

## How to Pick Up Women

Want to see more female CrossFitters? A successful ladies' man has the secrets.

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Josh Bunch

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Ever heard of the phrase “perception is reality”? I vigorously disagree. Just because I perceive black as white, for example, doesn’t make me right; it just makes me ignorant or colorblind. A similar illusion is often at play when it comes to women and fitness training. If your perception leads you to believe women are the weaker sex, you’re not only missing reality, you’re probably not a CrossFitter (and if you’re a guy, you’re probably single).

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In my little CrossFit world, women are the majority vote. I own Practice CrossFit in Troy, Ohio, which currently has a membership ratio of 80% women to 20% men. While I would like to believe it's because I am such a stunning specimen of human perfection and font of knowledge that women clamor to be trained by me, a pretty face only goes so far. The females I have the pleasure of working with every day come here because they get results.

That makes me wonder: "What exactly is it that I'm doing differently from other gyms that brings such a high percentage of chicks in here?"

The answer, I think, starts with admitting that you don't know it all. This is a learning process. Surely, you've witnessed the train-wreck of a guy who approaches a woman like he has all the answers, and he is just about to bless her with them all that very instant—that supreme bravado that shouts, "I have you all figured out, and I'm about to show you how much you want my company right now." Let me introduce you to the 20-year-old version of me.

After many failed conversations, and derailed, cheap-ass one-liners, I did manage to learn one thing: I knew nothing about women.

Fast-forward about eight years and I own a CrossFit facility with attendance, as I mentioned, mainly of women. While I may still be an amateur in relationships and matters that go deeper than human performance, when it comes to training the opposite sex, I think I've learned a tidbit or two that could be useful to the CrossFit box looking to increase its girl-to-guy ratio.

### How To Turn Women On

Number one, realize and respect the fact that women are tough—easily as or more resilient than men—but that context is important. The line "drop and give me 20 burpees" only works on women while you're training them—not at dance clubs. .

From what I have seen at the gym, women are like caged rabid dogs with a piece of meat hanging just outside the locked cage. They kind of pace about in circles waiting for the cage door to be flipped open. Then, all that's left is a path to get the meat. The meat is their future goal. The path is CrossFit. The lock, of course, refers to the wall of societal expectations about women and hard-core exercise that's keeping them from being the best they can be.





The difference between women and men in this analogy, I think, is that men start with no lock on the cage, but lack the urgent rage to get out. Once they do, they choose to stay in with the rest of the pack—either out of fear of losing, or embarrassment over not showing any competency. Women, however, will suck at it, lose, cry, and still come back for more at about a ratio of 10-1. Once whatever external motivation breaks her lock, and she decides to change her ways, she becomes a juggernaut going after that meat.

The job of any good CrossFit trainer then becomes how to turn her on to CrossFit.

### **Rule #1: Set High Expectations for Them**

When a female newbie enters my box, I will expect more out of her than a male. In fact, I believe it monumentally disrespectful to expect any less from a woman than of any male.

As a male it's kind of expected of me to be at least proficient at doing some of the stuff we as CrossFitters do, even if it's my first time through the door. What I seem to notice is the sheer amazement on the face of each woman new to our box when I say, "let me see your pull-up." The bewilderment on their faces excites me to no end because I know how that look will change the first time their chin gets over that bar. It will be a look of supreme self-accomplishment.

I am just a facilitator of proper training technique, cues, and motivation—nothing else. I make it my business to ensure my clients know they are the ones doing the work every day, so all the kudos go to them. I have heard it said that the best manager has a team who will continue to perform equally or higher even when that manager is on vacation. My PCF clients are the team that I manage; they're great—and would be that way even without me standing next to them.

My point is this: Returns tend to mirror your expectations. Therefore, I recommend that you memorize this equation:

Expect low = Achieve low, Expect high = Achieve high.

Simple, huh? In fact, you should take it even further with CrossFit women: Expect perceived unattainable or outlandish goals—goals that the untrained individual might consider to be bordering on crazy. The reason they'll seem that way to untrained individuals, ironically, is simply because they are untrained. Being unchallenged, uneducated, and uninspired, they've usually had less than optimal faith placed in them by others, or by themselves.

When an "unfamiliar" woman arrives at PCF, her blood may begin to boil with intimidation. In the presence of no machines, rubber weights, and pull-up bars, she may immediately begin to rationalize why committing suicide



might be easier than a workout with us. This female probably has never done a pull-up or a handstand or ever touched a weight that wasn't colored. Even more challenging, though—and what I believe is the real difference at our box—is how we view her. I will look this proverbial newbie in the eye and expect what others, including her, have never expected. I do this because in my time as a trainer, it has been my experience that most women will continue to surpass most males on any given aspect of fitness. I must say, even in the dark days before CrossFit, back before baptism by bloody-handed pull-ups, and before evangelical seminars from a man some call a cult leader, women were still the most hardcore even when trained, what I call, “the old way.” If you want to attract more females, you have to tackle their reality of CrossFit.

