOURSELF A CHANCE TO SUCCEED***

The authors of “Willpower” have four basic recommendations on learning to manage your self-control:

1. Use your willpower wisely—“to develop effective habits and routines in school and at work”—rather than calling on it to get you through one self-made crisis after another.
2. Know your limits. Remember, the “supply of willpower is limited, and you use the same resource for many different things.”
3. Recognize when you’re burned out. If you’ve been making lots of decisions and now you’re paralyzed by something simple, give your willpower a rest. “Get some healthy food into your body, wait half an hour, and then the decision won’t seem so overwhelming.”
4. Make plans, but make reasonable plans. “Leave some flexibility and anticipate setbacks.” And be honest: “Force yourself to think about your past.” If a weekly reward system hasn’t worked for you in the past, try something new this time.
5. And, perhaps most importantly, be gentle with yourself. Self-flagellation over breaking down and having a cigarette or a bowl—OK, a pint—of ice cream after a tough day gets you nowhere. Determine what went wrong, eat some healthy food, get a good night’s sleep and make a solid plan for the next day.

Willpower can be our most powerful secret weapon. We just have to learn to use it. ■

### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***



Joe Henson NYC

Eleanor Brown is the New York Times and international best-selling author of the novel “The Weird Sisters,” and of the fitness inspiration book “WOD Motivation.” She has been doing CrossFit for three years and trains at CrossFit Modig in Highlands Ranch, Colorado.

### **ADDITIONAL READING**

“Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity” by David Allen

“The War of Art” by Steven Pressfield

“Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother” by Amy Chua

“Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us” by Daniel Pink



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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## “Above-the-Neck Fitness”

CrossFit King of Prussia finds success with SAT-prep program.

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By Andréa Maria Cecil

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Tatiana Lumiere Photography

He arrived a shy teenager. Skinny, hunched over, head hung, knees caving.

Today, things are different.

“Now he’s head high, ‘I can squat, I can lift weights, I can hold my own,’” Aimee Lyons said of Carter Buce. Lyons owns CrossFit King of Prussia in Pennsylvania.

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Aimee Lyons

***At CrossFit King of Prussia, tutors help students with subjects such as math, but they also address topics such as time management and test-taking strategies.***

But the 17-year-old is not just physically improved. He's also mentally improved. After participating in CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program, Buce gained 250 points on his SATs to finish in the 98th percentile. A percentile indicates the percentage of other test takers with lower scores, and scoring in the 99.93rd or 99.98th percentile indicates a near-perfect score.

"He was able to ... see that putting in the work pays off," said Nate Rieder, Buce's tutor who helped him prepare for the standardized test via two-hour sessions at the affiliate.

Initially, Buce—who had already scored in the 89th percentile on the SAT—had the mindset that he knew the material, only got a few questions wrong and couldn't do much about it, Rieder indicated.

After working together, Rieder said Buce "began to see that with experience comes even better results."

Buce was one of two teenagers who took part in CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program, which emerged in 2012 at the encouragement of CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO Greg Glassman.

Glassman has said it's equally important to be physically strong and possess "above-the-neck fitness."

### **The New Program**

The affiliate introduced the program simply: word of mouth and via its blog. Its first unwitting participants came from Upper Marion High School's male crew team. The team was already taking classes at CrossFit King of Prussia to supplement its sport-specific training, so Lyons decided it would be a good option with which to start the program.

It began just with post-workout homework help.

"We basically had them stay after (and told them), 'So this is part of the program now,'" Lyons recalled with a laugh.

That encompassed 45 minutes dedicated to the CrossFit class, followed by one hour of tutoring. With the help of CrossFit King of Prussia's first tutor, Patrick Burling, members of the crew team got help with vocabulary, math, study skills, time management, memory skills, stress management and test-taking strategies, as well as SAT and ACT prep when needed, Lyons said.



As expected, the teenagers weren't exactly elated at the prospect of lengthening their day for additional schoolwork. Still, a handful stuck around for the help. Eventually, Lyons began asking who was preparing for the SATs. Buce and his friend Austin Chui showed up to work with Burling, a school counselor at Phase 4 Learning Centers, an alternative school in Philadelphia; he was the boyfriend of a CrossFit King of Prussia member. Both teenagers were part of CrossFit King of Prussia's Steve's Club program for at-risk youth.

"I was pretty excited for it because the first time I took the SATs, I didn't have that high of a score," Chui said.

The 18-year-old first scored in the 30th percentile on the test. After the tutoring at CrossFit King of Prussia, he gained 160 points to raise him to the 50th percentile.

"I saw it as a way to help myself get ... further in the future, I guess," Chui added.

For Buce, it was a sure-fire way to get him to prepare.

"I knew that if I didn't have a designated class to go to I wouldn't end up studying on my (own). And I thought that

if I want to get to a good college, I would need some sort of help with my SAT scores."

Thus far, the high-school senior has applied to three schools: Carnegie Mellon, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York and Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. He plans to major in computer science.

Like Buce, Chui is a senior who graduates in June. He's planning on college and has applied to one school: Rochester Institute of Technology. He plans to apply to more and, once there, likely major in computer science, as well.

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**"I definitely saw an  
improvement in my scores."**

**—Carter Buce**

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Tatiana Lumiere Photography

*Austin Chui's SAT scores rose from the 30th to the 50th percentile after he was tutored at CrossFit King of Prussia.*



Aimee Lyons

***CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program confronts two prevalent problems: childhood obesity and high-school dropout rates.***

"It was fun and helpful," Chui said of CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program. "It helped build my strength, and I guess it sort of helped me in school."

Buce said as much, too.

"I definitely could tell I was getting stronger 'cause I started getting a lot better ... rowing times," he said. "It made me kind of feel better about myself because I was more confident and it made me have fun in exercising."

And, Buce added, "I definitely saw an improvement in my scores and ... learned to study better."

### **Better Students, Better People**

For his part, Rieder—an athlete at CrossFit South Philly—said CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program tackles two pervasive problems: childhood obesity and high-school dropout rates.

"Education and fitness are two things that kids are lacking," said Rieder, who came to be CrossFit King of Prussia's second tutor after attending a Level 1 Certificate Course in early 2014 at the affiliate. By the spring of the same year, he was tutoring Buce and Chui.

He continued: "It just seemed like a great pairing of services. ... You talk about the benefit that people get from CrossFit other than working out, the community outreach, all that—Aimee wanted to help them."

And, Rieder noted, although it was Lyons leading the efforts at her affiliate, the program was voluntary. No one forced Buce or Chui to show up.

"They definitely came around to it and put the effort in," Rieder said.

The environment helped, Lyons said.

"It's a testament to the community that we have here, too, that has kept them coming back."



### **About the Author**

Andréa Maria Cecil is a CrossFit Journal staff writer and editor.



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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Fair-Trade Fitness?

Bartering seems like a great idea, but many affiliate owners warn that caution is required if you want to avoid trading a well-fed pig for an emaciated chicken.

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By Emily Beers

March 2015

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Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

When it comes to philosophies about bartering, affiliate owners are all over the map. And so is their bartering. Some do it all the time and have never had a bad experience, while others are more cautious.

One affiliate owner admitted to bartering his coaching services for everything under the sun: a deck, a fence, a home sound system and construction work by a handyman. Similarly, others have bartered for mechanical work on their vehicles, a remodeled kitchen, advertising, printing services, power washing, computers, food products and even 1,000 lb. of dumbbells.

Services were swapped for sand for a volleyball court in one odd deal, while more common arrangements include chiropractic or massage sessions, as well as gym equipment such as plyometric boxes and rigs.

While some trades go well, others fail. Experienced affiliate owners agree that successful bartering requires a clearly defined arrangement in which the right people trade the right products and services.

### The Right People

The most common trade seems to be bartering for cleaning services.

Joshua Godfrey of CrossFit Grace in Boiling Springs, South Carolina, regrets ever having traded a membership for cleaning services at his gym. Godfrey used to clean his gym himself after each class and after each day, and he'd do more detailed cleaning on the weekends.

"But my wife and I needed a break from having to thoroughly clean the place weekly. We have a 1-year-old, and that time was valuable family time to us," Godfrey said of why he started to seek a new cleaning option.

"So we bartered with a young college student who struggled with money. He actually approached us about cleaning the gym," Godfrey said.

Godfrey didn't know the student well, but it seemed like a good opportunity. The student agreed to clean the gym twice a month and would receive 50 percent off his monthly membership in return.

The student cleaned one weekend and did a good job, but Godfrey said the work took much longer than it should have. And when it came time to pay his reduced membership fee, the student procrastinated. Godfrey reminded him a couple of times but was only given excuses.

Although the student never cleaned again and never paid his fee, he continued attending classes for a while until he eventually stopped coming altogether. For Godfrey, the



Courtesy of Joshua Godfrey

***Joshua Godfrey, his wife and child had to resume their cleaning duties after a barter-gone-bad at CrossFit Grace.***

attempt at bartering was more of a temporary annoyance than a huge loss, but the experience left a sour taste in his mouth.

"Although this bartering example gone wrong isn't that bad and could have been much worse, we did learn some things from this situation," Godfrey said. "We learned to be very careful when making agreements with anyone."

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**"My biggest advice to those considering bartering is to be careful who you are bartering with."**

**—Joshua Godfrey**

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Courtesy of Brian Costello

***Affiliate owner Brian Costello (left) recommends specifying exact terms when bartering.***

In Manhattan, Kansas, Christina Spencer of Junction City CrossFit had a much better experience bartering for cleaning services. The client who cleans the affiliate is a longtime member, a mother of two and the wife of a soldier, so the family appreciates any cash savings. For Spencer, this trusted female client was the perfect candidate.

"She comes in three days a week to clean. She gets unlimited membership in return," Spencer said, adding that she has a similar deal in place with another longtime member, who helps with billing and paperwork. Both arrangements are working well and help Spencer's business stay clean and organized.

After learning his lesson with the struggling student, Godfrey now agrees with Spencer's approach: Only barter with members with whom you have a solid relationship.

"We have people with different skills, backgrounds and connections that can be very useful to us, and it gives those particular members a sense of contribution to their gym," said Godfrey, who has traded with members for construction of boxes and rigs, as well as for graphic design and marketing help.

"My biggest advice to those considering bartering is to be careful who you are bartering with, what you are bartering for, and don't put yourself into a position where you are assuming all the risk," he said.

### **The Right Agreement**

Without a clear bartering agreement, the following situation has arisen at more than a handful of affiliates:

One of your members agrees to clean the gym or take pictures for your Facebook page in exchange for his monthly membership dues. Then one month, he becomes unexpectedly busy at work for three weeks and only shows up for one workout. And because he hasn't used his membership much, he figures he doesn't need to clean or take pictures until he returns to the gym on a more regular basis. He doesn't communicate, leaving you with a dirty gym or a bland Facebook page. Ultimately, you're left high and dry.

Because of this pitfall, Brian Costello of CrossFit Long Island in Yaphank, New York, avoids bartering as much as possible. He suggests that if you do choose to barter, make sure you are specific about the terms. It's easier if you're trading something like a month of group classes for three

plyometric boxes. It's tougher when you're trading for things such as cleaning services and website upkeep, as it's harder to know exactly how many hours of work these services will require.

