
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Back to the Beginning

With CrossFit's popularity exploding, Craig Hysell describes his box's introductory program and why it works.

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All images: Craig Hysell

So, you got 'em into your free trial class, and they fell in love with you at "constantly varied functional movement at high intensity." That fawning prospective member is in a sweaty heap at your feet and, when he can breathe again, he practically begs you to tell him how to get started.

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Elements, fundamentals, bootcamp ... whatever you call it, the point is to teach new members form, technique and terminology.

You say it's simple, when his legs stop involuntarily shaking from the air squats he just did and can walk to your desk, he needs to sign up for your Elements Class.

"What's an elements class?" he asks.

You swallow a sigh. How many times do you have to answer this freakin' question?

"It's our foundations class," you say with a tight smile.

"OK ... so ... what's the foundations class?"

Biting your tongue, you answer, "It's our elements class."

WTF? Did somebody just mention "broad time and modal domains" or something? How could a concept so, ahem, elemental, be so confusing?

Well, it is.

And it's your fault.

Get With the Program

Foundations. Fundamentals. Elements.

These terms might be keeping prospects from your business simply because people have no idea what they mean. It doesn't matter if you understand what you are talking about; it matters if the customer understands what you are talking about. You can have the greatest cues in

the world, but if the athlete, member, exerciser or potential client in front of you doesn't "get it," you aren't doing your job. Period. A good coach or owner always finds a way to get his or her message across.

"Who cares if they don't get it," the hardcore box owners might huff, and that's certainly their right. It's their business, and I don't pretend that anything we do at our box is the only way to do something.

**A properly formatted
introduction sets a tone
for safety, understanding,
adaptation and then progress.**

Here's what I do know: we are a 2,200-square-foot facility on an island of 45,000 year-round residents. We opened in April 2010. We had 50 members when we started 2011. We grew to 133 members by the end of the year, we have a much lower turnover rate than in our first year, and we have significantly less sports-related injuries. I credit a majority of this to our BootCamp.

BootCamp? Seriously? Did I just combine “boot” and “camp” into some kind of lame CrossFit-style one-wordism to denote our FoundationsFundamentalsElements class? Yes. Yes, I did. And it works.

Bootcamps have been a rite of passage with military institutions—a community of people for whom CrossFit is well suited—for millennia. Bootcamps are traditionally a time of learning, cultural initiation and trial by fire. It’s where all our voodoo and “brainwashing” happens if you buy into the ridiculous notion that CrossFit is a cult. What really happens, however, is that a properly formatted introduction sets a tone for safety, understanding, adaptation and then progress.

Here are a few things that happen if we CrossFitters and non-CrossFitters don’t understand one another:

1. You (a non-CrossFitter) relate to me (a CrossFit coach) that you know all about CrossFit due to your experiences with P90X or Insanity. I look at you like Louie Simmons would look at me if I told him I thoroughly understand the conjugate method of training because I did band-assisted sumo deads last Friday for 10 sets of 2. Except I don’t have a back the size of a refrigerator door or super cool “Louie-isms” that relate your ignorance to some obscure 185-lb. powerlifter from 1978.
2. You could injure yourself if you run headlong into the program without understanding the mechanics-consistency-intensity principle. That is completely unacceptable.
3. You have no idea what I’m talking about when I use terms like WOD, rounds for time, AMRAP, clean and jerk, elbows up, get tight, head through, etc. That means I hold the entire class back much longer than necessary to explain these things in detail to you instead of relating one or two quick “refresher points” to jog your memory.

In no way, shape or form do we take credit for the initial formatting of our BootCamp. Much, much smarter owners, coaches and trainers came up with this template long before I came along and were gracious enough to put it out there in the intraweb world where CrossFit nerds like me could find it.

What we do take credit for is the evolution of our BootCamp. Our BootCamp is a living document, and it goes through some sort of monthly permutation in order to improve upon the month before it and better prepare our newbies for our regular CrossFit classes if they choose to join up. It is particular to our needs as a box and not necessarily universal to the constantly varied functional movement world. What this simply means is: once you understand it, the template is yours to manipulate as you see fit. We feel that as soon as we stop tweaking our BootCamp, that probably means we no longer care about it and the training will drift into mediocrity.

Our BootCamp starts the first Monday of every month and runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for four weeks. Classes are either 5:30 to 6:30 a.m. or 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., and the slots are interchangeable. We take 20 people maximum per class time, which means we can take up to 40 new members a month. Each class builds off the one before it, so attendance is mandatory. If BootCampers miss more than one class, they must repeat the BootCamp or schedule a make-up class.

We go through a little five-minute spiel on Day 1 to lay down some concepts and our expectations. Our BootCampers do the same WOD only once, on Day 1 and Day 12 because we don’t want to tell them they have gotten better; we want them to see it for themselves. They record everything in a notebook we give them on Day 1. Each class is followed by a short discussion going over some specific points we want to get across. We garner a majority of our BootCamp sign-ups through our Facebook page, our free trial class and word of mouth.



