
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Left Out in the Cold

One loyal CrossFitter has a bad experience at an affiliate and issues a call to action to others: Be passionate about every athlete.

By CrossFit Mom

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Dear CrossFit affiliates,

Ignore my husband's rolling eyes when I say this: I don't ask for much.

I'm the typical, overlooked, mainstream, voting American mom of boys who spends too much time folding socks and serving as head chef and chief accountant at our humble abode. But I have a secret: last year I discovered CrossFit.

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I'll spare you the clichéd anecdotes we've all found in unraveling our self-esteem under an Olympic bar and finding, slowly, a hidden tiger aching to load more weight and heave till limbs quake. I may be 20 years older than most of the chiseled hunks and muscled divas who frequent the daily WOD movies and *CrossFit Journal* entries, but I've unleashed the addiction to get stronger each day despite the bleeding blisters and failed attempts of the day before.

My frustration is this: as an at-home CrossFitter (we live in the boonies), I needed help learning the Olympic lifts. Despite the fact that my husband lost his job six months ago and we're sapping our savings trying to find work and keep our house, I begged and pleaded for the money to do a beginners' class at a (somewhat) local affiliate. Something about my newly found rock-hard abs, flab-less rump, and increased bedroom interest enticed my husband's hesitant permission, and off I went, scared stiff, to embarrass myself in front of other out-of-shape, middle-aged hopefuls looking for a ray of hope to reclaim their youthful dreams of strength and sex appeal.

But it sucked!



Are you motivating each and every athlete each and every day?

Wanting More

I didn't expect someone to hold my hand when I went to the affiliate. I went knowing I wasn't going to find Globo Gym-style sales pitches telling me I could look 20 again in six months of personal training. I thought the place would be filled with other hopeless CrossFit addicts who savored their PRs and slim-lined muscles as much as I do. But it wasn't at all!

The lukewarm enthusiasm was heartbreaking. The "lesson" for each session was haphazard and scrambled at the last few moments before the class started. I paid for the classes, learned some techniques on Oly lifts, and was dismissed at the end of the last class with a price sheet and a mention of the affiliate's very limited class schedule. I asked about offering more time slots. I tried to ask about nutrition and homing in on the Zone Diet. There was nothing but sidetracked, lackluster attention paid to me and the other hopefuls. What gives?

The trainers not only spared us the sales pitch but also left out their willingness to have us join them altogether. It was subliminally clear that they were not there to help other pilgrims along their journey to the CrossFit Holy Land but were simply doing this whole CrossFit-affiliate-gym thing on the side of their "real job" and personal interests.

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Not once were we asked what our goals were. Not once were we asked why we were there. Some kudos were given for finishing a workout, but we received little motivation to come back or assurance that the trainers wanted to share the journey with us as we achieved our goals. Was I expecting too much?

Now let me also say this: it's a given that working with the public is a true pain in the ass. I have no doubt as to the validity of the shenanigans and droning, high-maintenance client demands you hear trainers allude to on the affiliate blogs. But I'm not one of those people.

And despite my personal economic hardship within my own family, I would have sold my soul to the devil to come up with the money and driven my bicycle uphill both ways in a blizzard to make it to the CrossFit gym for a little support, to talk with other CrossFit Games hopefuls, and to pump out some more personal PRs that I never would have thought possible.

I wouldn't have demanded attention. I wouldn't have badgered anyone for his or her time. I would have cheered other aging prospects and admired the virility of youth all around me. I would have arrived on time, done the WOD, maybe asked a question or two, sweated and puked with the others, and high-fived the cute, tall one on the way out. But I never got the chance, and for the sake of principle, I never will because I refuse to go back.

I believe in the American religion of capitalism. My husband is a small-business owner, and despite the loss of his job (his business burned down), he is slowly and successfully rebuilding because of his excellent customer service. He excels because people seek him out for his attention to their needs. He rarely advertises. He is successful because he genuinely likes to help people and knows how to treat paying customers. Is that so much to ask of a CrossFit affiliate?

It drives me to ask: What is the purpose of the CrossFit affiliate? Is it just an avenue for other CrossFit addicts to make a little money at something they like to do? Or is it to function as something more?

Online I watch endless CrossFit videos from other gyms showcasing the camaraderie that's fostered in driving people to push to their maximum and empower themselves to succeed when they thought they couldn't. There's so much more to it than lifting heavy weights: it's a quest to prove to yourself that you *can* do the unimaginable. Shouldn't that be at the crux of the reasoning behind opening an affiliate?

Well, I had hoped it would be and was sadly disappointed. The two owners were nice. I don't mean to disparage them. Truth be said, I'm sure they are fueling their own personal passion for CrossFit on the side of their "real jobs" and can only do the best they can do. There are, sadly, only 24 hours in a day.



Passionate athletes need passionate trainers. Are you putting everything you have into the athlete-trainer relationship?

Yet there was a gaping hole in the “feel” of it all. Aren’t all CrossFitters wild-eyed tongue-waggers who will fill your ears with their latest PRs on hang power snatches and double-unders in between swapping post-workout nutrition recipes? Read the *CrossFit Journal* comments and the passion is palpable. Yet walking into this affiliate, I was treated like someone walking into my kitchen after 9 p.m. and asking me for a meal when I’ve been battling screaming kids, a disorganized husband and a half-possessed dog. Find fuel elsewhere!

Pursue Virtuosity

So my question is this: who is at fault? Who’s approaching this the wrong way? I’m humble. I can admit when I’m wrong. My husband can tell me without fear of being shot if I’m expecting too much (well, three weeks out of the month anyway). Was I asking too much to hope for a little camaraderie at the CrossFit gym with other Zone Diet zealots? Was I wrong in thinking they would have at least asked why I was there and addressed how they could help me achieve my goals? Was I being too girly or needy in thinking they’d want to see me come back? After all, it is a business.

Will I ever go back? No. I couldn’t give them money and reward them for their lack of professionalism, interest in helping others or enthusiasm. If my family can get back up on our feet financially, I may go to one of the other CrossFit gyms (an hour away) and try another affiliate. Until then, I will continue my less-effective attempts at home. I am consistently stopped by friends who ask how I’ve managed to get into such great shape, and though I have turned several of them on to CrossFit, I wish I could get them to a close affiliate with trainers who could help them more.

To be fair, this was only one affiliate over the duration of four weeks. Was it a fluke? A misinterpretation? I may never know, but what I do know is that the box was cold and unwelcoming. The result? A missed opportunity for them and for me. I love CrossFit too much to let it slide. Too many people across this planet are busting their tails to improve themselves and others. What are you doing, affiliates, to make sure this isn’t happening in your box?

My purpose in writing is to send a wake-up call to the other affiliates:

Why are you open? What is your purpose? Are you helping people reach their CrossFit dream? If not, why not?

Again, I’m a very small person, always overlooked and never respected. I’m used to being unimportant to everyone unless I am heavily laden with a homemade hot dinner. I’m OK with that. But in the CrossFit world, I am more! I am just as eager as you are to be strong and to conquer another PR, regardless of how pathetic it is compared to yours. And I would have paid dearly to bleed a little beside someone else just as nuts.

So next time the middle-aged housewife comes in with a dream in her eye and a baby-belly bulge left to tackle, don’t overlook her. She might just be your best fighter in the bunch!

3, 2, 1... Go!



About the Author

The author is a 5-foot-nothing, 105-lb CrossFit mom of two CrossFit boys. She’s currently addicted to Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, NCAA football, and the gut-wrenching quest of the 7-minute mile and 135-lb. deadlift. She is currently intensely searching for proof that the Twix bar is in fact a good carb for the Zone Diet.