And when something feels wrong and you sense you're getting the bad end of a trade, confronting the person is never fun or easy, Costello explained.

"If the client isn't holding up their end of the bargain, it puts me in a tough situation," he said. "I would feel uncomfortable speaking to them like an employee or demanding better service."

He added: "Of course, very clear guidelines and expectations can prevent (negative outcomes), but in my experience barterers are usually more informal."

Some affiliate owners use contracts to make everything crystal clear. But most times, owners and clients are friends, and it can feel weird and awkward—like you're drafting a prenuptial agreement—when you hand someone you trust a piece of paper to ensure he'll show up twice a week to scrub your toilets and wipe down your pull-up bars. But

even if a friendship is in place, it's still important that both parties know exactly what's expected.

Because of these difficulties, and because Costello believes valuable services shouldn't be discounted, he generally shies away from most trades.

"I like people to respect my prices and service, so I try to show the same respect for them," Costello explained. "I like to think my service is professional, unique and fairly priced. If one of my clients provides a service, they probably feel the same way."

Recently, Costello had the opportunity to barter with one of his coaches to take professional photos for his website. But he chose not to.

"The first thing I asked her is what she normally charges for this service, and that's what I will pay. I'm sure it's fair, and I want to see her business succeed," he said.

### The Right Deal

Jeff Licciardi of CrossFit Amoskeag in Bedford, New Hampshire, has found a way to make bartering work. "I do



Courtesy of Jeff Licciardi

***Jeff Licciardi of CrossFit Amoskeag (center, in orange) restricts his trades to services that will directly aid the development of his business.***



it a lot more than I realize," he said, referring to trades for anything from construction to cleaning.

The key for him is to keep trades strictly related to the development of his business. He's heard of other owners trading for personal luxuries such as haircuts and home renovations, but this isn't his approach. If it makes his gym function better, he's into it. If it provides better service to his members, he's into it. If it will help his business grow, he's into it.

"I keep it to stuff directly related to members and the facility," Licciardi said.

Like many box owners, Licciardi bartered for painting as well as flooring when he was building his gym.

"Anyone who did a tremendous amount of work, I gave them a certain amount of free classes—six months of classes—and it worked out really well," he said. "It was all people I knew."

Recently, Licciardi became acquainted with a group of strongman competitors who wanted to both store their equipment and train at his gym. He decided to allow it if the athletes opened up their training and equipment to his current members.

"It's working out great. We're kind of a big stay-at-home-mom gym. The 9-a.m. class is packed after the moms drop their kids off at school. So I was kind of surprised how many people showed up to throw stones around," Licciardi said.

Licciardi also barter with a local radio station.

Instead of paying for advertising, Licciardi is putting one of the on-air radio personalities through a long-term fitness challenge. In return, the talk-show host explains how CrossFit is helping him. Licciardi will also get a chance to go on air and talk about his business in the upcoming months.

For Licciardi, bartering doesn't have to be about trading a service for a service. Most recently, he called a Lululemon store in an attempt to forge a business relationship.

"They're going to pack up their store one night and open it in our gym, and in exchange we'll get a percentage of revenue of their sales," he said.

For Licciardi, bartering is as much about creating healthy partnership agreements with quality people as it is about receiving something specific. Ultimately, he wants to create potential growth for his business and community.



Courtesy of Joe Vaughn

***Coach Steve Hicks spots an athlete at CrossFit Mousetrap. Owner Joe Vaughn utilizes a reimbursement method when he barter with clients, which gives him leverage if someone doesn't deliver.***

## Insuring the Deal

Joe Vaughn of CrossFit Mousetrap in Orlando, Florida, has another tip for bartering.

"Use a reimbursement method," he suggested. This method means the person will pay his or her bills up front, and Vaughn will reimburse the client at the end of the month if all goods and services are delivered as agreed upon.

He explained this provides additional leverage for the business owner if the other person doesn't hold up his or her end of the deal. For added insurance, Vaughn also makes those he reimburses sign a contract.

Currently, Vaughn employs this tactic with two intern coaches whose duties involve helping out with 15 classes a month in return for a membership. Not only does the agreement help the interns pay for their memberships, but it also helps classes run smoothly because there's a second set of eyes on the floor. And the system is easy to reverse if it's not working out.

"If a person decides coaching isn't for them, it's easy to transition them back into being a regular member," Vaughn said.

He does the same thing with a massage therapist who provides one massage service per week for a membership.

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**"It's about the psychology.  
When that charge goes through  
their account every month,  
it motivates them to hold up  
their end of the deal."**

**—Joe Vaughn on reimbursement  
methods of bartering**

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Like others, Vaughn learned about bartering the hard way. He once traded a membership with a college student who agreed to clean the gym. The story is a familiar one:

"I gave her a key. She cleaned the gym around her schedule. Soon, she started not doing a great job and ended up not showing up after a month-and-a-half," he said. "That's a big problem, because now this person is out there in the world with a key to the gym."

Vaughn's reimbursement method, on the other hand, ensures quality of service, and he believes it also motivates the person more. The intern coach knows he has to help with 15 classes each month, and if the massage therapist has to cancel, she knows she won't get 100 percent reimbursement.

"It's about the psychology. When that charge goes through their account every month, it motivates them to hold up their end of the deal," Vaughn said.

## "Let's Make a (Good) Deal"

Whether you barter regularly or only rarely, it's important to avoid the pitfalls.

Affiliate owners agree problems can be avoided when the following template is implemented: Barter with the right people, use the right agreement, and define the right products and services.

When done poorly, bartering can create ill will and financial problems. When done correctly, it can be wonderful for your members, your business and your community at large.



## About the Author

*Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at CrossFit Vancouver. She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.*



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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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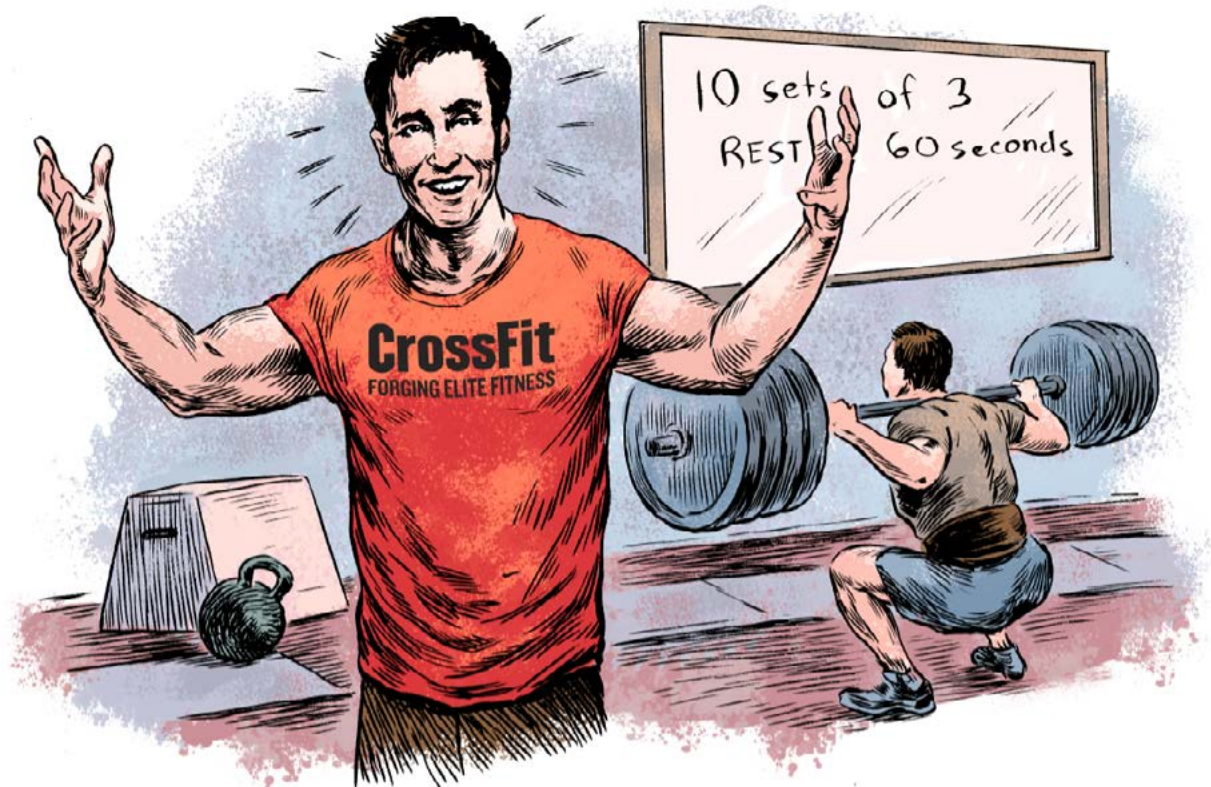
## Tinkering Trainers

CrossFit coaches detail their successful and unsuccessful programming experiments in the search for measurable, observable and repeatable results.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

March 2015

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Howell Golsan

*Ben Bergeron has experimented with strength-biased programming but now focuses on conditioning—and strength numbers are still improving.*

CrossFit athletes are a skeptical bunch. They like to experiment and tinker and tweak.

For Kurtis Bowler that meant messing around with strength-biased programming for his affiliate, Rainier CrossFit.

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1 of 5

"Every year or year-and-a-half, there's an influx of newer people," said the owner of the 10-year-old gym in Washington state.

And with new people come new ideas—or old ideas made new again. Inevitably, they want to try other training methods besides the standard group programming to improve their fitness. Bowler is happy to oblige. He lets members experiment on their own with principles from "Starting Strength," for example, or by adding a Westside Barbell strength cycle to the usual programming.

"I have found that the best way for them to learn that that stuff doesn't work (in improving overall fitness) is for them to give it a go."

Bowler added: "If I'm the only one tellin' 'em, it's like your folks tellin' ya."

So he steps aside, lets them have their moment and then encourages them to "look at the numbers."

At the end of the day, data always wins.

"I have found that we always come back to just programming CrossFit," said Bowler, who is on CrossFit's Level 1 Seminar Staff.

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**"I have found that we always  
come back to just programming  
CrossFit."**

**—Kurtis Bowler**

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Athletes progress just as well—if not better—training with CrossFit than with any other training method, he added. Plus, they recover better, he said.

"For me, in my training, I just noticed I get stronger doing just CrossFit stuff than I do just trying to get stronger," said Bowler, a longtime strongman competitor.

He's not alone in his thoughts.



Howell Golson

***When athletes show an interest in starting a strength program, Kurtis Bowler lets them experiment, knowing they'll always come back to good old CrossFit.***

Many affiliates have fiddled with programming over the years. Sometimes coaches initiated the change. Other times it was members. In either case, box owners said they came out of the experience with a renewed appreciation for Greg Glassman's original prescription.

A lack of commitment to fundamentals will kill a physical training program, warned Glassman, CrossFit Inc.'s Founder and CEO, in a 2005 open letter to CrossFit trainers.

"Rarely now do we see prescribed the short, intense couplets or triplets that epitomize CrossFit programming. Rarely do trainers really nitpick the mechanics of fundamental movements," he wrote in the CrossFit Journal article "[Fundamentals, Virtuosity, and Mastery](#)."

