

THE CrossFit JOURNAL



#1

YOU

Be The Affiliate!



KEVIN HAS WORKED HARD TO CREATE A GROWING COMMUNITY AT HIS BOX. HE'S SUCCEEDED, AND NOW HE NEEDS TO HIRE SOME TRAINERS—BUT HOW? HE DOESN'T WANT TO CHANGE THE CULTURE OF THE BOX, AND HE'S UNSURE HOW TO LOOK FOR SUITABLE CANDIDATES. AFFILIATE OWNERS GREGG ARSENUK, SKIP CHASE AND AIMEE LYONS OFFER THEIR ADVICE.

AFTER A YEAR OF WORKING HIS ASS OFF BY HIMSELF TO GET A SMALL BOX UP AND RUNNING, KEVIN FINALLY FEELS LIKE HE'S BUILT UP SOME MOMENTUM. HIS CLIENTS ARE SEEING IMPRESSIVE GAINS, AND THEY KEEP COMING BACK OFTEN WITH FRIENDS. THE ATMOSPHERE IN HIS BOX IS GREAT, AND THE PLACE IS REALLY STARTING TO FEEL LIKE HOME FOR MANY REGULARS. HE'S GOT SOMETHING SPECIAL GOING.

MEMBERSHIP IS GROWING STEADILY, AND KEVIN HAS ALREADY EXTENDED HIS HOURS AND ADDED EXTRA CLASSES. HIS DAYS USUALLY BEGIN BEFORE 6 A.M. AND SOMETIMES DON'T END UNTIL 10 P.M. KEVIN IS LUCKY TO GET ONE DAY OFF A WEEK, AND HE'S STARTING TO BURN OUT. HE'S STILL INVESTED IN HIS CLIENTS AND STILL GIVES 100 PER CENT, BUT HE'S JUST RUNNING OUT OF TIME AND ENERGY. THE ACCOUNTING IS TAKING LONGER TOO, AND HE'S GOT TO START CONSIDERING RENOVATIONS AND PERHAPS EXPANSION TO ACCOMMODATE LARGER CROWDS OF ATHLETES.

THE DETAILS

Kevin has decided it's time to hire at least one trainer, if not more, but he's having difficulty stepping back from his current role. More than anything else, he's worried about any decline in service to his members, and he's scared to tamper with the current chemistry. He's also not sure how to pay a new trainer. He wants to be fair, but he doesn't want to hire someone who's just in it for the money. He really wants someone who's passionate about training.

The problem is compounded by the fact that he has some enthusiastic members but none with any experience training. Kevin has the only box in the area, and he doesn't know of any other trainers nearby. Two members who might be interested in coaching—and might be good at it—both love their current jobs and work long hours themselves.

Kevin is unsure of what to do, but he knows he needs to do something rather than risk burning out and letting his members down.

How would you proceed?



Courtesy of Gregg Arsenuk

GREGG ARSENUK GUERRILLA FITNESS

I never had to put an ad in the paper. I never had to persuade someone to take the job. When the size of our classes grew to the point of requiring additional coaches, the positions were filled seamlessly, as if the new coaches had always been there—because they had been there the entire time. I often think to myself that I am just lucky to have had a client base that has produced some fantastic coaches. So why should I be the guy to write an article on how to hire a coach? Maybe you just need to create some luck.

During my career prior to opening Guerrilla Fitness, I had the great fortune of meeting Nick Yanicelli. Nick was my senior, had been in finance for some time, and was very successful. He hired me as a junior partner, bad suit and all. It would be the only good "financial" deal I ever made. At the end of the day, Nick had a semi-competent partner and I had a phenomenal mentor. Of the many business and life lessons I learned working with Nick, one has always kept me going through the many trials and tribulations of starting a small business: "People that achieve great success work their asses off and have some luck along the way." In other words, you don't get

lucky sitting on your couch waiting for things to happen. Working smart and diligently puts you in the best position to receive luck. You most certainly have an influence on your own destiny and what happens to you and for you.

What Nick didn't impart on to me was that to work as hard as was necessary to get lucky, one had to have an undying passion. We reunited several months ago, and even though Nick didn't bestow this last bit knowledge on me while I was his apprentice, he most certainly reaffirmed the notion and recognized that I had found my calling. But I had heard this before from someone else. We all have. I can't pinpoint the exact article or seminar or video, maybe because I had heard it several times from a certain person. Greg Glassman said it: "You have to love what you do."

