
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

How to Succeed as a CrossFit Affiliate

Understand what an affiliate is and is not, then pursue excellence in every way.

By **Jeremy Thiel** CrossFit Central

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Courtesy of CrossFit Central

Your affiliate is your business. It is not a cookie-cutter replica of someone else's gym. No one is telling you how to operate, how to program and how to look. That's both a huge opportunity and a huge burden. Your success is up to you.

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This kind of challenge fires me up. I decide how well I do. I'm ambitious, and the freedom that CrossFit HQ gives all of us puts no limit on how well I can do. The relationship between HQ and the affiliates is not a hierarchal structure like you might see in other businesses. We are free to communicate across the lines to anyone who will freely and openly communicate with us.

CrossFit HQ doesn't tell me how to run my business, and to that I say, "Hell, yes!" The annual affiliate fee puts us in a low-tax environment. That's right: low tax. Do you know what franchises pay monthly? And, the more successful I get, the smaller the fee is as a percentage of my revenue.

I have the opportunity to do what I love in a free and open market. If you're an affiliate asking for regulation, get over it. Go sign up for a franchise where you will experience both the hierarchy and the heavy tax burden. That's not what the CrossFit affiliate program is about.

Our customers determine our success. Not other affiliates, and certainly not HQ. I have no fear about what any other current or future affiliates do because they can't affect the two things that make our business strong: the relationships my trainers and I have with our clients and the results our clients get from training with us.

The CrossFit Mind Pyramid

I have a concept of the type of thinking that makes a trainer successful. I call it the CrossFit Mind. It is a pyramid with four main sections: a base of humility and service, twin pillars of attitude and professionalism, and a pinnacle of excellence. I guarantee that if you have these characteristics as the foundation of your training, you will be as successful as you want to be.

The Foundation—Humility and Service

The foundation of this business is humility and service. It is the vision of the community. When Carey Kepler and I went to our Level 1 Cert in 2004, I saw the most amazing group of individuals. I looked at my sister and said, "These are my people!" They were the most humble people I'd ever met. Greg and Lauren Glassman didn't know who we were, yet they welcomed us and truly cared about me as an individual and my success.

As an affiliate owner, it is your responsibility to truly care about your clients and their success. No one can teach you how to care, but if you do, your clients will know and they will be loyal. But you must be there for them and for their success.



Jeremy Thiel has seen West Coast CrossFit culture thrive in Austin, Texas, and he believes a balance between attitude and professionalism is key to promoting your version of the CrossFit brand.

The Body—Culture and Your Brand

On the left side of the pyramid, you've got one extreme: intense and hardcore CrossFit. This side is for the kill-your-mother, hardcore, tattooed, skulls-and-guns, I'm-gonna-murder-you, intense CrossFit people who never turn down the Rage Against the Machine or Metallica. This is CrossFit, and I'm a part of it.

This intensity is why I do CrossFit, but it's only one side of the pyramid and only half your brand. Still, it's an important half. Intensity is what gets results. If you're too soft, your clients won't get the results they deserve.

The opposite side of the pyramid is professionalism. If you want to be successful, you have to operate like a professional business. This means having a professional brand, logo and structure in your box, as well as legit systems, including new-client programs and/or on-ramp programs. It also means showing up on time, being prepared and being at your best when you're with clients.

These two sides of the pyramid represent two extremes, and as a CrossFit affiliate you have to strike a balance between the two. You need the feel of CrossFit—the culture and the attitude—but at the same time your business should appeal to everyone. It should offer stability, accountability and high-quality, world-class training. Create organization and structure within your business model but keep the look, feel and culture of a garage gym.

The CrossFit Mullet: Business in the Front, Party in the Back

You can create balance between attitude and professionalism. At CrossFit Central, our gym looks and feels like CrossFit. We've got roll-up garage doors and a really minimalistic garage-gym feel. In the front part of the building where clients walk in is a check-in desk and retail area. The front lobby looks and feels very professional. This is where clients fill out their waivers, where we have nutrition meetings, and where benchmark scores and body assessments are kept. When you walk out into the gym you're going to get the CrossFit experience. It's a lot like a mullet: business in the front, party in the back.

Our trainers at CrossFit Central are CrossFit and truly represent the brand. The culture of the CrossFit brand is the West Coast garage gym, and now in Texas you see guys CrossFitting in board shorts. Think about that: we wear board shorts in Texas ... where there are no beaches. The whole reason people who live in California CrossFit in board shorts is because they're going to the beach or they just came from the beach. Nobody is going to the beach in Texas, but we still wear board shorts. Why? Because it's a part of the brand. It's part of our culture, and we maintain that brand in our box.



The CrossFit Mind: The pursuit of excellence will unite your community and bring success to you and your clients.

The Pinnacle—Excellence

The pinnacle of this pyramid is excellence. What holds all these pieces together is the pursuit of excellence. It's what you should be striving for as an individual and as a business owner. I continuously analyze all components of our training and business and poke holes in it to see where we need to improve and how we can offer a better product.

At CrossFit Central, our coaches define and model excellence. As a company, everyone works to develop themselves in each of the Five Pillars of Excellence:

1. Knowledge of Movements
2. Character
3. Professionalism
4. Living the Code
5. Servant Heart/Compassion

To pursue excellence, you need to support yourself with each of these pillars. If you are a coach who knows everything about movements and technique but is unprofessional, you will not have long-term success. If you are a coach who is a really great person and cares a lot about clients but is lacking in knowledge of movements, you will not have long-term success. You have to strive to be well rounded by developing each of these pillars.

Ultimately, the standard of excellence is set by the marketplace. Your clients make up the marketplace. Just because you have an affiliate doesn't mean you have excellence. The easiest way to gauge whether or not you are pursuing excellence is to look at the measurable output of your business: results, success stories, client retention and growth. Analyze these numbers, data and benchmarks, and you can quickly find out how you fare in the marketplace.



Courtesy of CrossFit Central

The character of your box is up to you, and if you cultivate the right culture you'll create a family atmosphere based on the pursuit of health and fitness.

The Future of the Affiliate Community

CrossFit's prescription is constantly varied functional movement at high intensity. Learn all you can about as many different functional movements as you can. Experiment with what works and produce the fittest clientele you can. Open, honest and creative debate about fitness ideas will drive our community forward. Emotions and egos only get in the way.

Every time you talk trash about an affiliate, you're contributing to the deterioration of the brand. You're helping to lower and degrade the excellent status of the community. Egos destroy communities. They rip them apart from the inside. If we leave our egos at the door and let the experts share their information, we will continue to progress.

Create a brand that fits the CrossFit Mind Pyramid, distinguish yourself and, above all, pursue excellence daily.



About the Author

Jeremy Thiel is the co-owner of CrossFit Central in Austin, Texas, and has competed in all three CrossFit Games, finishing third in 2008. Carey Kepler, his sister and the co-owner of CrossFit Central, finished third in the 2009 CrossFit Games. The team from CrossFit Central finished second in the 2009 Affiliate Cup.



Courtesy of CrossFit Central

Bickering and trash talking serve no purpose in the global CrossFit community. What matters is moving forward together in pursuit of one goal: excellence.