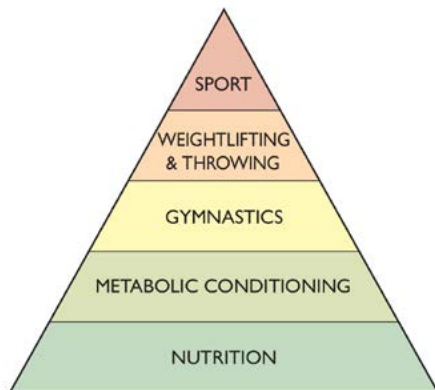
He continued: "There is plenty of time within an hour session to warm up, practice a basic movement or skill or pursue a new PR or max lift, discuss and critique the athletes' efforts, and then pound out a tight little couplet or triplet utilizing these skills or just play."

In one of its simplest manifestations, Glassman's prescription was illustrated as his Theoretical Hierarchy of Development (Figure 1). In that pyramid, nutrition provides a foundation for metabolic conditioning, and they combine to support



gymnastics. Nutrition, conditioning and the ability to control one's body then allow mastery of external objects. All the elements combine to support sports performance.

"We don't deliberately order these components but nature will," Glassman wrote in the October 2002 CrossFit Journal article "[What Is Fitness?](#)" "If you have a deficiency at any level of 'the pyramid' the components above will suffer."



**Figure 1: A Theoretical Hierarchy of Development.**

### Lessons Learned

For three years, Ben Bergeron programmed wrong.

From late 2010 through early 2013, the CrossFit New England owner planned workouts with a strength bias.

"I kind of fell into the same mental trap as other affiliate owners do. ... 'My athletes are having a hard time doing the workouts as prescribed, so let's get them stronger,'" he explained.

At that time, the Massachusetts affiliate would switch up the programming every two months. Sometimes it would focus on running, other times on handstand push-ups. At one point, the spotlight was on metabolic-conditioning workouts, which sit just above nutrition in Glassman's pyramid.

During the conditioning period, athletes began to see their lifts increase more so than when they exclusively focused on strength, Bergeron noted. Since then, CrossFit New England's programming makes met-cons the star of the show.

"These workouts do get people stronger if they just focus on that," Bergeron said.

He jokingly added, "I guess that Greg Glassman guy knew what he was talking about."

In 2011, at CrossFit Inferno in Southern California, Bill Grundler was programming a Jim Wendler 5/3/1 strength cycle that preceded the gym's metabolic-conditioning workouts. The result was unintentional.

"That became the emphasis of the workouts of the day," Grundler said. "Then, all of a sudden, the met-con lost its importance."

Athletes would push "really hard" on the strength portion of the workout and then mentally check out for the met-con, he explained. Likewise, their fitness suffered. No longer were they increasing their work capacity across broad time and modal domains. Their general physical preparedness decreased. They were no longer in a ready state.

Grundler changed the workouts so they began with lifting an increasingly heavy barbell every minute on the minute, followed by a met-con. Strength numbers started to rise.

And Grundler, a firefighter at the time, was happy his programming imitated real life.

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**"I guess that Greg Glassman guy  
knew what he was talking about."**

**—Ben Bergeron**

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"(There were) a lot more positive gains than 'my front squat went up,'" he explained.

Instead, Inferno athletes saw increased work capacity in addition to strength gains.

Strength, Grundler added, is not "an end all, be all."

### The Importance of Experimentation

To be clear, there's nothing wrong with experimentation. It's how CrossFit came into existence.

Any CrossFit coach who is not examining CrossFit.com archives dating back to 2001 is "doing themselves a disservice" because they're not seeing what Glassman tried in early CrossFit.com programming, said Matt Chan, on CrossFit's Level 1 Seminar Staff and an instructor for CrossFit's Competitors Course.

The strength-biased programming that has become popular among some affiliates is nothing new, Chan noted.

"If you look at the archives in 2001 and 2002, you'll see that Greg has already done that. He's tried it," Chan said. "He didn't get the results ... that CrossFit nowadays does."

So when athletes ask about other approaches, the former firefighter challenges them to find something that works better than CrossFit to increase general physical preparedness (GPP).

"Yeah, you might get stronger, but your GPP isn't going to go up," Chan noted.

Experimentation provides an avenue for discoveries, said Reed MacKenzie, owner of CrossFit Taranis in Canada.

"I'm pretty sure that if somebody approached Greg Glassman and said, 'I've tried this in my gym and it works,' I'm pretty sure he would take it and test and see if it works," said MacKenzie, who opened his affiliate in 2008.

Over the years, CrossFit Taranis has often followed CrossFit.com programming.

"We've never really deviated from Coach Glassman's original prescription as far as how to approach CrossFit training," MacKenzie said. "However, we have added lots of different programs. But it's mainly evolved from clients' interests."

Revisiting CrossFit.com programming is a reminder of what CrossFit should be, Bowler said.

"Main-site programming is good stuff, and I think it's important for people who have been programming, even

for a long time, to go back to dad every once in a while and look at what dad's doing," he explained.

"Doesn't matter how long you've been doing this stuff," Bowler continued, "it's good to keep your eye on that main-site stuff so you don't stray too far from what CrossFit actually is."

For his part, Grundler said experimentation can be good because it allows the programmer to see, "OK, what exactly is this going to do?"

"I don't think it's bad to do. I don't think it's necessarily a good idea to announce that you're doing it because that will attract or detract people from wanting to do that," Grundler said.

Consider, for example, a group of soccer moms.

"They don't want to lift a lot of weights, but you know that it's good for them," he said.

In that case, Grundler will avoid telling them, for instance, that he has them on a Hatch squat cycle. Instead, he might call it "a squat party."



Howell Golson

**Bill Grundler believes overall fitness suffers when athletes are too focused on strength numbers.**



Beyond the physical adaptations, such experiments can further engage athletes. That's important, Bowler noted.

"I don't think there's a problem with playing with that stuff. If everybody in your gym wants to do a strength cycle, do a strength cycle," he said. "I think it's important to know that sometimes people just want to have fun, too."

Even more important, said longtime affiliate owners, is evaluating results to determine the next step.

### A Word of Caution

While programming experiments can be educational—sometimes even necessary—it's important they have a purpose.

MacKenzie advised CrossFit coaches to perform experiments on themselves first.

"Don't give it to your clients and your people that are trusting you to do things right and do things effectively, using them as guinea pigs initially," he said.

Test it on yourself first, MacKenzie emphasized. If there are no biomechanical issues or injuries with good technique, then it's safe, he said.

"Then you want to expand your sample; test it again that way," he said. "It has to be a responsible testing procedure."

What it can't be is unplanned.

"For the six weeks, we're going to try this thing that I dreamt about last night," MacKenzie joked.

He continued: "It's irresponsible. Try it on yourself and you're going to know within a week if it's doing something beneficial."

And coaches should track results, emphasized Chan's wife, Cherie, who is also on CrossFit's Level 1 Seminar Staff.

"As long as you can recognize that, then there's no harm. It's when you don't actually assess what's going on and see if people are getting better, that's when there's a problem," she said.

Cherie encouraged trainers to reread Glassman's *"World-Class Fitness in 100 Words"* often.

"You definitely need experimentation. But you need the basics," she said.

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**"Routine is the enemy of progress and broad adaptation. Don't subscribe to high reps, or low reps, or long rests, or short rests, but strive for variance."**

**—Greg Glassman**

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She continued: "I think simplicity is key, and I think consistency is more important than sexy programming. I think we see that all the time—you're gonna get results with people being consistent, and you don't need to keep them attracted by all these bells and whistles. The simplicity is part of the beauty of what we do."

And that's demonstrated in Glassman's pyramid.

"For the fitness that we are pursuing, every parameter within your control needs to be modulated to broaden the stimulus as much as possible," Glassman wrote in *"What Is Fitness?"* "Your body will only respond to an unaccustomed stressor; routine is the enemy of progress and broad adaptation. Don't subscribe to high reps, or low reps, or long rests, or short rests, but strive for variance."



### About the Author

*Andréa Maria Cecil is a CrossFit Journal staff writer and editor.*

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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## A Study in Academic Misconduct?

CrossFit 614 owner Mitch Potterf sues Ohio State University on the strength of sworn statements from participants who say they were not injured in study.

By Emily Beers

March 2015

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All photos: Emily Beers/CrossFit Journal

It started out as a great opportunity for Mitch Potterf.

It was a chance for his athletes at CrossFit 614 in Columbus, Ohio, to participate in a scientific study at one of the most well-known public research universities in the country.



More than three years later, Potterf finds himself suing Ohio State University for academic misconduct.

The study, with lab work at OSU and training at CrossFit 614 in 2012, was published the following year in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, the official research journal of the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). It kept tabs on athletes' blood,  $\text{VO}_2$  max and body composition.

The title of the study—"CrossFit-based High-intensity Power Training Improves Maximal Aerobic Fitness and Body Composition"—nicely summed up the findings of the research. In short, do CrossFit and your  $\text{VO}_2$  max and body composition will improve.

The problem with the study comes when you dig a little deeper into the article. After analyzing the findings in detail, authors Steven T. Devor, Michael M. Smith, Allan J. Sommer and Brooke E. Starkoff also included a section about injuries allegedly related to CrossFit.

"A unique concern with any high intensity training program such as HIPT or other similar programs is the risk of overuse injury. In spite of a deliberate periodization and supervision of our CrossFit-based training program by certified fitness professionals, a notable percentage of our subjects (16%) did not complete the training program and return for follow-up testing," the study stated in its discussion section.

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**Potterf and his lawyer, Ken Donchatz, have collected sworn statements from every single athlete who didn't test out of the study, and in each case the athlete attested he or she did not get injured.**

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It also detailed why participants didn't return for follow-up testing at the end of the 10-week period—also referred to as "testing out."



***Mitch Potterf of CrossFit 614.***

"Of the 11 subjects who dropped out of the training program, two cited time concerns with the remaining nine subjects (16% of total recruited subjects) citing overuse or injury for failing to complete the program and finish follow up testing," the study stated.

There is one major problem Potterf has with the latter statements: They're lies. Lies that Potterf believes have not only damaged his livelihood as a trainer but also other affiliate owners around the world and the CrossFit brand.

In preparation for the trial, Potterf and his lawyer, Ken Donchatz, have collected sworn statements from every single athlete who didn't test out of the study, and in each case the athlete attested he or she did not get injured.

Donchatz wants two things for his client: retraction of the study because of academic misconduct and compensation for the damage the study has done to Potterf. Details of the damages remain undisclosed.



*Potterf's lawyer, Ken Donchatz (right), says it's been difficult to watch his client go through an ordeal that's hurt his business.*

Potterf's trial date is set for November 2015, but this could change if the pre-trial process takes longer than expected or if OSU settles.

### Flawed Research Hurts

In a small restaurant and coffee shop in the Short North area of downtown Columbus, Potterf ordered steak and eggs and a black Americano before taking a seat to wait for Donchatz to join him.

Three years have passed since his affiliate got involved with the OSU study.

Potterf is tired. Tired of thinking, talking, stressing about his battle with OSU. The process hasn't been fun. He just wants it to be over.

