

# (Route)Setting Good Standards: Expectations & Communication

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**Clock in, strip walls, reset walls, open walls for the public.**

In a robot world, the expectations for a routesetter would be that easy. However, we do not live in a robot world. There is an incredible amount of planning, maintenance, and human feeling to consider when understanding what expectations a team should have and how to communicate those expectations.

[As we discussed in a previous article](#), a quarterly or bi-annual check-in meeting is a great time and place to re-evaluate team expectations and how well those expectations are being communicated and met.

However, if this is not possible for you, you have options. These take multiple forms, such as writing out policies and procedures, experimenting with communication styles, and opening the feedback loop.

## Written Documents

One of the first steps for improving expectations can be having one “home” binder where all important documents live. During the COVID shutdown, I used my work from home time to write our routesetting manual. I included maintenance logs, trajectory paths for newer setters, professional development opportunities, gear logs, and an expectation check-off sheet. This gave us a starting point for what to go over when we returned to the gym, and it gave me a

standard process for onboarding new hires.

## Written documents serve many purposes concerning expectations:

1. **They solve the problem of things getting lost verbally.** We're all told how to do things and then immediately forget. Provide your setters with somewhere to check for guidance.
2. **They keep your team on track with their own progress.** Say you have a setter who has already obtained their USAC Level 1 certification and is hoping to progress to L2 someday. Routesetters have more clear paths to their goals by giving them a list of steps they can use to excel.
3. **They help routesetters stay safe.** Gear logs and expectation check-off sheets are key tools for risk management and worker safety. In our manual, each routesetter knows what gear they are responsible for taking ownership of and inspecting regularly. Our check-off sheet has each setter sign that they will take safety precautions such as wearing eye protection, using safe ladder etiquette, communicating when they are injured, etc.

## Forms of Communication

With diverse personality types (as you often see in routesetting teams), comes different (and usually quite strong) preferences in the ways team members communicate best with their head setter or each other. If an issue needs to be addressed, it may feel tricky to figure out when / how / etc to meet or notify the teammate.

### On my team, I have divided us into two communication styles:

- Those who prefer immediate face to face confrontation.
- Those who prefer to be messaged or emailed after the setting day, with time to reflect and respond in text rather than verbally.

In my experience, I have found that if there is a problem, especially if expectations are not being met, it is critical to communicate with the setter in their preferred communication form for the best shot of resolution.

Meeting with a setter who would rather receive written communication can detail their sets and even cause tension. On the flipside, emailing someone who would prefer a face-to-face may leave them feeling confused or feeling unable to defend themselves.

It may take some time on your part to read into the setter enough to know what style works better, but if you're unsure it never hurts to just ask what they would prefer.

# Feedback Loops

The absolute best way to ensure your team is meeting expectations is to create multiple feedback loops and opportunities for conversation.

I was recently setting a regional event where the chief described all the times where events tanked, or someone had an epic (routesetting jargon for spending an absurd amount of time or energy on one idea instead of problem-solving), or the team was still setting at 3:00 a.m.

All of these problems could have been avoided if the team knew exactly what was expected from them and had an opportunity to ask questions. Take into account that some do well with verbal instructions while others do well with written - in a commercial and competitive environment, try to practice both.

**Start and end the day with a team meeting** making sure to ask specific questions like “what do you think could’ve gone better today?” or “what did we do today that we should do again in the future?” **If there’s a set in question,** (perhaps conflicting grade opinions or concerns about safety), **make a point to discuss the plan** of how you’re going to make the final decision.

From a head setter’s perspective, you cannot expect anything out of your team that you are not actively displaying yourself. If someone on your team is not meeting your expectations, ask yourself if you are leading by example. Then ask yourself:

- How has the information been communicated already? Has it?
- Is there a different way to communicate this information?

And, inevitably, when you have to have the tough conversation, make sure the conversation takes place in the form that best meets the setter’s communication style.

## About the Author



Hayley Moran is the Head Routesetter at The Crag in Nashville, Tennessee. She has a Master’s Degree in Child and Family Studies and previously worked in the field of public health with a focus on health equity. She uses those experiences to help guide her work in the climbing industry by creating events and discussions that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through the sport of rock climbing. When she is not on the wall, you can find Hayley baking in the kitchen, designing silly sweatshirts, or hanging out with her cat, Goblin.



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