So how does this help you hire a coach? To understand is to see this from my perspective. I loved my business from Day 1. The enthusiasm I had running a class of one person in a freezing-cold gym is the same as when I'm running my current Saturday-morning class of 25-plus. Well, maybe I'm a little more pumped today. But I was always pumped!

I put a great deal of thought and effort toward every aspect of Guerrilla Fitness, from the name and logo to the layout of the gym and, most importantly, the goal of the gym and how I would achieve that goal through best-in-class programming and coaching. What was important to me was delivering the best fitness that New Jersey had ever seen. I knew what my income statement looked like. I knew how much money was coming in and going out. That is all very important to know. But my primary motivation wasn't money.

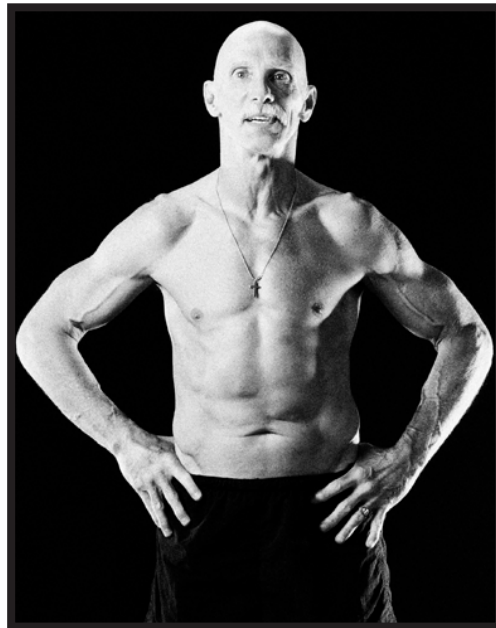
I was driven by the people in my gym. I expected a lot from them. And they expected a lot from me. Mutually, we all benefited and watched the gym grow. It wasn't hard for me to figure out

that the more good I put forth, the more good I received back. Over time, I began noticing that I was creating a literal army of loyal members. And as wonderful as everyone here is, a few showed something extra special. They crushed WODs but were humble about it. They were always early and it felt as if they never left. They cleaned up their weights and the weights of others still sprawled on the floor post-WOD. They understood the methodology. They helped others understand and perform better. I could see the philosophy of my particular gym was very clear to them. *Most importantly, they believed in the philosophy of this gym and they believed in me.*

The question became less, "How do I hire a coach?" and more, "How do I recognize great coaches and cultivate them?" It all begins with you as the affiliate owner. It is up to you to create the vibe and culture of your gym. It is up to you to demand best practices of yourself and your members. Doing so weeds out those without true grit, the weak, the posers. It leaves you with the humble and dedicated, those willing to listen, experiment and educate themselves—the kinds of people who would make great coaches.

Besides creating a fitness community of like-minded individuals, I had also qualified a good number of people who had the basic prerequisites to work in my gym. Hiring coaches from a pool like this is the easy part. By this time, someone you have had your eye on may approach you! In my case I had to ask. As I said earlier, I had a humble group—so humble, in fact, no one would have asked for the position themselves. But I knew exactly which athletes to ask. So I asked, and each one said yes. I recognized people with potential to be great coaches, and I hired them. The real work was to nurture that potential, and to nurture them is to let them coach—a lot! Experience is key, and you have to let them get it.

I never set out to create clones of myself. As great a coach as you think may be, your coaching staff need not be mirror images of you. But they must respect you, your goals for the gym and the overall philosophy of the gym. They need to be a part of the team 100 percent. What is great here is that if you have made it this far in the process, the standards of your facility are quite obvious and the people you have chosen have already shown that they understand and believe in the goals and standards of your gym. You want coaches who are free thinkers, who innovate, and who continually educate themselves. Varied coaching styles are very helpful within the gym so long as the basic methodologies, philosophies and standards are adhered to. You don't want a rogue coach on your hands. Remember, you have a very high-level clientele. You trained them to be that way. They will notice inconsistencies in your program if everyone isn't on the same page.



Courtesy of Skip Chase

SKIP CHASE
MT. BAKER CROSSFIT

I began my affiliate with 13 clients. They were all private personal-training clients I had been training for a minimum of four months. I view all of my clients as friends. When I meet them they are new clients, but as time goes on, I am always prepared to ask them new questions in an effort to learn more about them and become better acquainted. I see every new client as eventually becoming my new best friend. I want to know them just as well as I do my current friends.