Donchatz said it's been difficult to watch how the whole ordeal has hurt Potterf, whom he considers a friend.

"Every time I met with him, there has been a lot of frustration, rage," Donchatz said.

Potterf nodded in agreement, though he's adamant it's not his emotions that have driven him to pursue the case in court.

He took a sip of his Americano and his mind went back to the day he found out the study had been published.

"There was a guy I was friends with on Facebook, who was a (CrossFit Games) regionals athlete and owned an affiliate but then became anti-CrossFit," Potterf began. "He re-posted something about CrossFit being dangerous and said something like, 'See, this is why I don't let you do CrossFit. Sixteen percent get hurt.' And there was a link (to the study)."

"Then someone else said, 'Hey, Mitch, isn't this your gym?'" Potterf remembered. "Until then, I had no idea it had been published."

What followed were related stories in the mainstream media that painted CrossFit as dangerous, citing the OSU study as evidence. One particularly damaging article was published in November 2013 in Outside Magazine titled "[Is CrossFit Killing Us?](#)"



"The study also revealed a troubling statistic: 16 percent of the 54 participants had quit the program due to 'overuse or injury,'" wrote Outside Magazine writer Grant Davis.

The article was widely circulated, especially by CrossFit critics.

Because Potterf's athletes were involved—and his affiliate mentioned by name in the study—he was personally negatively affected by the press.

"Especially today, (CrossFit) is a highly competitive market. So one negative thing can really hurt an affiliate's business," Donchatz said, adding that even now the fraudulent study haunts his clients as it continues to be widely cited by mainstream media and circulated on social-media platforms.

"Someone just posted on Facebook about fixing the people that Mitch (Potterf) injured. It was someone



***Left to stand unchallenged, incorrect injury statistics could affect the reputation of CrossFit 614.***

from Columbus. He took pictures off Mitch's site and (to paraphrase) he said, 'I can fix the people Mitch injured,'" Donchatz said about the January 2015 Facebook post.

Within minutes of reading the published study, Potterf had reached out to both Devor and Smith for an explanation. He emailed Smith but never received a reply. Eventually, he spoke with Devor on the phone.

"What's up with this injury data?" Potterf remembered saying. "And his point was, 'You're missing the bigger point about the improvements (your athletes saw).'"

"My response was, 'If one thing (in the study) is a lie, then how can you really rely on the rest of it?'" Potterf continued. "You're publicly saying people were injured."

Potterf persisted but Devor kept dodging the issue.

"He just tried to get me to shut up," Potterf said. "He kept trying to get me to focus on the positive things in the study."

Donchatz added: "He kept trying to get Devor and Smith to talk to him about the injuries, and they just stopped communicating with him. You don't expect that from Ohio State."

When Potterf realized he wasn't going to get anywhere with either Devor or Smith, he approached Donchatz about taking the matter to court. In March 2014, they filed their case.

Donchatz explained that the suit—filed both in General Court and the Court of Claims—is against OSU as opposed to any individual because state employees have sovereign immunity in Ohio and cannot be sued. However, if the Court of Claims decides state employees acted intentionally, their immunity could be waived and they could become defendants.

### The Evidence

Donchatz believes he has an airtight case.

What he knows for sure is a total of 54 athletes took part in the OSU study, which coincided with a 10-week fitness-nutrition challenge Potterf hosted at his affiliate. Potterf knew all 54 participants. Considering 52 of them were his clients at the time, he said he would have known had anyone gotten injured.

Of the two participants who weren't clients at CrossFit 614 at the time of the study, one was a woman who did one personal-training session with Potterf, signed up for the study, paid her fee but never returned. The other was a Pilates instructor and former CrossFit 614 client.

Potterf hadn't hesitated when Ph.D. candidate Smith asked to borrow some of CrossFit 614's athletes for the study. The research would give participants the opportunity to get their blood work done, their body composition measured using air-displacement plethysmography and their  $\text{VO}_2$  max tested, which seemed like a great opportunity.

"We know we can improve your Fran time, your fitness. But we had never tested a  $\text{VO}_2$  max. But (OSU) was able to put science behind it," Potterf said of the excitement he felt to have more of his members' health markers measured.

"By the time January 2012 rolled around, all the pieces were in place," he said.

In conjunction with OSU's testing, which cost each athlete US\$120, Potterf created a point system for his in-house challenge that encouraged his athletes to eat whole foods and train consistently for 10 weeks.

Some of his athletes were predominantly interested in the in-house challenge, while others were excited about the OSU testing and returned to be re-tested at the end of the study. Of the original 54 participants, 43 returned to OSU to test out at the end of the 10 weeks.

Meanwhile at Potterf's box, his athletes celebrated the completion of a rewarding 10-week challenge. They didn't need OSU's data to tell them they had improved. They could see and feel their gains in the form of performance and body-composition improvements.

"The challenge made noticeable changes for everyone," Potterf said.

Shellie Edington participated in Potterf's 2012 challenge, as well as in the OSU study. A two-time CrossFit Games competitor and bronze medalist in the Masters Women 45-49 Division in 2014, Edington knew not everyone had returned to OSU for the second round of testing. But, she said, nobody had mentioned an injury.



***Due to sovereign immunity for state employees, Ohio State University is named in Potterf's lawsuit.***

"I think the people who chose not to go back to the re-test just fell off the (nutrition) bandwagon and were embarrassed (about their scores). That's probably why they didn't go back," Edington said.

Potterf remembered one client not returning for the second round of testing because she had to go to a funeral, while two others asked for make-up test days. OSU denied their requests, Potterf said.

Through pre-trial investigation, Donchatz discovered that Joe Miracle was one of the nine athletes the study's authors claimed had sustained an injury that prevented him from completing the study. Miracle, however, was not injured at that time.

The day he was to test out, Miracle had to attend welding training for work. Coincidentally, the welding training was on OSU's campus.

"After taking the bus to campus, I had enough time to have the body-composition test and lipids testing done, but they were running behind (schedule) on the  $\text{VO}_2$  max testing," Miracle remembered.



His welding training was about to start, so he let the tester know he had to leave due to time constraints, he said. He left without having his VO<sub>2</sub> max tested.

What makes the allegation that Miracle was injured especially suspicious is that the study was blinded. Athletes were assigned numbers, meaning their identities were unknown to the researchers. In the CrossFit Journal article “NSCA ‘CrossFit Study’ Fraud?” by Russell Berger, study coordinator Chelsea Rankin provided details.

“I’m the only one that knew who did or didn’t show up. The participants were de-identified and were only known to the OSU researchers by a number. ... They (OSU) may have spoken to people there while they were doing the post-test, but they never had contact with the people who didn’t show up, and I have no idea how they could have,” Rankin said.

Contrary to the study’s data, Miracle was uninjured, and the physical gains he saw during the challenge were undeniable. He shed 25 lb. in 10 weeks.



***Shellie Edington took part in the study and said she never heard anyone talking about injuries.***

Miracle is sympathetic to Potterf’s taking legal action.

“Fitness journalism really latched on to that (injury) statistic from the study, and I truly believe there should have been a retraction or explanation from the study representatives on why they made that statement,” Miracle said.

He added: “If I were a gym owner, I would be in the same position.”

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**In a later round of edits, though, something suspicious crept into the peer-review process: A push to include data about injuries.**

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### Discovered in Discovery

When they filed their case, Potterf and Donchatz questioned the impetus to include allegedly falsified data in the study. What has been revealed during the discovery process has helped shed light on the researchers’ possible motivations.

Discovery is the pre-trial phase of a lawsuit in which both parties have the opportunity to gather evidence from the other through requests for information.

“We literally discover all of their factual information and they discover ours. And once we read about each other’s information, if it’s possible to see some middle ground, then there could be a settlement,” Donchatz explained.

The transparency during the discovery process helps make court proceedings more efficient and often deters people from attempting to fight a case they know they can’t win.

What Potterf and Donchatz allege is that falsified injury data was planted into the study to appease the wishes of academics, specifically the NSCA, which has often **found itself at odds with CrossFit**.



***Potterf would rather be coaching than litigating, but he's not going to let his business be affected by bad press generated by incorrect statistics.***

One of the pieces of evidence Potterf and Donchatz were able to obtain through discovery was a series of emails between Smith and Devor, as well as emails related to the editing process. The first round of requested edits from peer reviewers were generic, somewhat mundane changes.

"Things like conclusions not having enough support or poor writing," Donchatz remembered. "Things you would expect from editorial review."

In a later round of edits, though, something suspicious crept into the peer-review process: a push to include data about injuries. There was no mention of injuries in the original study, Donchatz explained.

"It only came up after the reviewer pointed out that it needed to be included and cited another study," he said.

In one particular email, Smith wrote to his co-authors, "I guess I never really looked to(o) closely at this drop-out rate and reason."

Despite a lack of injury data in the original draft of the study—and even though Smith admitted he hadn't paid attention to the reason people dropped out of the study—"All of a sudden in the next draft, there's all these conclusions about injuries," Donchatz said.

But when Potterf expressed concern about Devor and Smith's research, they chose to ignore him.

In an email exchange between Devor and Smith, Devor wrote: "By the way, I have decided to blow off Mitch (Potterf). He was insulting and disrespectful. No patience for that sort of thing."

Smith replied, "I was actually wondering why you gave Mitch (Potterf) as much credence as you did. He's obviously lacking in brains and class."

## **The Big Picture**

It was 6 a.m. at CrossFit 614 and a crew of 18 athletes trickled in for class.



Potterf arrived with coffee in hand, ready to coach an endurance class with a small group of triathletes. Even after more than 20 years in the fitness industry, Potterf still wants to be in the gym when the sun rises. When he's at the gym working with clients, he knows he's doing something useful with his life.

"I care about those 25 people who come and see me in the morning, and I'm going to pursue what I think is best for them, and this is what I think is best for them," Potterf explained.

Potterf used to be a member of the NSCA. He held his Certified Personal Trainer (CPT) certificate for three years, a certification that required him to take a written exam at a testing center.

"There was no practical component at all," Potterf said.

So after a few years of using his CPT credentials merely as a way to bolster his résumé, he came to believe there was little value in the certification. When he turned 26 and it came time to renew it, he didn't bother.

Now 41, Potterf is convinced the NSCA, its research and some of its publications aren't doing much, if anything, to better people or their health.

"One thing I've become very aware of through this whole process is ... things aren't what they actually appear. There is no pure information (about) the athletic world coming from the NSCA," Potterf said. He added that one of the most significant problems is a lack of practical application.

Through the discovery process, it was revealed to Potterf that neither Devor nor Smith has ever trained anyone, let alone tried CrossFit.

"Their answers to everything are that they've never trained people, but they're going to tell you how to train people," Potterf said.

Working with university students further emphasized this point to Potterf.

While he believes in education, Potterf likened having a degree in kinesiology, human kinetics or exercise science to owning a Ferrari before knowing how to drive.

When he spoke to OSU students in 2012, they asked him about exercise science's most significant shortcoming.

"Everyone who is going to graduate in the spring with a degree in exercise science, stand up," Potterf requested.

Everyone stood up.

"If you know how to operate a treadmill (Bruce) protocol test and a body-fat test, keep standing," he continued.

Everyone kept standing.

