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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Fitness Is ... Exposure and Impartial

Greg Glassman asked the question, "What is fitness?" Blair Morrison offers some of his own thoughts to help you discover what fitness means to you.

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By Blair Morrison CrossFit Anywhere

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Courtesy of Blair Morrison

What is fitness?

The question is one of the foundations of the CrossFit program, and asking it will make you reconsider just about everything you know about training. In answering it, Greg Glassman created a new way of training and a new way of thinking about health and human performance. He also got people thinking and answering the question for themselves.

In the third installment of this multi-part series, two-time CrossFit Games competitor Blair Morrison talks about what fitness is to him.

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## Find Your Weaknesses—Then Improve

Exposure.

This idea more broadly includes the people we meet, the places we go, and the tools we use in our quest for health. More directly, and as it pertains to this essay, it represents our respective abilities/inabilities when it comes to our physical and mental thresholds during exercise. If we're lucky, we discover more good things than bad, more strong points than weak. But that's not reality. We're not good at everything. In fact, we're not good at most things.

Coping with the knowledge that mastery over a vast array of disciplines, skills and challenges is beyond our capacity is not a discovery many are comfortable making. More encouraging is the exposure of a hidden talent or a secret strength. It's affirming, empowering and, most of all, easy. It lets us know, from time to time, that everything doesn't always have to be such a struggle. Once past this initial burst of satisfaction, though, what lasting good is this knowledge? What can we use it for, besides the occasional reassurance that there are some things we can do well? From this perspective, exposing areas where we struggle is far more instructive for a number of reasons.

First, exposure targets our training. When I found out I couldn't do chest-to-bar pull-ups at the 2009 Mid-Atlantic Regional, you better believe I practiced them like crazy before going to the Games in July. I discovered how hard they were to do and how effective they were in building strength, and I targeted my training accordingly.

Second, exposure questions our approach. A few months ago I did a workout that prescribed 5 rounds of 3 overhead squats, 6 front squats, 9 back squats (all using body weight on the bar) and 12 sit-ups. It took 11 minutes, and I was sore for a week. I had expected it to be challenging, but I didn't expect anywhere near the pain I felt afterward. Looking back, I realized I had been training heavier squats on strength days, but never in a met-con format, explaining my body's surprising reaction to the workout. This discovery exposed a hole in my program and enabled me to rectify it.

Discovering our weaknesses also gives us the opportunity to improve. If we only do things we are good at, we will have no motivation to train and no knowledge of where we can get better. And the affirmation won from hard-fought gains is far more powerful than that which we get after discovering a hidden talent. Most people know this from experience. Think about your first push-up, mile run, handstand or all-day hike. Think about the time you set a personal record of any kind after being stuck on a plateau for months. This type of empowerment only comes from improvement.

Lastly, and most importantly, realizing that we *can* improve is an exposure in itself. It's one thing we all have in common. While individuals are naturally leaner, faster or stronger than each other, nobody is without weakness. In fact, in the history of time, nobody has ever been that good at any one thing that he couldn't get better, let alone that good at everything. It's a universal impossibility.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

***Complete fitness is about eliminating weaknesses by exposing them and training hard to overcome them. At the CrossFit Games, the athlete with the fewest weaknesses walks away with the title "Fittest on Earth."***



Staff/CrossFit Journal

***Fitness has few gray areas: the weight went up or it didn't.***

This is one of the most important discoveries we get to make in fitness: There is no ceiling.

It's hard to remember when we're struggling to get off the couch and get to the gym, but everyone's been there. How hard things can be, how long they can take and how far we still have to go—these are common struggles, and they're worth enduring. These are the ones that test our ability and raise our threshold.

### **It's a Rep or It Isn't**

Impartial.

Fitness doesn't care about circumstances, timing or convenience. You're either up to the challenge or you're not.