**Rule # 2:  
Feed Their Tendency to “Do it for the Team”**

As you may well know, CrossFit classes breed competition, a give-it-your-all magic while training with others that is hard to duplicate all lonesome-like. What I have observed is that “competition” means different things to men and women. Men push hard to beat the other guy, or not to lose. Women push hard because they want to help the team. So, competition and community are closely linked for women.

So, there is a definite expectation that females will place upon themselves while working out alongside other females. They have almost an unspoken respect for each other while engaged in brutal physical activity that makes them push harder when in a group setting. Don't get me wrong; guys push hard during the same settings, but not at such a different level.

Prior to opening PCF over a year ago, I trained mainly private sessions. None of my clients witnessed the other training. One female client of mine trained frequently for quite some time, looked good, but just didn't hit the marks a proficient female should. Miraculously, when PCF opened and she was forced to train alongside many other women, her skills jumped by leaps and bounds. My expectations never changed, nor did my respect for her. What appeared to change in her was the expectation she had for herself.

I believe that, to some extent, she felt as though she would be letting others down if she couldn't be the best she could be. Competition was there, of course, but also an innate sense of togetherness.



Wow, rereading that makes me want to pick flowers and watch the sunrise and then puke, but that's how guys are wired. We don't do that. Males perform at their utmost in front of other guys usually because we just don't want to lose, and we want to improve our skills. Women do the same, but with an added sense of communal responsibility that is inherent within them.

When the aforementioned women felt as though she was letting other women down by not performing at her best, she got good, and she took everyone else with her. In turn they continually help each other grow as athletes, and individuals working at accomplishing challenges far greater than they may have ever believed they could.

### **Rule # 3: Women Can Handle Honesty (In the Gym)**

While we all strive for honesty in every relationship, be it trainer/client or husband/wife, I have found it much more rewarding when you're honest with your clients than with your significant other. Let me clarify that little gem. If one of my female clients looks softer than she did a week ago, I tell her. I doubt, however, this would work as swimmingly with a girlfriend (not married), because telling her she has gained a few pounds would probably lead to a slew of

discussions (arguments) I really don't want to have. Women can spot a lie from a man light years before we have even thought of it. So if one of your female CrossFitters asks you why the back of her thighs is the only place she cannot see results, then tell her it's the late night trips to Ben or Jerry's house. Hold her accountable, tell her to stop, and leave her to her own vices, because all she needed was for someone she respected to tell her wrong is wrong.

The same goes for her performance. If she sucked today, tell her. Hopefully you would tell a male CrossFitter if he was performing sub-par, but I have witnessed some male trainers harp on guys while making, or accepting, the excuses of their women CFer's. Females will figure this out. Realize you are not being the best trainer you can be, and she will look for someone to be honest to her. "Good job," "you did great," and all the other clichéd crap you can come up with to tell her during and after a workout doesn't mean squat to any women I have ever worked with if it's not the truth. A little whisper to her that you really feel she didn't do her best today, said with honesty, of course, not manipulation, and she will respect you for it. Then, more than likely, she will scare little children with the ferocity she will demonstrate during her next WOD.

### Rule #4:

#### Don't Try to Teach Attitude

I can teach proper CrossFit mechanics all day. Programming is a snap. Nutrition is a breeze. Attitude, however, is not teachable. If any client standing in front of you doesn't have the right attitude, the desire to work harder than they ever have, the need to go against the generally accepted grain of the false fitness atmosphere, then there is no need to continue the relationship. I throw 80% of the fish that enter PCF back in the pond. The 20% I keep are workers. They are ready. It doesn't matter how old they are, how they look, what walk of life they arrive from. As long as they are ready to be a hard working positive addition to PCF, they can come in from off the porch. At PCF, the ones who enter are typically female; the ones who leave get beat by these girls, and are males.

Attitude is what helps to keep that "perception is reality" crap in check. And it starts with the belief that there is no difference between males and females when it comes to expectation-setting. Reality: CrossFit is hard. Wrap your hands all day. They are still going to bleed. Enjoy it. Wear white. It'll be black when you leave. Complain. And watch me leave you hanging from the bar after I remind you of how lucky you are to have the ability to train at all. At PCF you'll get this exact same attitude whether you're male or female. And if I'm not mistaken, this is the exact way each and every WOD is prescribed. There is one Rx'd weight. If you scale it, the workout may still remain super intense but it's not recommended. If the weight is attainable for the client, female or male, they must do it.

