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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Fitness Is ... Purpose and Defense

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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Photos: Staff/CrossFit Journal

What is fitness?

That question is one of the foundations of the CrossFit program, and asking it will make you question 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.

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In this multi-part series, CrossFit Games competitor Blair Morrison talks about what fitness is to him.

### Protecting Yourself

Defense.

Typically, I think of fitness as a way to achieve ability in different facets of life. I want to be strong so the loads life asks me to bear seem lighter. I want endurance so that I can enjoy activity longer without tiring. I want to be agile so I feel balanced and coordinated in any situation, be it crossing the street or climbing a wall.

The other day I met a man at the gym who related a story that reminded me getting fit isn't purely about being "able." This is something I always tend to forget, but it's such an integral part of why fitness can be so valuable.

When he was 19 (he's now 41) this guy was a weightlifter. He did clean and jerk, snatch, deadlift, squat, bench press, etc. Now he mainly does machine weights, dumbbell curls and other bodybuilding-style movements. This is because just before his 20th birthday, he fell 7 meters from scaffolding onto the concrete sidewalk below. In an admittedly ill-advised attempt to brace the fall, he landed on his feet and tried to catch himself in a squat. He did it but shattered his right tibia and fibula in the process.

Doctors performed a series of surgeries to repair the damage, including inserting massive metal plates and bolts to secure his lower leg (I saw the scars—wow). After a year in a cast, he started to rehab, only to discover that his Achilles tendon had been so traumatized by the experience that it had remained shortened from the shock of the impact. Now his right leg is shorter than his left, he has a slightly noticeable limp, and has had to redefine what a functional-training program means to him.

Not so bad, when one considers what the surgeon told him in post-op. Apparently, the musculature he had developed during his teenage years of training had largely held the broken bones in place during the accident. He was told that most cases with such an extensive a break pattern fragment so badly that the individual loses any real functional use of his lower leg, but that he would likely return to a level completely compatible with daily life.

Furthermore, this man's body had somehow absorbed the impact that would have ordinarily traveled up to his spine and even into his neck. According to the doctor, it was practically miraculous given the nature and angle of his fall that this man had suffered no structural back damage whatsoever.



***Fitter individuals are better prepared for life, and they usually bounce back faster when an injury occurs.***

Stories like this abound. I know of very fit individuals who have been thrown from their motorcycles (wearing helmets), their bodies breaking through trees but only emerging with minor injuries. Their physicians explained this as a combination of luck and physical resilience, the latter partially due to the protection and stability their muscles provided.

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I heard a story a while back about an individual who contracted a rare blood infection that attacks the lungs and was minutes from being put on a ventilator but eventually rebounded, went his entire hospital stay without needing insulin, and emerged without any permanent lung damage. According to the blood and pulmonary specialists, his diet and his training had respectively and independently saved his life.

The moral here is that fitness isn't always offensive. As much as I focus on training for ability and achievement, the reality is that I'm just as actively training for protection. Sometimes, in the immortal words of Forrest Gump, shit happens. The better prepared your body is to handle it, the less damage it will do.

### **Why Am I Doing This?**

Purpose—know yours.

"They say that there's nothing but circular motion in the inanimate universe around us, but the straight line is the badge of man, the straight line of a geometrical abstraction that makes roads, rails and bridges, the straight line that cuts the curving aimlessness of nature by a purposeful motion from a start to an end." —Ayn Rand

Training without purpose is like feeding coal to an engine that will never leave the station. Sessions cannot be strings of circles dropping like zeroes behind us. They have to be straight lines of motion toward a goal, each day leading to the next and to a single growing sum. Without purpose, fitness is an endless spiral of repetition and pseudo-accomplishment for which we have no measure.

A little while back, some friends of mine posted a discussion on their page regarding the advantages/disadvantages of different types of motivation when it comes to exercise. The consensus was that external support, though convenient and effective, could not match intrinsic motivation



*CrossFit workouts are hard. So why do you do them?*



***For some athletes, competing in the CrossFit Games is the goal. For others, it's increased strength, endurance or power. What's your goal?***

in either power or longevity. Eventually, you have to push your limit for your own reasons. This speaks to the importance of having a purpose beyond the workout, some goal to which you can anchor your motivation.

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Just before the end of the [post by Adam Hesch](#), I was struck by a rhetorical question posed by one of the editors, something he would ask himself during a session when he felt like throwing in the towel: why am I here? It jumped out at me for its simplicity. It's a question that gets lost amidst the confusing blend of treadmills, sweat and stress that fuel typical workouts, but it is fundamental to knowing one's purpose in the gym.

So I tried it. When a WOD started to grind or when I felt that familiar discomfort and doubt creeping in, I asked myself why I was there. For what purpose was I putting myself through whatever it was I was putting myself through?

Interestingly, the answer changed depending on the day, my mood, the difficulty of the routine or any number of variables. Often, "I'm here for my health, personal strength and longevity" was enough to keep me going. Sometimes, it was "to see what I'm capable of." Other times "the 2010 Games" was the only thing that struck the right chord.

While my answers to this question varied based on circumstance, some consistencies should be noted. First, purpose is necessary to effort. What if I was in the middle of a grueling workout and asked that question but had no answer? Most likely, I'd either call it a day or slink through the rest of the workout without passion or intent. Knowing what drives us inspires our effort and is therefore fundamental to success. It's the psychological Teflon that keeps us from cracking under the inevitable pressure of failure and pain.



### 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

***Fitness: it's worth the work.***

Second, purpose doesn't have to be singular. People are complicated and tend to have multiple goals. Rather than becoming paralyzed by the task of choosing one among many, pursue them all. What you lose in focus, you'll make up in enthusiasm. Eventually, the less important goals will sift themselves out, leaving just those that are vital.

In all of this, it's important to remember that goals will vary from person to person, so don't look to adopt another's purpose or expect others to adopt yours. It's unlikely that my mother would derive much satisfaction from adopting the training frequency and intensity of an Olympic sprinter, or that an undersized adolescent would see much benefit from following the exercise and nutrition program designed for post-op hip rehabilitation. People who advocate too strongly for one method of training have typically fallen prey to the passionate blindness of their own success. Remember, what drives one forward may hold others back. Be certain your fitness suits your purpose.