During three years of personal training in Washington, D.C., I had the privilege to meet and engage with people seeking fitness from all walks of life. I listened to their goals, taught them the skills they would need to achieve them, and did my best to help them meet and overcome each inevitable hurdle. During the course of these interactions and experiences, I heard a million reasons why goals weren't reached or why hurdles were too high. But no justification, no matter how convincing or true, ever transformed failure into success. No task, whatever it may be, will ever make itself easier to overcome because you are tired, sick or haven't had your coffee. This is fitness' beautiful simplicity. You either lift the weight or you don't. You get yourself to shore or you drown. Almost doesn't count.

In many cases, this kind of impartiality can be ruthless—but it is always fair. Growing up playing football and baseball, I was exposed to kids from good families, bad families, rich families, poor families, families with dogs or cats or birds or whatever. The best part of any sport I ever played was that I wasn't any of those things when I was on the field, and neither were they. In that moment we were nothing but our ability or inability to perform.

Unfortunately, this brand of abject fairness doesn't sit well with those who don't get it done. Rather than acknowledging failure, finding their flaw and working toward improving it, the vast majority of kids looked outward and instead found an external excuse for their incompetence. Call it immaturity, irresponsibility or whatever, but it is the same in society at large. People blame violence on the influence of video games and popular music. Someone's kid hurts himself jumping out of a tree and the city is up in arms to chop it down. Gone are the days where individuals are held responsible for the risks they take and the decisions they make, and it's creating the biggest and most dangerous epidemic facing the world: that of non-accountability.

Take obesity. There are plenty of medical explanations for why someone is obese and can't lose weight: overactive thyroid, low bone density, slow metabolism, poor nutrition, previous injury, diabetes, psychological distress ... the list goes on. One or all of these could be absolutely true in



any given situation, and I sympathize with the person fighting to overcome them. But the harsh, impartial truth is that finding a reason for your obesity doesn't make you any less fat. I promise you, gravity isn't going to feel sorry for your plight and decide to stop pulling. Yet so often this seems to be what people expect. They resign themselves to the status quo and deem it acceptable because some white coat wrote them a prescription. Their explanation becomes a psychological crutch that cannot be outgrown.

Even more blind are those who blame society for their shortcomings. How many times have you heard or read criticisms of the fast-food industry's corporate greed and deceptive advertising campaigns? As if the individual plays no part in shoving that Big Mac and super-size order of fries in his face. The reason McDonald's is a multi-billion-dollar-a-year business is because people choose to eat there. It's convenient, it's cheap, and it tastes good. It also offers very limited nutritional benefit and little beyond the possibility of hypertension, obesity and heart disease. The choice is straightforward and stark, but people get it wrong every day because they think a good justification is the same thing as a good decision.

I used to wonder how many people could use busyness as an excuse for not exercising. No joke, I heard it at least six times a week during personal training sessions, and every time it was the sincerest plea. "I've been swamped at work," or, "Things have just been crazy lately." You mean people have to work for a living and sometimes that makes them tired and tight on time? Things are always about to "calm down" or "lighten up." Such excuses are the purest form of psychological masturbation. They do absolutely nothing to break the barriers between you and your goals but rather serve only to make you feel better about not reaching them.

I love fitness because it's a results-based pursuit, the purest form of meritocracy. You set goals and you reach them. Or you don't. No list of excuses will ever change the fact that you didn't make the time, lose the weight or prevent the heart attack. So stop making excuses. Some people have it harder than others, I grant you. Tough shit. The mirror doesn't care, and neither do I. If the individual reaps the benefit, then so too must he shoulder the burden.

Whatever the challenge, just get it done.



### About the Author

*Blair Morrison is 28 years old. He was born and raised in Sacramento, Calif., where his family still lives. He received his undergraduate history degree from Princeton University and his master's degree at Universiteit Leiden, the Sorbonne and Oxford. Formerly a personal trainer from Balance Gym in Washington, D.C., Blair placed seventh in the 2009 CrossFit Games and 23rd in 2010. He now owns and operates CrossFit Anywhere out of Sacramento. He is dedicated to the pursuit of physical challenges and the mental fortitude that comes from the ability to overcome them.*



Courtesy of Blair Morrison