But when he asked the students to keep standing if they knew how to teach their grandmother how to squat or deadlift, most of them promptly sat down.

"You're capable of doing a job that provides you with \$60,000 of equipment, but when you need to teach someone to put something on a shelf, you're completely incapable," Potterf told the group.



**Potterf, a former member of the NSCA, did not renew his credential and said he now questions the fitness information produced by the NSCA.**



***Potterf is critical of university-educated trainers who have no practical experience, and he calls CrossFit “the truth in fitness.”***

He added: “Your grandma doesn’t care what her  $VO_2$  max is, but she wants to be able to stand on a chair. She wants to be able to carry her groceries. ... If she can pick up a barbell, she’s probably not going to get hurt putting a jar away.”

Potterf shook his head remembering the experience.

“I can look like the smartest strength coach in the world if I have the best athletes (to train),” he said. “But if you can teach the average person how to lift a barbell, then you really know how to teach.”

About what universities teach, Potterf added: “That’s the giant error in their philosophy and their application. They train (students) specifically before they’re even competent to train the general public.”

This philosophy is in stark contrast to what CrossFit has taught Potterf—how to get the average person moving better, how to turn ordinary people into athletes, how to make his clients’ lives better through fitness and how to keep them fit for life.

“One of the things that made CrossFit resonate with me is that this is the truth in fitness,” he said.

As the case unfolds before the justice system, this truth is what Potterf will try to protect. He’ll do this by showing up to the gym each day at 6 a.m., by continuing to coach his athletes to be better.

“It’s an attack on entrepreneurialism. (Meanwhile) you have this guy sitting in academia, completely protected from the world. ... It’s just wrong. Independent of any financial harm, they’re building a knowledge on things that are wrong,” Potterf said.

He paused before adding, “Their motives aren’t making people better or protecting people ... CrossFit is about the only thing (in the fitness industry) that’s getting large amounts of people to care about what they eat, what they do, how they perform.”



### About the Author

Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at [CrossFit Vancouver](#). She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.





THE  
**CrossFit** JOURNAL

# NOT TAKING IT SITTING DOWN

BY MAUREEN O'HAGAN

Kelly and Juliet Starrett work to prevent poor movement by supplying kids with stand-up desks at school.





After witnessing sloppy mechanics at their daughter's field day, Kelly and Juliet Starrett were motivated to confront the culprit: sitting.

In the spring of 2013, Kelly Starrett and his wife, Juliet, volunteered to help out at their daughter's elementary-school field day in Marin County, California. The experience was eye-opening.

Far too many kids seemed to be physically compromised. They saw kids who couldn't get themselves into burlap sacks for the sack races, much less hop to the finish line. They saw kids whose running mechanics were a mess. Specifically, they were heel striking—something they weren't doing before first grade.

Running on your heel vs. on your midfoot might seem like a small difference, but as a doctor of physical therapy, Kelly recognized a mechanical fault that could lead to some lifelong issues. And it was also a symptom of something much larger.

"We left the field day and we were pretty bummed," Juliet said.

The problem, the Starretts believe, is mobility: At the ripe old age of 7, 8 and 9, the children were already showing compromised hip function. Yet the Starretts had seen these same kids running around like champions a few years earlier. So what had happened?

Kelly, who runs San Francisco CrossFit, chewed on the problem for a while. He thought about the elite athletes he trains and what he's learned working with them. He thought about kids and their daily activities. And he came to a conclusion: "We were forced to confront sitting."

Confront, indeed. That day at the sack races has led the Starretts down a path they hope will start a nationwide standing revolution—beginning in the first grade.

## The Dynamic Classroom

As the leader of the CrossFit Mobility Trainer Course, Kelly knows more than a few things about how the body works. So the idea that excessive sitting is a problem wasn't new to him or Juliet.

To be sure, it's possible to sit while maintaining decent spinal position—in theory. Mostly, however, humans slouch. They hunch their backs and drop their heads. Their trunk musculature shuts down. Their breathing labors under a compressed diaphragm. Their hip flexors are shortened.

Basically, sitting introduces kinks all throughout the system—both literal and figurative. Ever feel a tug in your back when

you rise from a seated position? It might be because sitting in that kinked position all day has taught your hip flexors they're supposed to be short and tight.

This habituation plays out in ways that have become predictable to Kelly, and he sees it manifested in elite military groups, cyclists, ballet dancers, football players and CrossFit athletes of every ability. So over the years, he's devised an arsenal of mobilizations to address these problems. But he also knows that a few minutes of, say, couch stretching, will not undo eight hours of sitting with a horrible spinal position. Lately, Kelly has been focusing a lot of attention on prevention in the form of standing desks. And his clients started to notice a difference: Their backs don't hurt anymore, their mechanics begin to normalize, and their performances improve.

**"You literally cannot  
make a case for sitting."  
—Kelly Starrett**

"What we've continually said is we're going to take the lessons we're learning about elite athletes and optimal human performance and spin that backwards to make it valuable to the rest of the population," Kelly said.

"All you have to do is go into any classroom, observe the kids' spines and you'll be horrified," Starrett said.

Then, he posed an incisive question: "If you know that sitting on an airplane crushes you," he asked, "why is it OK for your kid to sit (all day in school)?"

Spurred to action, Juliet really began digging into the research.

Excessive sitting has been linked with increased incidence of heart disease and diabetes; it appears to affect cholesterol and blood sugar. It's even been associated with decreased lifespan. As the new saying goes, "Sitting is the new smoking."

All of this still true for people who work out regularly. You simply can't counteract all those negatives with an hour or two of exercise each day.





Juliet Starrett was worried administrators, teachers and parents wouldn't hop on board with students having stand-up desks. She was pleasantly surprised.

Think about all that. Now think about how often you sit. And how often your kids sit. At breakfast, lunch and dinner. In the car or the school bus. All day in the classroom. An hour or more doing homework. Playing video games and watching TV.

And how often are they moving around?

Exactly.

The Starretts feel so strongly about this problem they see it as a public-health issue.

"The research is clear," Kelly said. "You literally cannot make a case for sitting."

Juliet's research turned up another interesting fact, too. You burn a lot more calories standing than you do sitting. Mark Benden, a researcher at the Texas A&M School of Public Health, ran a project in which several classrooms in Bryant, Texas, were equipped with standing desks. Kids in both the sitting and the standing classrooms were also outfitted with calorie monitors. Standing students burned 17 percent more calories than seated students. Overweight kids who stand burn 32 percent more calories than seated kids. The results were published in the

article ["The Impact of Stand-Biased Desks in Classrooms on Calorie Expenditure in Children."](#)

Juliet figured out that if a kid stands instead of sits, he could burn 30,000 to 50,000 more calories in a year, depending on his weight and how often he stands. When Juliet plugged her own vitals into an online calculator, she found that standing instead of sitting would burn as many calories as running 33 marathons.

It was an aha moment. Could standing desks help fight childhood obesity?

"The problem isn't as simple as sitting vs. standing," Juliet said. "Really, the problem is inactivity. But what are the simple, elegant solutions to the inactivity problem?"

Juliet found adjustable, kid-size standing desks for about US\$250 each. The Starretts decided they were willing to buy desks for their daughter's entire class at Vallecito Elementary. They listed the possible hurdles: the principal, the teacher and—most intimidating of all—the other parents.

This wasn't a group of CrossFitters who know Kelly and Juliet's work. To most people at Vallecito, they were just another mom and dad.



Research has shown kids who stand in school burn 17 percent more calories than those who sit, making stand-up desks part of the fight against obesity.

"I was a little nervous beforehand because parents do some crazy stuff," Juliet recalled. She added, "They probably already think we're weird."

The Starretts approached Principal Tracy Smith last spring, prepared for some drawn-out discussions.

As it turned out, their timing couldn't have been better. Gina Roberts, a kindergarten teacher, was being reassigned to the fourth grade but didn't yet have a fully outfitted classroom. Smith and Roberts agreed to give it a go. Over the summer, Smith sent letters to parents explaining the standing desks would be a trial. The Starretts promised not only to foot the bill for the desks but also to help adjust each desk to the proper height. In addition, they planned to check in periodically to see how the students, their parents and Roberts were feeling about their new classroom.

It turns out the parents weren't as wary as Juliet initially thought they would be. Their biggest concern was that their kid would get tired being on his or her feet all day long. Roberts reassured them the kids wouldn't be standing for hours on end and said she'd change things up every 15 minutes or so.

For Roberts, the excitement wasn't necessarily about the physical benefits of the new set-up. It was the idea that standing is good for the mind, too.

Benden, the researcher, said kids are better able to concentrate when they're not stuffed into chairs—chairs that typically come in just one size regardless of the student's height.

**If you really think about it, putting kids in orderly rows of desks and chairs isn't all that natural.**

If you really think about it, putting kids in orderly rows of desks and chairs isn't all that natural. "When you go into kindergarten, you say, 'Everybody sit down and be quiet,' and they moan and groan," Benden said in an interview. "It's almost like you're torturing them. You can see their little bodies are about to explode."



By letting kids stand, they “burn off some of that nervous energy,” Benden added. “It’s OK to fidget or wiggle or wobble. That motion will allow them to focus on their work.”

Visiting Classroom 36 at Vallecito, you’ll notice a few things immediately. First, it’s not laid out in orderly rows. Sometimes the students push their desks into groups; other times they circle up for an activity. Also, the desks are all different heights—as are the students. There’s almost a foot difference between the tallest and shortest in the class.

You’ll also notice the kids aren’t just standing there, still. The desks are outfitted with a hinged footrest, and as the kids listen to Roberts, many are swinging a foot back and forth.

“They’re fidgeting with their foot so they’re able to put their focus on me,” Roberts said.

When she’s not doing direct teaching, Roberts gives them some freedom. One day in mid-September, for example, she passed out a vocabulary test with these instructions: “When I give you your test, you can sit wherever you like or stand wherever you like, but you need to be away from others,” she said.

Some kids stayed put; others sat or even lay on the floor. Some grabbed one of six small stools and sort of perched at their desks.

“If you learn better by sitting, great,” Smith noted. “If you learn better moving around, that’s great too.”

Kelly sees all that getting up and down from the ground as another benefit.

“We just parlayed a whole lot of extra movement into the environment,” he said. “You have to understand that the movement-rich brain is ready to learn. And it’s very, very powerful.”

It’s worth noting the stand-up desks are a big change for students, yet a few weeks into the school year, they were doing well with it. They were behaving. They were sharing the stools. They were listening to Roberts. Sure, there was some poking and giggling as the students moved about the classroom. But, as Roberts said, “That’s just fourth grade.”

## Standing to Be Standard?

Benden has said probably a few hundred classrooms around the world have tried standing desks. He thinks the numbers will soon grow.

The Starretts want to help make that happen. They’re forming a nonprofit, Stand Up Kids, that will help educate people about the benefits of standing desks, and, hopefully, encourage donors to fund standing classrooms around the country. They’re also writing a book on the perils of sitting on how to combat them.

As the owners of a gym, they see how important all this is. It’s hard to get people to stretch to counteract all that harm they’ve done to themselves with excessive sitting, but what if, from a very young age, you set yourself up right? What if you get your body accustomed to standing instead of sitting? What if you didn’t get such tight hips in the first place?