A BootCamp participant is introduced to the thruster.

(We tried a Groupon once, and it didn't work out for the most part. Yes, we got a few members, but mostly we got cheap people who either had no interest in working hard to get better or didn't want to spend the money even if they did. Most of them had no respect for what they were getting into, and we way undersold what we were doing. Other boxes might have had other experiences. Groupon was not a total waste of time, but it wasn't enough of a positive experience for me to try it again.)

You will have created a member with a significant understanding in the fundamentals, concepts and expectations of your box.

Bootcamp Pros

- Prospective members know what a bootcamp is and usually are not intimidated by the word or concept. (Yes, our BootCamp is, for all intents and purposes, an elements class, but just like in cueing, some people don't understand what you're saying when you tell them, "Push your hips back and unhinge at the knees." So you have to simply say, "Pretend you are sitting in a chair.")
 - You will, usually by the end of the first week, weed out all of those people who do not want to be a part of your gym or CrossFit training in general. That means you will not waste your valuable time training members who have no intention of sticking around. (We do not give refunds.)
 - We have an 80-90 percent sign-up rate by the end of our BootCamp from those who stuck around. That happens monthly. We give them a special deal at the end of the BootCamp as a reward: six months of membership at the yearly rate (our cheapest monthly option).
- You will get to know all your prospective members on a much more personal and athletic level due to the intimate nature of the group environment and speed of the beginner courses. And they will have plenty of time to process and practice what you are telling them.
 - They will know other people when they get to regular classes—members they "graduated" with—and understand the very special concept intrinsic to healthy CrossFit boxes: community.
 - They will have the feeling that they accomplished something special, which they have.
 - They will have the respect of your current membership because they will have been "initiated" to a degree.
 - You will have created a member with a significant understanding in the fundamentals, concepts and expectations of your box, which keeps people safe and retention up.
 - You will save time, create a more competent and culturally cognizant athlete, and make more money more efficiently—which is why Coach Greg Glassman went to the group-training concept in the first place.



After a month of BootCamp, graduates integrate seamlessly into the regular classes.



BootCamp participants are guaranteed safety and results -- but it's not easy.

Bootcamp Cons—And Our Answers

- It's only once a month. Answer: Funneling people into once-a-month classes adds not only to the anticipation but also gives prospective members time to recruit friends to come with them. At our box, the more friends they bring, they cheaper the BootCamp becomes. We do make exceptions from time to time on putting members through our BootCamp.
- It's too early or it's too late. Answer: Suck it up and make a decision. Can you get up a little early or stay up a little late for 12 hours of your life? If you can't, then this isn't for you. No hard feelings. Remember, the coach or trainer gets up earlier and stays later than all of you.
- It's expensive. Answer: You are getting 12 hours of personal training in a group environment. Personal trainers can cost anywhere from \$50 to \$150 per hour. Our program is \$200 per person and \$150 if you bring a friend. It's \$100 if you bring two or more friends. Our program is not expensive.
- I can't make it to every class: Answer: We understand that life gets in the way. How many classes are you going to miss, and why are going to miss them? You are allowed to miss one without having to make it up. Yes, we make exceptions, but not many.
- It's challenging/hard. Answer: Of course it is. If it were easy, it would be mediocre, making us mediocre, which means you wouldn't respect what you have earned or what we do. What's more, because it is hard and only continues to get harder, in three months you will look back on these workouts and treat them as merely warm-ups. We do not guarantee "easy." We guarantee "safety and results" if you are listening and putting forth the effort.

Bootcamp Chart

	Warm-Up	Skill	WOD	Post-Wod	Discussion Points
1	200-meter run Samson stretch Hip flexor mobility/ plank Over/under the fence	Posture Air squat Push-up Sit-up	200-meter run 15-12-9 Squat/push-up/sit-up 200-meter run	Calf roll-out with roller. Lacrosse-ball chest roll-out on wall	Explain importance of recording WODs
2	200-meter run Hip mobility from plank. Figure 4 from back. 2 x 10 squats/5 push-ups	Pass-through Good morning Deadlift Shoulder press Push press	Amrap in 7 minutes. 100-meter run 7 barbell or dumbbell deadlifts 7 barbell or dumbbell push presses (PVC if necessary)	Hip mobility from plank Upward and downward dog twice	Flexibility Attrition Treating soreness Stay away from NSAIDs and ice when hurt
3	200-meter run 10 squats/passthru/ push presses/deadlifts Lacrosse ball in scapula for one minute Low-back mobility PVC mobility for better front rack	Front squat Thruster	3 rounds of: 200-meter run 10 barbell or dumbbell thrusters 10 sit-ups	Pigeon pose Upward and downward dog	Attitude Mental toughness: "I can't vs. I can"
4	3 over-under the fence per leg Samson stretch 10 squats/pass- throughs /good mornings/thrusters Shoulder mobility on bands	Hollow rock Pull-up progression (body row, ring row, jumping, band assisted, singles) No kipping	4 rounds for time of: 100-meter run 7 pull-up progressions of choice 25 squats 10:00 minute time cap	Roll-out with lacrosse ball	Fish oil and protein powder