CrossFit creates a lifestyle change for me and my members. I am building a permanent community of lifelong associations. That is my goal. We have members who have been training with us from our first month in business, and it is our expectation to influence all of our members the same way.

When I first meet them, the questions are “sourcing” questions:

- How did you hear about Mt. Baker CrossFit?
- Have you been working out? If yes, where and how? If no, why do you want to work out now? What are your motives?
- When was the last time you worked out?
- Why have you selected Mt. Baker CrossFit?
- What do you expect to achieve?
- Where do you work?
- What do you do? (This gives me an idea of their activities of daily living; do they sit on the job, walk, lift, etc.)

As time evolves, I continue to ask questions. Every time a client walks in the door I focus on the fact that my time spent with them is all about them.

- Are you married?
- How long?
- What does your husband/wife do?
- Children?
- How old?
- How is your nutrition?
- How was your weekend?
- How is work going?
- Salaried or hourly?

Again, the intent is to truly get to know our clients. We learn their likes and dislikes, their passions, their interests, their needs and their wants.

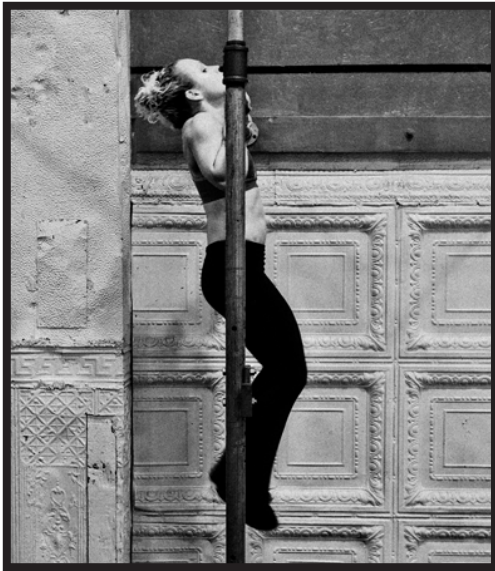
After a few months, we are able to observe their CrossFit passion and commitment. I also observed several members who displayed leadership skills on the floor by helping and encouraging other members.

After three months, I needed help. I had nearly 100 clients, and I needed another trainer. My goal was to recruit an existing member who could train primarily in the early morning and evening, giving me the opportunity to sleep in a little longer and go home earlier.

Based on the answers I received on some of the questions I asked of a few members, I approached two clients with the question, “How would you like to become a part-time trainer?” Fortunately, both answered yes!

One was an operations manager at a local bank. Without knowing her, I never would have considered her due to the responsibilities of her position—too busy. However, after getting to know her by asking questions and becoming good friends, I knew she disliked her job and was filled with stress. CrossFit was her release, and she was anxious to start part-time evenings. The second gal had the same story. She disliked her job and had a passion for CrossFit. She later became our first full-time trainer.

On every affiliate’s client list are members who will want to become trainers. Ask questions, and you will learn who they are.



David Zaveloff

AIMEE LYONS **CROSSFIT KING OF PRUSSIA**

When you open the doors to your affiliate, you need to anticipate that you will grow, and it is vital to prepare for that growth because, more often than not, it comes much more quickly than you ever expected. Here are some things that have worked for us:

1. Identify athletes who are extremely concerned about learning proper form and are capable of identifying and correcting poor form. It is extremely easy to memorize a few cues and repeat them to a class, but in order to become a successful trainer you need to go beyond that. The trainers in your box need to explain the primary points of performance to the basic movements and, more importantly, know how to spot when they are not being met. At that point they need to be able to fix and/or scale the athlete accordingly. You may damage a few egos, but you will gain respect, which is crucial in maintaining the atmosphere you have strived to create.
2. Realize that there is no ideal athlete who makes a great coach, but from experience it is best to take one from inside your box. You do not need to limit your search to your fire-breathers. It is possible to be a good coach without being technically proficient at performing the movement. When you think of professional sports, more often than not, the athlete is far superior in performance to the coach. However, the coach is capable of noticing the smallest things that will make the athlete perform better. That is what we are after. It is also important to note that many of our boxes have a very diverse clientele. An overweight 55-year-old housewife may have a hard time relating to a 22-year-old firebreather with a sub-three Fran. That particular client may feel more comfortable learning from someone her age or with similar capabilities. Everyone has his or her own ideal learning environment, and the more we can cater to that, the more successful our clients will be. This is most effectively done by having a variety of trainers with distinctive styles.
3. There are many models for paying your trainers, and which one you choose will be based on how many clients are in your box. CrossFit Central has an amazing program in which some trainers are making nearly \$100,000 a year. For your average affiliate, this is many years down the road, but do not despair: other alternatives exist. First, realize that the trainers you bring on do not need to be full-time trainers. Nearly all of the trainers at CrossFit King of Prussia (KoP) work their "day job" before coming into the box. In this role, you have the option to pay them on a class-by-class basis. Better yet for smaller affiliates, you can barter with trainers and ask if they would be willing to coach a certain amount of classes per month in exchange for their monthly