The possibilities are exciting.

“We certainly don’t think standing desks are the end-all,” Juliet said. “But we think they’re the simplest, most elegant solution.” ■

## About the Author

Maureen O’Hagan is a Seattle-based journalist who is the recipient of numerous national writing and reporting awards. Skeptical by nature, she tried CrossFit for a newspaper story in 2009. Now she’s hooked.



The Starretts are forming a nonprofit called Stand Up Kids to help educate people about the benefits of standing desks, especially for children.



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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Stability Now!

If the bottom of your snatch is full of trepidation and shaking, Bill Starr has the cure.

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By Bill Starr

March 2015

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Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

*In the snatch, strength can sometimes save the lift when precision is lacking.*

I believe full snatches are the epitome of athleticism. If coaches in every sport—from wrestling to soccer to lacrosse to basketball—would insist that their athletes learn how to do this dynamic Olympic lift, athletic skills would be enhanced much more so than by going through plyometrics drills, pulling ropes and sleds, and employing other

gimmicks designed to improve foot speed, agility and jumping ability. What those unusual exercises really do is line the pockets of the equipment providers. All the athletic attributes the coaches want their players to work on can be improved simply by doing snatches.

When done correctly, the full snatch is a flawless symphony of strength, quickness, timing, coordination and balance. Consider this: The athlete must pull a weighted bar as high as he possibly can in an explosive fashion, then shift his mental keys in a nanosecond to erupting downward and planting his feet solidly and perfectly so that he is able to control the bar with his arms locked securely over his head.

There are many things that have to be done before an athlete is able to master the technique in the full snatch, and that applies to both the split and squat style. He has to spend time making every part of his body a great deal stronger—from his ankles to his traps and wrists—to be able to elevate a heavy bar to a height that allows him to get under it and lock it out.

He must hone his timing to know the precise moment to make his move to the bottom. And he must do hundreds of reps in order to become stable enough to land on the platform in the exact same position every single time. In the bottom, his entire body must be extremely tight, with his torso erect as he fixes the bar over his head with elbows locked.

Finally, he has to be strong enough to recover from that bottom position. If he is unable to do that, then all previous efforts have been for naught. The snatch is not complete until the lifter stands up and controls the weight over his head.

So that's the topic of this article: how to make the bottom position so strong that the lifter can still control the weight even when it's not in the ideal spot overhead. We want lifters who are so strong that they can still stand up without difficulty even when they have to stay in the bottom for an extra long time as they adjust the bar to bring it into the proper alignment.

### KISS: Keep It Simple, Squatter

The first exercise I use to enhance strength in the bottom of a snatch is the overhead squat. Overhead squats are extremely useful for any strength athlete because they work so many muscles in a very different manner. Squatting with weights overhead forces the shoulder girdle, back, hips and legs to contract in a unique way. Front and back squats only involve the shoulder girdle slightly, while overhead squats bring the arms and shoulders to the forefront.

Initially, I have the lifter power-snatch a weight, then do 5 overhead squats. After he gets the form down, I start piling on the plates. For the squats to be effective, heavy poundage must be handled—50 or 75 lb. more than what the lifter can snatch.



*Regularly squatting 50-75 lb. more than you can snatch will increase stability and confidence when you go back to the quick lift.*

This is where it gets a bit tricky. How is the lifter going to be able to get that much weight overhead? If there happens to be a very wide power rack available, that will solve the problem. Unfortunately, this type of rack is rare.

The solution to the problem is the same one we used in the '50s, before any commercial power racks appeared on the market. I learned what to do from Sid Henry at the Downtown Dallas YMCA while I was attending Southern Methodist University in Texas. I really didn't bother doing any overhead squats except as warm-ups for my snatch sessions. I didn't need them because I wasn't snatching that much weight. But after Henry began coaching me, my snatch improved considerably, and I got to the point where I did need to strengthen my bottom position.

However, the main reason several of us started doing the exercise was because Henry needed to do them to stay competitive with his two main rivals, Norbert Schemansky and Dick Kirk. They controlled the heavyweight division in the early '60s.

There was nothing fancy about the Dallas Y weight room. It was primitive at best. Located on the sixth floor in a small room above the squash court, the space was originally designed to allow people to watch the squash games. There was room for a small platform and an area set aside for squatting, and we had enough space left over for lifters to sit between sets.

In order to do overhead squats, three lifters were needed: the one actually doing the exercise, plus two handlers/spotters. Gerald Travis, one of the top 198ers in Texas, and I were recruited. It went like this: We loaded an Olympic bar on the platform, and the designated lifter would then power-s snatch the weight with assistance from his teammates to elevate it high enough for him to lock it out overhead. The lifter would do his set and the spotters would help him lower the bar back to the platform. This was before bumper plates came along, and none of us ever let a bar crash to the floor intentionally. The wooden floor was not made for that kind of stress, and if too many attempts fell hard, we would soon be out of a place to train.

This system worked well for Travis and me but not so well for Henry. He was 6 foot 3, and once he started handling heavy weights, it was a struggle for the two of us to lift the

ends of the bar high enough for him to get under it. Henry was snatching 325 and wanted to overload by 50 or 75 lb., but there was no way this was going to happen.

Also, when Travis and I got to where we could handle 275 for reps, we both found that it was very difficult to lower the bar through the middle range. It always tended to run forward, and we had to concentrate on keeping our upper bodies very, very straight. In addition, because I was a splitter, I had to take some time to re-position my feet after the bar was locked out over my head. Henry and Travis used the squat style, so it was easier for them to get set before going into a full squat.

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**We would sit in the bottom for six to eight seconds, moving our hips around, shifting back and forth slightly, and sometimes twisting just a tad.**

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We always made sure the collars were tight before each set. If a bar did run out of control, we certainly didn't want plates flying around the room.

After several weeks of doing these, Henry added a twist. We would sit in the bottom for six to eight seconds, moving our hips around, shifting back and forth slightly, and sometimes twisting just a tad. We were trying to duplicate what might happen during the execution of a full snatch. Then we would stand up. I believe this actually did more to improve my stability than the overhead squats.

Henry, a civil engineer, eventually figured out how to overload the overhead squats by a considerable amount. He went to a hardware store and bought some sturdy chains and attached hooks to them. He also got some clamps to shorten the chains. He rigged the chains to an iron beam above the platform. This worked really well. A bar could be set on the hooks just inside the collars, which made it much easier for us to load and unload the weights.



Henry decided we would start the overhead squats from the bottom. This made getting into position much easier as well. Once we were set, we simply lifted the bar off the hooks and stood up with the weight. We did the rest of our reps and—with the aid of the training partners—fixed the bar back in the hooks. We still spotted each other closely, and I have to admit that I got extremely nervous holding my hands under the moving bar when Henry was squatting with close to 400 lb.

The squats helped all three of us, but Henry got better results than Travis and I did. We never pushed them as hard as he did, and his hard work indeed paid off. In 1961, he was selected as a member of the U.S. team for the Tour of Russia, and he lifted in four venues in five days. At the contest in Tbilisi, he won gold. At the World Championships in Vienna, he came fifth. In 1963, he defeated the great Schemansky to win the senior national title, then won the Pan American Games and moved up a notch to fourth place at the Worlds in Stockholm.



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

***Locking into a 12-second isometric contraction requires a great deal of effort, but it will pay off when you're fighting to stand up with a PR snatch.***

### Searching for More Stability

I left Dallas after I graduated from SMU and moved to Chicago, Illinois, to attend graduate school at George Williams College. I worked full time at the Park Ridge YMCA, and one of the first things I did was have our resident custodian build a platform and power rack for the weight room. I made sure the uprights were wide enough for me to be able to grip the bar for overhead squats.

After a year in the Windy City, I took a better-paying job at a YMCA in Marion, Indiana. With no handyman available, I built a power rack. It was ugly but functional, and once again I was able to use it for overhead squats as well as isometric contractions.

"Isos" rank high on my list of exercises to do to strengthen the bottom of the snatch. This was when isometrics were all the rage, and I had read everything on the subject. I did what the inventor, Dr. John Ziegler, recommended, and I used the same methods as Bill March and Louis Riecke. Both of those lifters had increased their totals by an astounding 100 lb. in less than one year. Later, we all found out they were also using anabolic steroids, but even without them, I got stronger from using isometrics. The isometrics were actually an isotonic movement in which you moved but a few inches before locking into an isometric contraction for 12 seconds.

(For more info on isometrics and isotonicity, see the CrossFit Journal article "[Short and Simple—and Effective.](#)")

I would do a few sets of overhead squats as warm-ups, then perform isometric work in two or three positions in the power rack, with most of the emphasis on the start. If I could move out of the deep bottom of the split with power, I never had any trouble finishing the lift. But I would still do an iso a couple of feet from the bottom and at the mid-point of the recovery for good measure.

I also used a variation to improve stability in the bottom. I would set the bar on top of the pins, get into a deep split, then move the weight off the pins and hold it off them for as long as I could. I found this to be very beneficial because I was forced to control the weight. It was never allowed to touch the uprights. It had to be held in the middle of the uprights so all work was done by the muscles and attachments.



***Starr used this isometric variation to help him recover from split snatches. After positioning himself properly, he'd raise the bar off the guards a few inches and then hold that position as long as he could.***

All these exercises helped, and I was always able to stand up if I had locked the bar out over my head in the snatch. When I left Marion to move to York, I was snatching 245, and I knew I was going to have to do more to strengthen that bottom position if I wanted to move to the next level in the ranking lists. I continued to do isotonic-isometric contractions and hold the loaded bar off the top pins in the power rack, but I was looking for something different, something more dynamic.

I found it at the Eastern States competition, held in March 1965 in Schenectady, New York. I had only been at York Barbell for a month and was learning the ropes as assistant editor of *Strength & Health*. I covered the contest for the magazine and also assisted Tommy Suggs, who had hired me for the job.

There was a lot of talent present for the prestigious event that awarded the largest trophies of any meet in the country, including the seniors Tony Garcy, Bob Bartholomew and Phil Grippaldi, as well as rapidly rising star Bob Bednarski. Suggs was making his comeback after laying off for the better part of a year because of his knees.

But the majority of the crowd that assembled in upstate New York that day came to see the confrontation between Garcy, national champion and Olympian, and the young phenom from Canada, Pierre St. Jean. At the Philly Open in January, they both totaled 915, but Garcy came through with a clutch clean and jerk to tie St. Jean and win by virtue of being the lighter man. However, there would be no battle because St. Jean had moved up to the light-heavyweight division, while Garcy was still a middleweight.

St. Jean put on a show. Weighing just 170, he pressed 290, snatched 295 and clean-and-jerked 370. He just missed a 305 snatch. His 955 total would have placed him fourth at the U.S. Senior Nationals. He was well on his way to becoming not only the best Canadian lifter since Doug Hepburn but also one of the best in the world. Only Bednarski, a heavyweight, out-snatched St. Jean.

After the light heavies finished, I wandered backstage, talking to lifters and trying to pick up tidbits of news to use in the magazine. As I walked past, I heard a lifter talking to St. Jean's father and coach, Lionel. I stopped and listened as Lionel explained his son's stability in the bottom of the snatch:



Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

**The “drop snatch” is now known as a “snatch balance.” The movement requires precision, speed, courage and determination.**

“He should be solid. He’s handling 350 in the drop snatch.”