Bootcamp Chart ... continued

	Warm-Up	Skill	WOD	Post-Wod	Discussion Points
5	200-meter run Hip mobility from plank PVC roller in T-spine Band shoulder stretch 10 push-ups/squats/pass-throughs/push presses	Knees-to-elbows Handstand push-up progression	3 rounds for time of: 200-meter run 10 knees-to-elbows 5 HSPU progressions of choice	Upward/downward dog twice Low-back mobility Stretch triceps	Paleo Diet: stick to outside of grocery store
6	400-meter run 3 over-under the fence per leg Upward and downward	Wall-ball Kipping pull-ups	5 rounds for time of: 7 wall-balls 7 push-ups 7 pull-up progressions	Pigeon pose Hip mobility from plank Upward and downward dog	ROM and technique under stress: the clock is just a tool Failing intelligently
7	2 minutes of jump rope 10 passthroughs 10 squats 10 pull-ups 10 thrusters 10 knees-to-elbows	Double-unders Re-visit kipping	For Time: 400-meter run 30 squats 15 pull-up progressions 15 barbell or dumbbell thrusters 15 knees-to-elbows progressions 15 double-unders 400-meter run	Full body roll-out	Scaling Talk about ice again
8	2 minutes of jump rope 30 seconds of hollow rock. 20 pass-throughs 10 deadlifts 5 kipping swings Hip and shoulder mobility Address front rack	Hang power clean Using Burgener Warm-Up to instruct Box jump	AMRAP in 8 minutes of: 5 barbell or dumbbell hang power cleans 7 box jumps 9 sit-ups	Couch stretch Calf and adductor roll-out	Hip pop

Bootcamp Chart ... continued

	Warm-Up	Skill	WOD	Post-Wod	Discussion Points
9	400-meter run 2 x 10 passthroughs/ good mornings/front squats/pull-ups Front rack mobility Burgener Warm-Up (clean)	Back squat Front squat Rack safety Loading weight Dumping weight	3 rounds for time of: Front squat 3-3-3-3	Figure 4 from back Hamstrings from back	Reiterate rack safety, dumping weight
10	2 minutes of jump rope 2 x 10 good mornings/ squats/ deadlift/ push-ups Hips, T-spine with PVC roller Triceps stretch	Dip (ring, parallel bars or box, band assist OK on parallel bars only) Overhead squat	AMRAP in 10 minutes of: 5 dip progressions 10 barbell or PVC overhead squats 15 hollow rocks	Triceps Hip flexor Shoulder band stretch	How our classes work and our class schedule Tell them of the deal we have coming up on Class 11
11	400-meter run 2 x 10 thrusters/ passthroughs/OHS 3 over-under the fence per side	Kettlebell swing Burpees	15-12-9 reps for time of: Kettlebell swings Barbell thrusters Burpees	Couch stretch Lacrosse ball	One-day-only sale price: 6 months @ \$115 per month. Or \$575 up front (cash or check only)
12	400-meter run 2 x 10 passthroughs/ good mornings/ squats/push-ups/ sit-ups Shoulder mobility from back, pressing above head, keeping abs tight	Burgener Warm-Up (snatch; PVC only)	200-meter run 15-12-9 Squats/push-ups/ sit-ups 200-meter run	Hips from plank Upward/downward dog Lacrosse ball	Graduation picture. T-shirt

Building the Affiliate Community

Now more than ever, proper introduction into CrossFit is paramount. More and more people are going to be drawn to your box looking for the answers. Reebok is throwing out ads during major network television events. The Games are on The Deuce (ESPN2). People are hearing about CrossFit from a friend who heard from a friend who heard it from another you've been CrossFittin'. The responsibility of where the community heads is in the hands of the local box owner, not Reebok or CrossFit HQ.

**They need to know that form
and intensity are a couple,
and that 10-minute
couplets are brutal.**

Your noobs need to know that this CrossFit thing is about technique over weight and weight over time. They need to know that we cheer each other on just as much as we compete against one another. They need to know that form and intensity are a couple, and that 10-minute couplets are brutal. They need to know that as soon as the camaraderie of what we do is lost, what we do is then also lost. They need to know that we are not some elitist underground cult of fitness freaks but, instead, we can explain our idea of fitness simply so that anybody who has the balls to walk into a box will have the opportunity to evolve into his or her best self through the hard routine of constantly varied functional movement at high intensity.

There is nothing wrong with being different and going mainstream as long as you keep the integrity of what you are doing intact. This starts on Day 1. The more people you can get to understand this, the better off your product and your business will be, and the better off we will all be.



Courtesy of Craig Hysell

About the Author

Craig Hysell is the owner and head coach at CrossFit Hilton Head. He lives in Bluffton, S.C., with his daughter and girlfriend. He would like to thank all the people in the constantly varied functional movement community who throw their information on the Web for free in their best effort to positively affect the learning curve on safe, proper, stellar training.