membership. If the coach is asked to cover more classes than what was agreed upon, you can revert back to paying them on a class-by-class basis. This will allow you to take some much-needed vacation from time to time. At CrossFit KoP, we have four levels of trainers and thus four pay grades: assistant trainer, trainer, assistant coach and coach. These levels were redesigned to align with CrossFit's new certification policies, and anyone seeking more information can contact us directly.

4. Remember that becoming a trainer is something that is earned. There are many safeguards you can put in place as an affiliate owner to assure your high quality of education continues when you hire a new trainer. When we identify an athlete or when an athlete comes to us with a desire to coach, he or she is entered into our coaches prep course. In the beginning the trainer is required to shadow classes for a set period of time. During this time, the trainer is a fly on the wall who takes meticulous notes and pays attention to the nuances of the class and the effectiveness of various teaching styles. After shadowing enough classes, developing a sense of confidence for what is expected and nurturing a rapport with the class, he or she will become an assistant in class and will be used to demonstrate movements and begin making corrections on form. It is important that the coach express to the class that the trainer and the coach are working together so the class is fully aware of your confidence in the assistant.

Once you decide the assistant is ready to handle a class of his or her own, the trainer will lead a "CrossFit lite" class that primarily focuses on body-weight exercises. This way the trainer can further develop confidence. After logging

25 hours of teaching experience, trainers can ask to be evaluated by the current coaching staff. This evaluation is designed to simulate a Level 2 test where the trainer will coach a select group of athletes who may purposely show poor form to see if the trainer can spot the poor form and make the correction. After competence is demonstrated in a variety of CrossFit movements including those beyond the nine fundamental movements, the trainer becomes a coach—one who can handle a class in your absence. We have seen that only the most dedicated and passionate trainers have the desire to get to the end of the process and, after all, they are the ones you want in your box.

There is no correct way to run a box, but there are steps that you can take to increase the probability of success as you grow. The keys are to have fun, be passionate, have a desire to continue your training education, and be dedicated to your client's safety and advancement by demanding proper technique above all else.



TONY BUDDING CROSSFIT HQ

Kevin is at a crossroads in his development as an affiliate. He has proven that he knows how to build community and get folks fitter. He has a growing, loyal following. But he hasn't planned for growth, and he's reaching the limits of his abilities. He needs help, but he's not sure what to do.

Gregg, Skip and Aimee have great advice for Kevin. Their different suggestions reflect the differences in their styles. But there are a few key themes running between them.

The first is that Kevin needs to be proactive. This is his gym, and no one is going to fix this problem for him. He needs help to prevent getting fully burned out, but the simple truth is that it's going to get worse before it gets better. He needs to develop new trainers appropriately, and that is a big investment of time and energy.

All three authors suggest finding this help from within his existing community. They suggest looking for values first. You want folks who are naturally service-oriented. They help out other athletes. They clean up after themselves, and even after others. They come early and stay late. They pay close attention to technique, both their own and others', and have developed an appreciation for the subtlety of improving human performance.

The values of your staff will have a deeper impact on the community than any other single factor.

Finally, there has to be an appropriate apprenticeship process. No one becomes a good trainer by reading a book or article or simply by virtue of being a good athlete. Every body is a little different, and figuring out how to elicit real change is more art than craft. Of course, they have to learn the technicalities, but that's much easier than knowing how to work with clients effectively.

Aimee's gym has a formal process with well-articulated criteria for advancing through the ranks. Gregg and Skip have a more intuitive process. Either way, it's essential that new or potential trainers be able to develop their skills in a low-risk environment.

Kevin has to make a big personal leap to pull this off. He has to evolve from helping others move better to helping trainers help others move better. This is a natural evolution for a competent trainer, but it's not automatic. He needs to leverage his strengths and cultivate the best of his clientele.