*Editor’s note: Starr’s description of the “drop snatch” more closely resembles the snatch balance with a dip, taught in the CrossFit Weightlifting Trainer Course. This exercise was at one time commonly referred to as the “drop snatch.”*

I was dumbfounded. It didn’t seem possible. That meant St. Jean was able to do a drop snatch with more than double

his body weight. Yet there was no reason for Lionel to lie. I had done drop snatches, but only in warm-up or as a quickness drill. I had never even considered using them as a primary exercise. But now I would. It was a revelation.

On the following Monday, none of the regulars trained in the York gym because they had lifted in the meet. So I had the gym all to myself, which is what I wanted. If I was going to stumble around like a cow on ice skates trying to do



drop snatches with heavy weights, I didn't want anyone to see me. I could have taken the bar off the power rack, but I wanted to have plenty of room just in case I had to dump the weights. I set two portable squat stands in the middle of the lifting platform and went to work.

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**I was dumbfounded. It didn't seem possible. That meant St. Jean was able to do a drop snatch with more than double his body weight.**

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Since I had never handled more than 135 on the lift, I stayed with that weight for several sets to get the feel of the movement. Then I started adding weight and only doing 2 or 3 reps per set. By the time I got to 225, I felt

comfortable doing the drop snatches and called it a day. I knew I could do them and would start moving the numbers up every time I included them in my workouts.

Here are the main form points: Using a wide or snatch grip, fix the bar firmly on your traps in much the same manner as you do when doing a back squat. The main difference is the position of your elbows. They need to be directly under the bar and not turned backward. You need to look straight ahead and continue to do so when you drive into the bottom. And you must keep your upper body very upright as you punch the bar off your traps and explode to the bottom. If you lean backward or forward, the bar will run too far out of the proper line for you to control it.

Set your feet at shoulder width and take a moment to make sure every muscle in your body is extremely tight, then bend your knees slightly and punch the bar in a straight line upward. The bar doesn't have to travel very far—only 3 to 4 inches—but it has to be moving fast. As soon as you drive the bar off your traps, move to the bottom position in the snatch. Slam your feet into the platform. As



Dave Re/CrossFit Journal



*Success in the snatch comes down to fractions of inches when the weight is heavy. Some loads need to be dumped, but others can be saved if the lifter has a surplus of strength and a lot of determination.*

you're descending, exert pressure up against the bar. Do not allow it to float free. And don't just hold the bar at arms' length; push up against it and try to stretch the bar apart.

This will enable you to be more solid when you hit the bottom, and if you have slammed your feet into the platform, the bar will just be where it should be: on an imaginary line directly up from the back of your head. Remain in the bottom position for four, five or six seconds before you stand up. Make slight adjustments in your shoulders, back and hips until you find the ideal rock-solid position.

Recover, and while bending your knees to help absorb the shock, lower the bar down to your traps. Reset your feet so they're on a line, shoulder-width apart, and do another rep. When you're only doing singles, put the bar back on the squat stand or rack and rest a bit before attempting another single.

Being able to hit the bottom exactly every rep takes time. The process cannot be hurried. I have my athletes place their feet where they want them to be in the bottom and then draw around their shoes with a piece of chalk. After going to the bottom in a drop snatch, they can see if they hit those marks. If they're off a few inches, they can make adjustments.

When you recover, keep your eyes straight ahead or look up a bit. Don't look down. That will cause the bar to run forward, and you'll have difficulty completing the lift. When you start handling heavy poundage, as in more than you can full snatch, the drive off your traps has to be dynamic and intense. It doesn't have to be a long punch, but it must be powerful, and you must react faster and faster as the weights get heavier.

Because there is so much balance, coordination, timing and foot speed involved in the drop snatch, using a considerable amount of weight has great carry-over value for the full snatch, the full clean and the jerk, but also for any athletic endeavor.

There is one attribute a lifter must have in order to do a drop snatch more than 50 lb. above his best snatch: intestinal fortitude. It takes courage, resoluteness and plain-old guts to drive down under a heavy weight that is right over your body. But if a lifter hesitates and only goes down halfway, the exercise is useless. And I have

observed that those lifters who shied away from going into the deep bottom position never went low when they did full snatches.

"No guts, no glory" is the perfect expression regarding drop snatches.

When I added drop snatches to my program, I wasn't sure how much weight I would have to use to ensure I would always be secure in the bottom of my split snatches. But knowing the lightweight St. Jean used 350 and I was a 198-pounder, I set my goal at 360 to better what the Canadian had done. I don't recall exactly how long it took me, but I think it was about a year before I did a deep drop snatch with 360. After that, I only did them every so often because I needed to spend more time on the parts of the three lifts that were weaker.

All the exercises I mentioned in this piece—overhead squats, isotonic-isometric contractions with the bar locked over my head and especially drop snatches—enabled me to establish a solid bottom position in the snatch. It gave me a huge boost of confidence to know that if I pulled a weight high enough and got under it, I could finish the lift.

If you think you need to make your bottom position stronger, start doing all these exercises. If you decide to only do one of them, make sure it's drop snatches. They build strength, and they build character.



### About the Author

*Bill Starr coached at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the 1970 Olympic Weightlifting World Championship in Columbus, Ohio, and the 1975 World Powerlifting Championships in Birmingham, England. He was selected as head coach of the 1969 team that competed in the Tournament of Americas in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, where the United States won the team title, making him the first active lifter to be head coach of an international Olympic weightlifting team. Starr is the author of the books "The Strongest Shall Survive: Strength Training for Football" and "Defying Gravity," which can be found at [The Aasgaard Company Bookstore](http://TheAasgaardCompanyBookstore.com).*

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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL VIRTUOSITY

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## Virtuosity 6: Every Rep a Victory

Jillian Sharp competes in the CrossFit Games Open and finds herself surrounded by support.

By Jillian Sharp

March 2015

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Jillian Sharp

*The Open at CrossFit Fayetteville in Fayetteville, Arkansas.*

I stood paralyzed underneath the pull-up rack. Beads of sweat trickled down my face, and my heart raced relentlessly. I attempted to calm myself: "The worst that can happen is falling on my face and scoring zero reps."

I know CrossFit is the best thing that has ever happened to me, not only for my health, but also for the friends and the go-getter confidence it instilled in me. However, in that moment, nothing could allay my fear. I feared failure.

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1 of 2



I feared humiliation. I was undoubtedly overwhelmed, and nothing could stop the adrenaline from accelerating through my body—until my coach shook me by my shoulders back to reality.

She reminded me that during the Open in 2014, I could not even squat a barbell. She reminded me that just a year ago, I vowed I would never have the ability to do the Open workouts. She reminded me of how far I had come and how much confidence I had gained from the sport. She pointed to the supporters around me.

For me, the Open was never about winning. It's more a competition for myself. The Open truly is for anyone who's willing to attempt a challenge. The beauty of CrossFit is it entitles you to a guaranteed, built-in support network while you attempt and achieve. You are never alone.

In that moment, I realized failure and humiliation do not exist in CrossFit. The Open is designed to eliminate that repulsive ideology our culture has created for physical fitness. At that point in time, I was not only united with the others in my box competing or cheering, but I was also united with hundreds of thousands of athletes from around the world who were performing in the same movements and striving for the same goals. I realized that

by signing up for the Open, I had set myself up for 100 percent success.

In Workout 15.2, I achieved six reps. Six. The world may see failure, but CrossFit athletes see that as success. CrossFit is about growth—growth in our abilities, growth in our self-esteem, growth in our community.

Never in my life have I been surrounded by such encouragement. The Open demonstrates what sets CrossFit apart from any other sport. It demonstrates that any person of any fitness level can strive after goals and achieve within the world's greatest support system and alongside the world's greatest athletes.

When I felt like I could not begin, I was told the opposite. When I felt like giving up, I heard people I had never met chanting my name. I was challenged, pushed, supported and encouraged in a way I had never experienced. After 15.2, when the thought crossed my mind that I had failed, athletes approached me in congratulation.

This is our way of life. This is my box. This is the Open. And this is CrossFit.

*Corrects to state CrossFit Fayetteville is in Arkansas.*



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### Submission Guidelines

To be considered for publication, authors must satisfy the following:

1. Articles must be original, unpublished works. Authors of selected submissions will be supplied with legal documents to be filled out prior to publication.
2. Articles must be submitted in Word documents attached to an email. Documents should not contain bolding, italics or other formatting. Please submit in Arial font.
3. Articles can be 500 words maximum.
4. Each article must be accompanied by at least one high-resolution photograph to illustrate the story. The photo can feature the coach, the affiliate, the community—anything that illustrates the article. Photo guidelines are as follows:

- A. Photos must be original and owned by the person submitting. Photos taken by others may be submitted provided the owner has given permission.
- B. Photos must be in focus, well lit and free of watermarks. Minimum file size is 1 MB. Please review your camera's settings to ensure you are shooting high-resolution images. Cell-phone photos and thumbnails are not accepted.
- C. Photos must be attached to the email as JPEG files. Do not embed files in Word documents. Photo file names should list both the name of the subject and the name of the photographer in this format: SubjectName-PhotographerName.jpg. Examples: JohnSmith-JaneDoe.jpg or CrossFitAnyTown-JimJohnson.jpg.

Virtuosity@crossfit.com is open for submissions. Tell us why you train where you train, and do it uncommonly well.



# THE BEST-LAID PLANS

BY CHRIS COOPER

A shareholders' agreement can prevent problems, but few gyms have one. How can they help CrossFit affiliate owners?





The clear lines of the parking lot were not reflected in ECFF CrossFit's business plan, and Derrick Sims soon found himself at odds with his partner.

New CrossFit affiliate owners sometimes consider taking a partner at startup. The burden of labor and risk can be lightened when spread across several broad shoulders, and pooling funds means avoiding the moneylender.

But sometimes the coach's vision doesn't match that of the investor, or circumstances change quickly. Other times, deals are struck with friends, and more than money is lost if the partnership breaks up.

When Derrick Sims partnered with his longtime friend to open ECFF CrossFit in Pensacola, Florida, he believed his relationship was stronger than any legal agreement could be. A year later, he's been through a bitter battle for his gym, and he's facing the future alone.

"It's just me now. I'm scared to shit," Sims said.

Good coaches want to coach for a living, and many see partnership with an investor or friend as a shortcut to the entrepreneurial dream. And partnerships can work out for everyone involved if they're set up well. But if proper care isn't taken at the beginning of the relationship, even the best coach could find himself unhappy.

A solid partnership agreement can save money, lawyers and friendships, and creating one isn't difficult or expensive.

## Starting on the Right Foot

At its core, a partnership agreement should contain the responsibilities of each party, remuneration details and opportunities for growth (if any), according to the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#). It should also describe the method for valuation in case of sale and define how one party can buy the other out.

Shareholders' roles and associated tasks should be delineated from the start, including job descriptions and estimated time spent at each task. In some cases, one partner will assume more of the day-to-day operational responsibilities while another builds the business. According to the [Small Business Administration website](#), it can be hard for each partner to appreciate the other's effort when it's out of sight, so clearly defined roles and responsibilities can eliminate speculation and confusion.

