

Stop Chasing the Number: Kayla Bonkowski Makes the Case for Practice Over Outcome in Fitness

Kayla Bonkowski explains why accountability and structure matter more than the number on the scale.



Sterling Heights, Michigan Jul 27, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - Diet culture sells outcomes. It does not sell fitness.

That distinction sounds like wordplay. [Kayla Bonkowski](#), a CrossFit athlete and social work graduate

student based in Sterling Heights, Michigan, treats it as the most practical observation she can make about why the weight-loss industry produces short-term results and the fitness methodology she has followed since 2021 has produced something that holds.

The difference is structural. And the structure, Bonkowski argues, is everything.

"Diet culture sells a number," she says. "CrossFit sells a practice. Those are fundamentally different products, and only one of them lasts."

The Problem with Outcome-First Fitness

The fitness industry is organized around a specific promise: change your body and the rest will follow. The before-and-after photo is the dominant genre of fitness marketing. The scale is the standard unit of success. The thirty-day challenge is the standard delivery vehicle.

What this model produces, reliably, is short-term results. People reduce calories, lose weight, reach their target, and stop. The behavior that produced the weight loss was organized around the target, not around a sustainable practice. When the target is reached, the behavior ends. The weight returns.

[Kayla Bonkowski](#) is familiar with this pattern. She tried other approaches before CrossFit. What changed in 2021 was not the intensity of her effort. It was the structure around the effort. The workout was scheduled. Other people were there. The result was recorded. All of those features existed before she arrived and persisted after she left. She was training inside a structure, not generating one from scratch each day.

"I tried other approaches before CrossFit," she says. "What was different wasn't the workouts -- it was the accountability built into the format."

A Practice-First Mindset in an Outcome-Focused Industry

CrossFit, as Bonkowski describes it, is not a weight-loss program. It is a strength and conditioning methodology built around measurable performance and community accountability. Workouts are scored. Times are tracked. Progress is compared against previous results, not against a target weight.

When the metric is performance, the goal is indefinite. There is always a faster time, a heavier lift, a more difficult movement to develop. The practice does not resolve into a completed state. It continues.

This is the core of Bonkowski's argument against outcome-first fitness culture: when the outcome is finite, the practice that produces it is also finite. CrossFit inverts that. The practice is the point, and outcomes -- including meaningful physical changes -- are a product of the practice rather than its purpose.

"When the goal is a number on a scale, you stop when you hit it," Bonkowski says. "When the goal is performance, there's always another lift to chase."

The Credential Behind the Critique

Kayla Bonkowski's standing to make this argument is grounded in direct experience. She graduated from Rochester College in 2017 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, earning Cum Laude honors. She is currently completing a Master of Social Work at Louisiana State University. She trains at CrossFit

Teneo in Macomb, Michigan, and is raising her son in Sterling Heights.

Since beginning CrossFit in 2021, she has lost more than 70 pounds. She has also competed in LexArtis CrossFit events including Battle of the Boxes, No Boys Allowed, and Cougars and Sugar Daddies -- a partner format pairing athletes across age categories. Each competition placed her performance against external standards in a public, measurable context.

The psychology background she carries from Rochester College shapes how she understands the mechanics of behavior change. Outcome-based approaches generate short-term compliance. Habit-based approaches, embedded in consistent environments, generate durable behavior. CrossFit is the second model.

Why Community Is the Missing Variable

Most critiques of outcome-first fitness culture focus on the goal. Bonkowski focuses on the environment.

CrossFit Teneo in Macomb, Michigan, is not simply a gym with a particular programming philosophy. It is a community of people who train at the same times, in the same space, through the same workouts. The social dimension of that structure is not incidental. It is load-bearing.

"CrossFit Teneo gave me something most gyms don't -- a place where showing up is the default, not the decision," Bonkowski says.

This is the variable that outcome-first fitness culture rarely accounts for. Weight-loss programs produce individual behavior changes. CrossFit produces community-embedded habits. Individual behavior is vulnerable to motivation cycles, schedule disruption, and the ordinary erosion of willpower over time. Community-embedded habits are not. Bonkowski has trained at CrossFit Teneo since 2021, through semesters of graduate school, through the demands of parenting, through the full range of ordinary life circumstances that flatten people who are running only on motivation. The training has held because the structure holds.

The Role of Competition in an Evidence-Based Practice

The LexArtis competitions [Bonkowski](#) has entered -- Battle of the Boxes, No Boys Allowed, Cougars and Sugar Daddies -- represent the most direct challenge to outcome-first culture's metrics. They measure nothing about appearance. They measure output.

"When I stepped into my first LexArtis competition, the question wasn't how I looked," Bonkowski says. "It was what I could do. That's a better question."

Competition provides a feedback mechanism that training alone does not. It compresses the evaluation of progress into a single measurable event and places it against external comparison. The result is honest in a way that before-and-after photography is not. There is no lighting, no angle, no framing. There is a score.

For Bonkowski, the competitive dimension of CrossFit extends what the practice builds on its own. Training at CrossFit Teneo develops capacity. Competition tests and publicly verifies it. The two together produce a practitioner with a grounded, accurate sense of where she actually stands.

The competitive record also provides proof of concept in a domain the fitness industry rarely engages

with honestly: what does this practice actually produce in someone who has sustained it long enough? For Bonkowski, the answer is three completed LexArtis events and a measurable performance trajectory from 2021 to the present. The before-and-after photo is a single data point. The competition record is a series of them.

A Different Standard

The fitness industry will not change because one athlete from Sterling Heights makes the case against transformation culture. Kayla Bonkowski does not expect it to. What she offers is a different standard, applied to her own life, with documented results.

More than 70 pounds lost since 2021. Three LexArtis competitions entered. One MSW program at Louisiana State University in progress. Training at CrossFit Teneo in Macomb, Michigan, ongoing.

"The fitness industry runs on transformation promises," Bonkowski says. "CrossFit runs on trackable, repeatable workouts. Those are not the same thing."

The distinction is structural. The structure, in this case, has produced a practice that a Sterling Heights athlete has sustained since 2021 alongside everything else in her life. Outcome-first culture cannot make the same claim. The fitness industry runs on aspirational language. Bonkowski runs on a record. Since 2021, that record includes more than 70 pounds, three LexArtis competitions, and a training practice maintained at CrossFit Teneo in Macomb alongside LSU coursework and everything else. The record does not require a before-and-after photo to make its case. It makes the case through duration.

Structure beats motivation. The evidence is in the record.

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