

# Lessons for Coaches at the Gym



**Sugar**WOD



# Table of Contents

**Introduction 4**

**Why Your Coaches Should Take Group Class 5**

Lead by Example 6

Understand the Effects of Your Programming 7

Show That the Product Works in the Form it is Offered 8

Practice What You Preach 9

**Why Your Coaches Should Post Their Scores 10**

Why Post to Sugar WOD? 11

If You're Going to Play the Game, You Have to Play it Every Day. 12

Coach Profiles 13

**Why Your Coaching Staff Should Do Your Gym's Programming 14**

**Why Your Coaches Should Know Every Name 15**

# Introduction



At SugarWOD, we talk a lot about how the workout of the day is the heart of your box. The group class that your athletes attend is the daily touch point that fosters community and communication, demands preparation and programming, and requires tracking and thoughtful analysis. To be successful, you must also mold the vantage point of your coaches such that they understand their role in the process of creating a healthy, vibrant, cohesive community.

Use this book to learn the four basic things you can do to lay the foundation for a team of coaches that supports this vision. Share it with your coaches and make a plan for how you will implement and track on each area. Use it during coach interviews to assess a person's belief in these principles.

A consistent effort by your entire coaching staff in each of the four areas will nurture your community and strengthen your message.

- **Nicole Christensen, SugarWOD Affiliate Ambassador, and Owner at CrossFit Roots**

# Why Your Coaches Should Take Group Class

I'll cut straight to the point—your coaches should take group classes.

By doing so, your coaches support a healthy gym culture that is built on trust and belief in your product and programming. Also, when your coaches take group class, they have a tremendous opportunity to set an example of the application of CrossFit principles and the culture you want at your gym.

I've heard many objections to this and most of it stems from fear—fear that the coach will look bad in front of their clients, fear that they will finish last, fear they can't do a movement or fear that a poor performance might diminish their authority as a coach.

Let me clear this up—your athletes will respect you and your fellow coaching staff 1,000 times more if you immerse yourself in the same set of expectations you hold for your athletes.



Your athletes will respect you and your fellow coaching staff 1,000 times more if you immerse yourself in the same set of expectations you hold for your athletes.



# Why Your Coaches Should Take Group Class

## Lead by Example

When your coaches take group classes, they set the example for your members regarding consistent class attendance and how athletes should carry themselves in group classes. When athletes see coaches in a group class at a regular time, they see an example workout consistency with life's other factors and commitments.

Ideally, you have a staff that listens to the coach, happily receives cues and corrections, and scales the workout appropriately and within the same allowances as the rest of the class. All of this models to athletes how you expect athletes to carry themselves. It also reinforces the coach's instruction and overall respect when they are dishing out the expectations while leading a class.

# Why Your Coaches Should Take Group Class

# Understand the Effects of Your Programming

Many coaches do the programming at their gym; however, they do it on their own timeline, outside of a 60-minute class.

It starts from the top. If you want your coaches to take group class, affiliate owners have to lead the way.

The work that might be reasonable to accomplish in a leisurely afternoon coaches' training session over 1.5 hours might feel like complete chaos and a beatdown when packed into an hour. By immersing yourself in the same environment and time constraints as your athletes, you learn the effects of your programming in greater detail.



Why Your Coaches Should Take Group Class

# Show That the Product Works in the Form it is Offered

When coaches take group classes, improve and PR over time, and as an additional bonus, have a physique that the member establishment would also like to have, it shows that your product can work for members in the exact way they consume it.

When the staff all does different or extra workouts, it can lead to athletes feeling they must need to do more to get the results they want and that the hour a day they once subscribed to will no longer get them the results they seek.

# Why Your Coaches Should Take Group Class

## Practice What You Preach

Suppose you are coaching a class and constructively tell an athlete that the rep scheme they want to do is too ambitious based on what you know of them as an athlete and what you have seen in their warm-up. Now, imagine you're taking a class, and one of your colleague coaches lets you know that based on what they have seen of the workout today, they recommend you scale the rep scheme to the first scaled option. You politely smile and say, "sounds good." Right there, you just gained a ton of respect from the athlete who overheard this conversation and has taken scaling guidance from you numerous times.