My first exposure to CrossFit was over the internet a few years back. I had been training out of a globogym for nearly five years prior to that, and during that time trained a wonderful stock of female talent. Most of my clients were women, and I expected the world from them. I, like everyone else, I'm sure, remember the first time I watched "Nasty Girls." I thought, "My girls can do that." Certainly, I don't mean they were all at the level of the fantastic females featured in that video. I'm saying that my first thought was of the ability at which I thought my female clients could train. I have never doubted a female's ability, much less questioned their tenacity with regard to fitness. For this reason, it's my opinion that attitude—both mine and that of every one of my female clients—is a huge part of the female training equation.



### Rule #5:

#### Ignore the Media and the Misconceptions

I'm positive my viewpoint is not unique as a CrossFitter when I say how disenchanted I become over the expectations the media sets for all of us all, but mainly for women—the catalogues, commercials and advertisements parading around skinny-fat chicks, not super-fit women. It would be hard not to be sold by all the dribble spouted by big name franchises, corporations, and fitness monarchs with mammoth facilities that show smiling females conversing as they workout.

I say, deliver us from clever lingerie advertising. Deliver us from commercials with pretty music, and puppies meant to provoke emotion. I say, let us get dirty while we train. Let us challenge ourselves harder than what we ever have. I say, you are not your %&%\$ing handbag; sorry to go all "Fight Club" on you, but Chuck P. has a good point when it relates to conglomerates ruining the beauty already inherent to the world. A healthy woman who can work hard and outperform a man is almost frowned upon in certain places. In CrossFit, it's common.

The worst thing to do is play into the propaganda. I'm sure most CF's don't do this, but even more so, don't go out of your way to separate yourselves from the pack. Don't go over your marketing plan looking for a way to advertise to women. At PCF, we don't even have a marketing plan. Instead, deliver training that makes your current members your best recruiters. One woman, who loves the program equals hundreds who hear about it. Don't go out and buy little pink-ass weights or 5lb resistance bands. Don't

put flowers in the women's restroom (although it's a nice touch) but do, no matter how hardcore you are, keep your damn showers clean. And, most importantly, don't set up your WODs with some kind of mindset that says the workouts need to be more pleasing to a girl. When a future CrossFit woman arrives on her first day, get her dirty. Make her sweat. Make her CrossFit. Have no more love for her than anyone else. If your WODs are at all gender-biased with respect to the level of difficulty expected of the so-called "fairer sex," you can bet they will soon be leaving very unsatisfied. If, on the other hand you expect them to flip that same big-ass tire as the guy before them, then stand back. I guarantee she will try harder than any male even if she only moves it an inch. And here's the kicker: She will keep trying until it's two inches... then end-over-end, baby.

Erase the atrocities of the American fitness Reich. Show them the truth. Choke them with the Kool-Aid, whatever you want to call it. Destroy the misconceptions from day one by examples, and truth, and she will bleed CF blood for you, and bring in other future all-stars.

### **Summary: Clean the floors and Set the Bar High**

Sure, there is something to be said about the impact of the "you can't do that, you're a girl" stuff, but that only lasts so long. Walk that brand new female CrossFitter to the pull-up bar and say "Let me see your pull-up." Hand her that 45-pound bar when it's time for overhead squats and watch her get it. Make the 100-pounder deadlift 225 pounds. In short, if you're an affiliate wanting or needing more female attendance, consider whether or not you're creating the kind of reality at your box that attracts women waiting to unleash the sleeping lion within them; a reality that says, "Yeah, this is tough but you're ready for it." If you feel you've already been doing this and yet still have poor female attendance, try cleaning your showers and vacuuming your floors every now and again.

As an affiliate owner and, therefore, a representative of the best fitness program on Earth, I feel the need to constantly spread the fitness gospel to the misinformed. So to the female reading, wishing, or wanting to CrossFit, or even the CrossFitter pushing herself less than optimally today I say you—more so than most males—are a walking, breathing waste of potential. I say that in the sweetest way possible, of course, because I know what you're capable of doing.

For males, it usually takes a true fire-breather with the desire. In my experience, females are already all that; they just may not know it.

Women: I guarantee you can begin CrossFitting or begin CrossFitting at a level you thought impossible, and quickly surpass the "you" of old. It may only require you to relinquish old expectations of yourself, and females in general, and adopting true CrossFit mantra: The clock loves no one, male or female. What matters is who calls time first.



### **About the Author:**

*For the last 10 years, Josh Bunch has been immersed in the field of fitness. He began managing a big box facility, and then about eight years ago, began a personal training business. He holds many certifications... "which don't really matter unless they have CrossFit attached to them," he says. Currently a Level 1 CF trainer, Josh has worked with many athletes concerned about aesthetics, or performance. An amateur competitive bodybuilder for the stage, he made CrossFit his program of choice to get ready for stage, and hasn't looked back since. In January 2008, Josh opened [Practice CrossFit](#), and would love to open another location. "The goal is to saturate the community with so much CrossFit dogma they cannot bear to train any other way," he says.*

