

Front Desk To Management: Indoor Climbing Gym Guide

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Posted By: **Jessica Malloy** in [CWA Blog](#)



Working the front desk can be a fun, temporary job with perks like free memberships, pro-deals, and in-house instruction and classes, but it can also be the first step toward being a professional in the indoor climbing industry.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Jess Malloy, head coach at High Point Climbing Gym. Jess has written about coaching, management, and routesetting for the CWA.
- **Who Should Read:** Front Desk Staff and really any entry-level employee hoping to move up in the indoor climbing industry.
- **What Will You Learn:** Strategies to move up through the ranks and take advantage of your environment.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** We linked it below as well, but Jess created [downloadable weekly posting calendar for social media](#) to get you started on her tip on using social media to break into middle management.

Front desk employees might be expected to hop in as a coach or instructor, be trained in rescue, apply their artistic talent to a chalkboard or marketing, wash holds or strip walls, and some get to learn the fundamentals of routesetting and wall maintenance. Broadening your experience and offering your unique talents will give you the chance to move up and continue to be a valuable member of the community and gym you are so invested in.

The climbing industry is a path worth pursuing to work in a place where you're surrounded by like-minded people. You can spend more time on the wall, and have a job you're excited to show up for. Not to mention, all the pathways to move up.

A [recent article in IBIS](#) showed that "the number of people employed in the Climbing Gyms industry in the U.S. increased by 9.7% on average over the five years between 2019 and 2024."

There's no question that this industry is growing and there is room for more full-time and part-time professionals to move up.

Whether you're interested in a management position, coaching, or routesetting, many industry professionals start behind the front desk. Several paths can branch from being a front desk employee, and there are many ways to be a high performer in the front desk position while showing your unique talents.

Design and Marketing

If your indoor climbing gym has a full marketing team, it may be difficult to get your foot in the door creatively. However, you can look for small-scale opportunities to get noticed. If there is a chalkboard, ask to be the one to keep it updated. Talk with your manager if you can design stickers, fliers, or shirts that represent the company brand to sell at the gym.

If you have experience in art, your gym might be interested in murals or crafting different items for special events. Be creative and bring attention to the gym and its community. Not only is this a way to make your current position more enjoyable, but it's also a way to gain more experience in a field you're already interested in and apply skills you already have.

Downloadable Content: Social Media Posting Calendar

Make it known that you're looking to apply these skills further by assisting in the gym's social media accounts or doing in-house graphic design work. You'll be surprised what type of job the right gym and the right skills might create.

Instruction

Most front desk employees are proficient in providing orientations. Orientations and test-outs are about understanding the fundamentals of climbing practice and risk. If you find that you are the first to jump at the opportunity to do an auto belay orientation, it might be worth looking into developing this path as an instructor or coach. Many go on to earn one of the CWA's Climbing Wall Instructor certifications.

Every indoor climbing gym is different, but many start with shadowing an experienced instructor

in a Top Rope Belay class, a 101-style class, or a youth program. If this is something that interests you, reach out to your management team to get started on the path toward learning more about instruction. Many gyms offer significant discounts to employees or allow them to take classes for free.

Sign up for whatever you can, especially lead climbing classes if your gym offers them. This is an area that often needs more experienced instructors and is in demand. Once you feel like you have experience, you can start pitching new ideas to the gym.

Routesetting

This is the flashy, cool job that so many climbers aspire to— for many it represents the epitome of climbing knowledge and strength, and it can feel like the cool kid's club. The path to becoming a career routesetter is long, hard, and taxing; physically and mentally.

Despite this, many pursue the dream of climbing and slinging holds for a living, and many still find that they love their jobs despite the job's demands. To get started, a lot of gyms need help with hold washing or stripping. For some, these are jobs that are separate from routesetting; they are open shifts for anyone willing to be trained on a pressure washer.

If you are looking to get into routesetting, this is often one of the best ways to get connected and gain experience as a setter. Offering to strip or wash holds as part of your shift is usually greatly appreciated by the routesetting crew, and if you can strip holds, **it gives you experience with using the tools of the trade and helps you become more efficient on the wall.**

The next step would be offering to help forerun. This responsibility can sometimes be in higher demand and is sometimes reserved for higher-level climbers. However, if you have a different body type than the rest of the crew, a shorter wingspan, or have a lot of experience with climbing, your voice could be valuable during the forerunning process no matter what grade you climb. Head routesetters look for people who show a higher understanding of climbing movement and who have a variety of skills.

To gain those skills, participate in local, in-house comps, climb new sets, ask questions, and be willing to listen and make mistakes.

Management

Working in management is often a stable, secure way to move up in an indoor climbing gym. Being an organized, prepared front desk worker who anticipates needs demonstrates great potential management skills. Make it known that you'd like to move up and ask what management looks for in a shift lead or supervisor-type role. Be forward-thinking, attentive to members, and show that you understand the programs and membership options. While the

upper management roles might take some time to move into, middle management roles will be available more frequently and have the potential to provide plenty of experience needed to be prepared for the next phase.

READ ALSO: [Supporting Your Team's Hidden Talents Supports Revenue](#)

Whether you are in a small, independent gym or a large mega gym, Assistant General Managers and General Managers are always needed to ensure that the facility runs smoothly. There are also ways to use downtime on the clock to watch educational videos or learn more about programs like [Rock Gym Pro](#) or Asana.

Doing so can inspire ideas that you can pitch to your supervisor to improve efficiency, organization, or solve an issue that your gym frequently deals with.

When you find a gym and a community that is uplifting and supportive of your growth, it can be very fulfilling to pursue a career in the indoor climbing industry.

Attend Our Next Customer Experience Roundtable Webinar

The CWA re-launched its Webinar Program with monthly alternating roundtables for members to discuss a wide range of topics. Customer Experience is defined as managers, senior managers, and entry-level employees.

Monday, January 27, | Free for Members

About the Author



Jess Malloy is the Head Coach at High Point Climbing Gym in Birmingham, AL. She has worked in five climbing gyms in the past eighteen years, is a USAC L1 Routesetter, a L2 USAC Coach, and has accumulated years of experience as a climber, coach, setter, yoga teacher, and as a published writer. She is also the Head Coach for Catalyst Sports's Climbing Team for Elite Para Athletes. She is the owner of @yoga.for.climbers, a small business where she can combine all her passions into one. She loves runout slab and trying to find static moves around dynos. She gets nervous on pumpy

overhanging sport but can always commit to the last move on tall boulders. When she isn't climbing, she reads books and comics, lifts weights, and does yoga. She also hangs out with her ten-pound rescue pup, Beta, who despite her name is not a good crag dog but is an excellent cuddler.

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SAFE SPORT AND INDOOR CLIMBING ☐

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