You can help your coaches understand why they should go to group class by reviewing the above reasons at a staff meeting. At CrossFit Roots, class attendance is part of our staff requirements laid out in our Employee Handbook. It's a non-negotiable and something we are sure to make clear and explore during the interview process. If a coach does not want to go to group classes, it is a good indication to us that they will not be a good fit for our team or believe in our product.



# Why Your Coaches Should Post Their Scores



Just the other day we did a workout at CrossFit Roots that involved toes-to-bar and overhead squats. I coached the workout in the AM and then took group class later that day. One round into the workout and I knew my time was not going to be anywhere near the folks I usually hover with on the leaderboard. What the hell was going on!?

After finishing the workout a good 3 minutes slower than the women who are my athletic peers, I went and posted my score to SugarWOD. Yea sure, maybe I got a little squirmy about posting it –I am human! What will people think about me, what exactly happened there, is there an excuse I can chalk this up to, do I need to reevaluate my entire fitness protocol, and should I even post my score!?! But while those small voices chattered in my head, I went ahead and clicked post and then I went on with my day.

As coaches, we have a big responsibility and an opportunity to model the behavior we want to see in our athletes. The same



Every day, your coaches have the opportunity to model this behavior, this code, and help you develop a set of athletes who understand that the effort is far more important than the result and that information collected is part of the process.



# Why You Coaches Should Post Their Scores

thoughts I listed above go through our athletes' heads yet we expect them to post their scores and without question.

While there is no written coach or athlete code on how to post to SugarWOD, I believe that coaches need to post their scores. It's part of being an athlete, it fuels longterm development, identifies weaknesses and it sets the example that score recording is not just for instances when you're proud of your accomplishment or feel you'll get lots of praise.

# Why Your Coaches Should Post Their Scores

## Why Do You Post to Sugar WOD?

Do you post to SugarWOD to track your progress, celebrate the accomplishments of others, and stay tied to the community of athletes you train with? Or do you post your scores only when you are happy with your performance and feel you'll get a ton of fist bumps? Most importantly, do you not report your scores when you don't like the number you put up?

If this is what your coaches do, this is the same behavior you will get out of your athletes. What develops is an inauthentic relationship with athletic progress, hard work, success, and yes, failure.

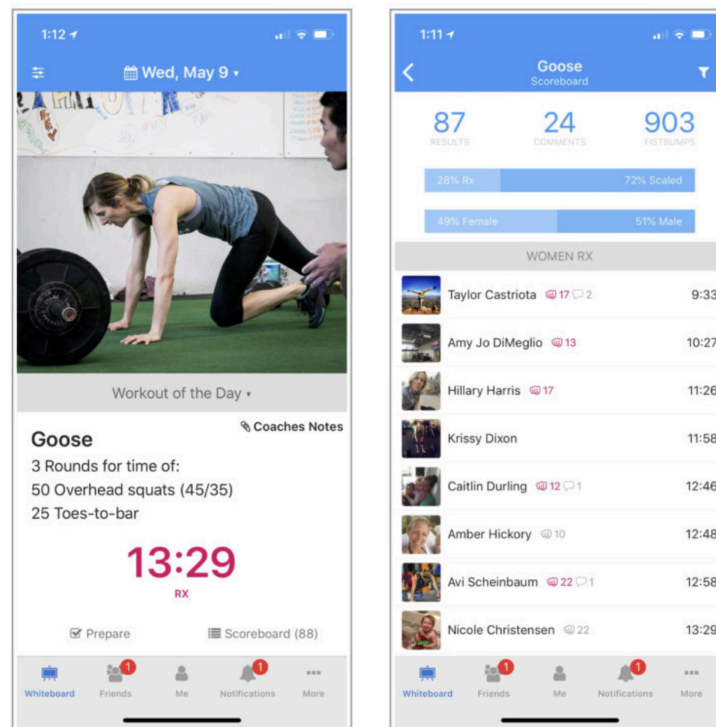
# Why Your Coaches Should Post Their Scores If You're Going to Play the Game, You Have to Play it Every. Day.

