



CrossFit openly exercises its libertarian views

By [TIM MAK](#) | SEPTEMBER 25, 2013 AT 7:24 PM

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“Why do you assume [the labor market](#) is elastic?” read a recent tweet from the official account [of Crossfit](#), the popular-but-controversial fitness regimen.

The tweet was related to an article by the free-market [Cato Institute](#), which the fitness company sent out to its 115,000-plus Twitter followers. The article argues that minimum wage regulations can drive up unemployment.

It wasn't a hack or some mistake. A deep libertarian ethos runs through the entire CrossFit organization, which has for some time been deliberately promoting polarizing articles and quotes.

Earlier this month, CrossFit [quoted Rep. Tulsi Gabbard](#), D-Hawaii, questioning the wisdom of military strikes [in Syria](#); before that, an article on drug decriminalization, a prominent topic in libertarian circles.

At its core, CrossFit sees itself as a contrarian movement, paralleling the contrarian instinct in libertarian philosophy.

For example, the fitness program rejects [the Department of Agriculture's](#) "food pyramid" concept, which encourages relatively high consumption of grains. Crossfitters, as those adhering to the regimen are known, are encouraged to eat very little in the grains department, and instead bulk up largely on meats and vegetables.

“Our recommendations for nutrition are very contrarian and go against official government recommendation, and mainstream popular knowledge as well,” spokesman Russ Greene said.

CrossFit founder Greg Glassman is a “rabid libertarian,” he told the similarly minded [Reason magazine](#) earlier this year. But it's not just him - its much of the group's senior staff.

“Our leadership is pretty avowedly libertarian,” said Greene, a libertarian himself. To him, this is just common sense. “We’ve got over 7,000 affiliated gyms. ... Don’t you think it would be unnatural if these small businesses were lukewarm about free enterprise?”

The effect of free-market ideology extends even further beyond the personal preferences of the organization's leadership to the company's structure and attitude.

CrossFit runs a web of thousands of loosely controlled affiliate gyms that are independently owned and operated. Affiliates are charged an annual fee, as opposed to a paying a cut of their profits as traditional franchises do, but they also control how their operations run, like their hours and prices. Further, the organization's staff is scattered across the country, with offices in San Diego; Santa Cruz, Calif.; Arizona and Washington, D.C.

"It's the libertarian idea of free markets," Greene argues. "You don't need centralized control."

Yet there is an inherent risk in combining business with contentious political arguments.

Whole Foods CEO John Mackey stirred controversy when he compared Obamacare to socialism and, more recently, fascism. And a firestorm erupted around Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz after he urged customers not to bring guns to his coffee shops, even in jurisdictions where open carry is legal.

CrossFit is no exception. But in an era when companies are actively trying to reach out to their customers through social media, either to promote products or troubleshoot complaints, CrossFit isn't afraid to alienate a segment of its own customer base.

The fitness firm wants a community founded on debate and discussion – and not people who are "intolerant and unable to deal with divergent opinions," Greene said. "We're not looking to expand CrossFit to where it's everybody."

So when Corey Fox, an Oklahoman who tweets under the handle [@TheRealCoreyFox](#) and claims to have used CrossFit since 2007, complained about the Cato article on the effect of minimum wage laws, the organization [responded rather aggressively](#).

"Why do you feel the need to even post stories like these... aren't you about fitness?" Fox asked. @CrossFit shot back: "We linked to a Democratic congressman and NPR in the past few days, Corey. Pay attention. ... If you think CrossFit is just about fitness, you must not know much about CrossFit."

Several days later, [Fox tweeted](#) that he now trains on his own.

"It's not mandatory that you be libertarian to be a crossfitter," Greene told the *Washington Examiner*, arguing that by posting controversial, nonfitness articles and quotes on social media, CrossFit is only upsetting those who "can't deal with people who don't agree with them."

But does being a crossfitter make you libertarian? It's a debate that played out in CrossFit's in-house publication, CrossFit Journal, several years ago.

"Strong conviction to the tenets of individualism and responsibility make CrossFit look less like a fitness program and more like a course in Libertarianism," wrote CrossFit's social media director Russell Berger in 2008.

Countered former CrossFit Journal editor-in-chief Dan Freedman, “In the fitness realm, who could argue against hard work or individual responsibility? But does it really follow that lax regulation of financial markets is a good idea?”