Considerations for pay—salaries, dividends and rates—should be recorded on paper. Each partner should know how to increase his or her share of the business, and each should understand his or her responsibilities when the business needs cash. Other important considerations include how much money should be



left in the bank account before dividends are paid, when and how much equipment should be purchased, and how each person can escape the contract if everything goes wrong.

In many shareholders' agreements, partners are given a "right of first refusal"—a first crack at the seller's shares—for a certain window of time if the other partner wants out. If the partner can't come up with the money or doesn't want to increase ownership, the seller can accept an offer from anyone. Most box owners wouldn't even consider hiring a stranger to coach; sharing intimate financial details with a new partner someone else selects could make for an uncomfortable venture.

## When it comes to buyout procedures, anything is desirable over a bitter fight without any legal boundaries.

A buyout scenario brings up the issue of valuation. Valuing a new or young company is a challenge, especially in a service business built around one or two dominant personalities. Some gyms have an "icon problem": Clients are more attached to one coach than to the business and will follow the coach to a new venture. Others don't use contracts and can't accurately predict their revenues from month to month. Fitness equipment is often valued at 30 percent of its purchase price after it's been used once. And discussing a "goodwill" value can make even an amenable buyout volatile because any number placed on a partner's passion and hard work will seem low.

Ultimately, share value can be hard to determine, so many business owners will spell out the process in advance. Share price might be based on gross revenue, assets of the company or salaries—or something else entirely. But deciding how to determine value in advance can save a lot of stress later.

Another option for a quick-and-dirty resolution is the "shotgun clause," in which one owner can reverse a purchase offer. For example, if Bill offers Martha \$100 for her 50 percent stake, Martha can buy out Bill for the same amount. It's quick and clean but favors the shareholder with more money: He or she can simply dangle an offer just beyond the reach of the partner.

When it comes to buyout procedures, anything is desirable over a bitter fight without any legal boundaries. When anything goes, everything often does.

## Last Man Standing

Getting into a shareholders' agreement requires two cups of coffee, an hour with an attorney and a few hundred dollars. Without an agreement, changes in ownership can take months and cost thousands of dollars—as well as friendships and sleepless nights.

"Me and (my former partner) were best friends," Sims said. "We were cops together. We worked overseas doing various things for the government. He lived with me for three years while he was trying to get back on his feet after his divorce."

He continued: "Last August (2013), we decided we were going to pull the trigger on our affiliate. We just found the space and ordered equipment. Then he decided to go back to being a cop. So I sucked it up and got the gym running while he was in cop training."

Though the pair did form a limited-liability company (LLC) to protect it from some risk, the arrangement was vague: There was no description of each partner's role or responsibilities, no clear valuation process and no buyout clause.

"We did well at first—we had 100 members in the first 10 months—but his participation fluctuated greatly. He went from doing half the work to almost none. I had a full-time job, too. I asked him to do more," Sims said.

"Of course, there was a girl involved, too," he added.

His partner's new romantic interest might have felt she had a vested interest in the gym; she acted as if she was an owner, according to Sims.

The long hours, dramatic relationship and high workload took their toll on Sims. Still working full time as a police officer, he would spend his shifts nervously praying his classes were being covered at the gym.

"Our first real blowup was in May (2014). I was tired of doing all the work and not getting any help. We had a sit-down discussion, and he agreed to take on some administrative roles like programming and following up with leads," Sims said.

Things seemed to be improving, but his partner's work was unsatisfactory to Sims. In July, the situation worsened when his partner took a promotion at the sheriff's office. He offered to sell his shares to Sims for \$40,000, but Sims still preferred to share the work and proposed weekly meetings to coordinate ownership better.



Courtesy of Jeff Lynch

**At CrossFit Alpha 1 Athlete, Jeff Lynch (delivering choke) provided cash for startup as part of a clearly defined arrangement with his partner.**

"That lasted two weeks," Sims said.

Over the summer, Sims had to release an employee who'd been hired by his partner. Further complicating the issue, the programming was becoming inconsistent, and the partners disagreed on their responsibilities in the box. When Sims left for a weekend CrossFit seminar, his partner closed the gym and took a vacation.

Feeling the situation was irreparable, Sims handed over control of the box via text message at the end of September.

"I just said, 'I'm out. Go ahead and run everything,'" Sims recalled.

The box couldn't close because clients had already been billed for October. Sims got an attorney who made the case that Sims owned more than a 50 percent share because he'd contributed all the original equipment. Because those terms hadn't specifically been spelled out in the LLC contract, the original contributions of each partner were open to interpretation. In this case, an ambiguous shareholders' agreement worked out in Sims' favor, but it easily could have gone the other way.

Sims' partner found a buyer for the equipment, but the money would barely cover the lease for the next year. With little to gain, the partner accepted an offer from Sims.

"I offered him 5K to just walk away. He signed the papers," Sims said.





Assigning specific roles to each partner helps people play to their strengths and interests. Some are more suited to coaching, and some are more suited to business management.

Sims lost members during the transition. The unpredictable schedule, tension between coaches and doubt about the gym's future caused several clients to train elsewhere. Now Sims is trying to repair the damage as sole owner.

"I wish I'd done it sooner," he said. "Now I have to rebuild membership."

Over a year into ownership, Sims is starting from square one—this time alone.

## The CrossFit Inc. Perspective

To protect the trainer-cum-owner, CrossFit Inc. has taken precautions with its licensing procedures. These precautions require some extra consideration when drafting a shareholders' agreement, according to Dale Saran, head of CrossFit Legal.

"In most businesses, the licenses they own are part of the assets," Saran said. "But ours is non-assignable and non-sub-licensable."

In other words, gym owners granted permission to use the CrossFit brand name for an affiliate can't shift ownership to a corporation, LLC or another coach.

To protect the trainer-cum-owner, CrossFit Inc. has taken precautions with its licensing procedures.



Rod Rodriguez (in white) is the operating partner at CrossFit Alpha 1 Athlete. His role reflects the fact he's the partner who will be in the gym every day.

"We don't license companies or entities. We license Level 1 trainers," Saran said.

"It's not up for discussion in a partnership agreement, like the equipment or somebody's salary. The ownership over the name 'CrossFit' plus whatever moniker before or after is entirely something we control."

This arrangement protects coaches who want to open gyms because the coaches carry the right to use the brand name. Investing partners can't take the name in a hostile buyout.

According to Saran, many shareholders' agreements have another issue: non-compete clauses.

"First, the law generally disfavors them," he said. "Second, they're usually limited in scope."

Those concerns are common to any business, but Saran's more concerned about a potential problem specific to new CrossFit gyms: "We just found that if we allow non-competes, people would put, 'You can't open another box within five miles (in their coaches' contracts). People would start creating their own protected areas. So we just don't allow it."

This means new affiliates have the same opportunities long-established gyms had when they opened. It's free-market capitalism at its best. Older gyms have to work hard to retain their spot at the top of the local pile and don't get to carve out territories that might allow them to coast. The arrangement eliminates complacency and ensures better coaches can make a great living as owners and operators.

Saran said the licensing agreement is built with this owner/operator coach in mind.



“Investors should understand that CrossFit isn’t an investment-grade asset. That’s not what it was designed for. The ‘least-rents model’ depends largely on keeping costs as low as possible. Any greed built into that business model would distort the market,” he said.

CrossFit’s “least-rents” model, described in [The Founder’s Views Part 3](#), means CrossFit’s mission isn’t to maximize revenue through affiliate fees. It’s to grow the brand as much as possible.

“We’re not trying to widen the pie,” CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman said in an interview with [Inc.com](#). Rather, his vision is to expand the pie itself to increase revenue without putting additional financial pressure on CrossFit affiliates. Non-compete agreements are contrary to that strategy.

Of course, a business has a right to protect its interests. One alternative to a non-compete clause is a non-solicitation agreement, in which partners and coaches agree not to approach former clients to entice them away from their current gym should a split occur.

“We’re fans of a non-solicitation agreement. If a trainer leaves, he shouldn’t be soliciting clients. That’s just shitty behavior,” Saran said. “The law looks at membership lists, contact info and all of that stuff as an asset of the business. So we’re fine with that (level of protection).”

Shareholder buyouts have been discussed since the first affiliates were licensed, and changes in licensee are sometimes dictated by circumstance. For example, many affiliates are owned by military personnel, so it’s sometimes necessary to move the official license from one shareholder to another.

“Let’s say we’re three years into this and I get deployed,” Saran said. “How do I take my share out? Can I sell to anyone I want or do my partners get the first option to buy me out?”

In these cases, CrossFit Affiliate Support and CrossFit Legal work hard to ensure the licensee of record isn’t being forced out. If the arrangement is amicable and all affiliation requirements are met, CrossFit Inc. will transfer ownership to a remaining partner.

## An Ounce of Prevention

CrossFit Alpha 1 Athlete in Plano, Texas, was formed on a formal shareholders’ agreement, and owners Jeff Lynch and Rod Rodriguez are involved in a good partnership. At startup, Lynch invested money and Rodriguez spent his days in the gym as the operating partner, making a salary. Rodriguez has a 10 percent stake in the business, with options to earn more.



Lynch (above left) and Rodriguez (above and below in white) set up a shareholders’ agreement that includes goal-based milestones and buyout options. With everything laid out in advance, each partner knows what’s expected of him and what options are available if either one wants to change his role.



“We fit the left-brain/right-brain analogy really well,” Lynch said. “I see numbers of happy people; he sees happy people getting fit.”

He continued: “Rod and I had a similar vision to create a better gym, but since I knew the gym wouldn’t be my main source of income, and it would be for Rod, I wanted him to have an increasing ownership percentage as the gym grows.”

Lynch built revenue-based milestones into their shareholders’ agreement. Every year, they consider the numbers to see if their goals are met. If they are, Rodriguez will increase his shares. There’s even an option to buy Lynch out. But an increased share doesn’t just mean increased dividends in times of plenty. It also means increased risk, which Rodriguez willingly accepts.

While Lynch doesn’t think his arrangement would work in all cases, he said it’s important to know what motivates your partners.

“What drives them?” Lynch asked. “Is it pride? Is it money?”

It’s also important for each partner to understand the combination of risk and reward that comes with ownership. A prospective partner might see only upside: the potential to earn his or her value as a hard worker. But the downside exists: A 10 percent stakeholder will be liable for 10 percent of the business’ debts if it fails. And if one partner doesn’t pull his or her weight, the other will have to shoulder a greater share.

Lynch noted new partners who are friends might be hesitant to broach the awkward subject of a formal shareholders’ agreement. After all, friends don’t sue friends—at least until they’re business partners. While broaching the subject of a formal agreement with a friend might seem awkward, it’s better than losing a friend—or your shirt—later.

Clients benefit from consistent, drama-free coaching, and when a bad breakup occurs, they can feel like children in a bitter divorce. Purchasing fewer kettlebells to cover a lawyer’s costs at startup might not feel enticing, but it sure beats having a lawyer break your medicine balls later. ■

## About the Author

Chris Cooper owns [CrossFit Catalyst](#). He opened his gym in 2005 with two partners but successfully removed them from the business. Since then, he’s launched several other partnerships and sold or purchased shares in more.