If you decide to be part of the community of athletes that post their scores, you have to do it every day—whether you are proud of your score, disappointed in it, did it Rx, scaled, were first on the leaderboard, last on the leaderboard, you get the point.

Teach your coaches the importance of posting their scores and lead by example.

Every day, your coaches have the opportunity to model this behavior, this code, and help you develop a set of athletes who understand that the effort is far more important than the result and that the information collected as part of the process

It shows a level of staff maturity when your team can post their scores with confidence and independent of their placing. Let's look at how that plays out in the eyes of your members with a few different coach examples.



# Why Your Coaches Should Post Their Scores

## Coach Profiles

**Coach #1:** This coach is a 36-year-old female who does one workout a day. Back in 2012 she competed on a regionals team and has since blossomed into an outdoor enthusiast—rock climbing, skiing, and mountain biking almost every weekend. She uses CrossFit to fuel these endeavors. She can do many workouts Rx but also scales workouts weekly.

**Athlete Teaching Point:** Athletes see that a top-level female athlete in the gym will still scale workouts as needed to achieve the intended stimulus of the workout and takes direction from the coaching staff when she's in class. When she posts her score, athletes see her name in the Scaled category and develop an appreciation for her that extends beyond her absolute capacity in the gym.

**Coach #2:** This coach is a 44-year-old male with two kids who does just one workout a day. He's never been super competitive but can hold his own in the CrossFit space and has helped countless athletes achieve levels of fitness that have now grown well beyond his. His athletic capacities are well-rounded and he has a healthy balance between Rx and Scaled workouts.

**Athlete Teaching Point:** Athletes see an example of what success looks like for a fit father of two who owns a gym and manages a ton behind the scenes. When he posts his score and is not first on the Scoreboard, it shows that he can check his ego at the door and put himself out there in front of his peers.

**Coach #3:** This coach is 28 years old, and he recently suffered two major injuries six months apart—a torn Achilles and a ruptured bicep. The kid that once threw down for multiple workouts in a day with aggressive goals now walks into group class with a crutch and leans on the coach for various scaling options.

**Athlete Teaching Point:** Clients see a constant reminder of an athlete who did not let ego override his commitment to posting his score. Over the course of a year, the athlete scaled or modified almost every workout, often being last on the Scoreboard, yet he posted his score for every workout. Athletes see an example of a coach continuing to come to class when they're injured and logging their progress. Because of the coach's detailed workout notes, the athletes see a real example of what modifying for injury can look like.

Building a great community has many threads. A coaching staff that attends group class and always posts their scores to SugarWOD helps foster a mature, focused, and cohesive community.

# Why Your Coaching Staff Should Do Your Gym's Programming



If you want your athletes to trust and do your gym's programming, your first step is to have your coaches do it too. The shared suffering we have come to know and love extends beyond the folks who take the group classes and includes the coaching staff dishing out the pain. Too many coaches fall victim to thinking that it is their capacity in a workout that validates them as a coach. It's not. It's the effort the coach puts forward despite their ability in any given workout. Let's look at a few examples of how this can play out.

It's 5pm on a Tuesday, and one of your coaches calls the group to the whiteboard.

"Oh man, that looks like a doozy," says one of your athletes, "did you do it?" they ask the coach.

"Ah no, I didn't, I'm doing another program right now, and I'm in the middle of this huge strength cycle."

...wah wah.

That single instance just created a small ripple in the belief in

# Continued...

and effectiveness of your gym's programming. Create enough ripples and you're left with anarchy.

The next day, your athlete drags herself to the gym to do the programmed (and dreaded) Run 5k. She doesn't like running, but she knows that training her weaknesses is one of the tenants of the program. Deep down she knows she should do it. She walks in and asks, "have any of the coaches done it today?"

You reply, "I don't think any of us has run it today."

...double wah wah.

The emotions run strong as the athlete then questions why she made an effort to show up. It becomes one more reason not to come when the gym programs something she isn't thrilled with. It sets an underlying message of "if you didn't even do it, why should I? This can't make that much of a difference."

Now on the flip side, when that 5k comes out, and your coaching staff shows up in droves it shows humility, a commitment to the programming, and the ability of your coaching staff to see beyond their personal reservations and fears to the bigger picture of gaining a balanced level of fitness. It says to your athlete that you're putting in the work too and to that they can relate. (As an aside, you can insert any workout into the "5K" example—it could be a coach on 5x5 back squat day who will get out-squatted by half the gym or a coach who can't yet do a muscle-up who shows up for 3 rounds of 14 clean and jerks and 7 muscle-ups).

When your athletes learn that their coach is not doing the same workouts they are it leaves them feeling disappointed, alienated, and questioning why they should trust you for coaching and fitness advice.

Doing your gym's programming allows you to do a few things that strengthen the foundation of your gym and community:



When your athletes learn that their coach is not doing the same workouts they are, it leaves them feeling disappointed, alienated, and questioning why they should trust you for coaching and fitness advice.



# Continued...

## 1. Lead by Example

If you want your members to commit to and believe in your programming and their membership, your coaching staff has to set the example. This includes the days when they will shine in their capacity and the days they will work a weakness and be at the bottom of the leaderboard.

## 2. Know the Effects of Your Programming

Whether you program your own workouts or subscribe to a programming provider, you won't get a full picture of what you're putting your athletes through, what you can expect of them, and the needs of your community if you're not actually doing it.

## 3. Up Your Coaching Game

Maybe your scaling option fell flat, maybe you thought the workout was about grip when really it was about the midline, or maybe you just have no idea what to expect. If you want to be able to give your athletes advice on the shop floor, it has to be grounded in experience or you can look like a fool.

## 4. Increase Attendance

When your coaches do the workout and post their scores—letting the virtual world know that they did the workout, athletes are more likely to sign-up and go do the workout too. Increased attendance means more consistency which means more belief in your product and a long lasting client.



# Why Your Coaches Should Know Every Name



Remember the show Cheers? I only remember it vaguely as my parents used to watch it back in the 80s. The show's theme song had a line in it, "You want to go where everyone knows your name, and they're always glad you came."

Nothing could be more real than at your gym. Walking into a gym and being greeted by name by the coach can instantly dismantle fears regarding the workout and put a person at ease trusting that they're in the right place.

If you're a gym that wants to lay the foundation to develop a genuine and natural community - start by requiring that your coaches know the names of all the athletes at your gym. Ideally, this wouldn't have to be a requirement, but more of an understanding of how a good coach should apply their profession.

When your coaches know all of the athletes' names, it sets you apart from other gyms. It also demonstrates to your athletes that they too should know the names of their fellow athletes. Finally, when a coach knows every athlete's name, regardless of athletic ability level, it sets the tone that care and connection come before fawning over athletic capacity.

# Why Your Coaches Should Know Every Name

Here are a few ways you give your coaches the tools and processes to always know everyone's names.

## 1. Go back to the whiteboard.

I know many gyms have moved to a "screen only" system and believe me, I'm all in favor of technological advances, and I LOVE BoxTV; however, there are hidden gems in the daily task of writing each person's name on a whiteboard. My recommendation is to use both systems—handwritten and the TV. By making the coaches write each person's name on the board, they get the daily repetition of having to recall each name. This practice makes it such that learning hundreds of names is easy.

When you write an athlete's name on the whiteboard you are much more likely to commit it to memory.

## 2. Take pictures in your client management system.

Whether you use Push Press, TeamUp, or Pike13, these systems all offer the ability to have a photo attached to each client record. USE THIS FEATURE! When a new coach starts at your gym, this can be a tremendous asset to help them get up to speed with hundreds of names. For the coach that forgets an athlete's name, a quick run to the class list and they can quickly see the name of that athlete.

## 3. When you just can't remember.

There will be times when your brain won't cooperate, and for the life of you, you can't remember an athlete's name. In this event, and provided your box has employed #2, do the following. Start the class with a 400m run. While the class is out running, look at your client management system or call another coach (yes, there are rare occasions to grab your phone during class, but not in front of your members). Spacing on an athlete's name happens, but as a general rule of thumb, you should do everything in your power not to ever let that athlete know that you forgot their name. When you write an athlete's name on the whiteboard you are much more likely to commit it to memory.

