

The Sustainability Of Indoor Climbing Coaching

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in [CWA Blog](#)



It's a bluebird autumn day, golden leaves are raining from every direction, and I'm filled with joy as I drive home from my first yoga for climbers retreat at the Red River Gorge, Kent.

While driving, I thought about where my professional coaching journey began and how far it has come. Not so long ago I worked alongside my friends to build The Ascent Climbing Gym in 2010. I saw climbers offering their talent to construct and paint, teenagers providing their time in exchange for memberships, and I saw mentorships develop. I was living the dream and building a community doing what I truly loved.

Though the pandemic has changed the culture of the workforce, I still see climbers offering a helping hand to grow the community. This is a fundamental value; we live to see each other thrive. We can all build on this fundamental value to foster mentorships and fuel our coaching teams.

As our leadership team at [The Crag](#) anxiously looks forward to our new location's opening in Franklin, Tenn., we are beginning to think about building new employees. Alongside interviewing candidates who send in resumes, I have also been encouraging the USA Climbing team members to volunteer as belayers and side climbers for our youth adaptive climbing league.

There is a long history of mentorships within the climbing culture and we can bridge the connections within our programs. **By planting the seed and communicating their potential to them, "I think you could be a really good coach one day," they will begin to grow themselves.**

Passion, consideration, and kindness come from within when we invite new employees to interview and get to know them on this level first.

If we climb with them during the interview or ask them to teach us something, we will have a better understanding of their ability to communicate, perform safety checks, or adapt a teaching method.

Bringing members of our youth team onto our coaching team means we have already laid the groundwork. We know how they best receive encouragement, feedback, and their strengths as climbers. Coaching does not end after practice, continuing to develop our young coaches will help us keep them. All of us love progressing and witnessing progress.

A Progress Card for Employees

One of my main takeaways from the [2022 CWA Summit](#) is that there is a much higher return rate for first-time climbers if they are given a progress tracker or challenge card.

I propose a progress tracker for our employees as well. Compose a hiring packet that includes:

- The job description
- A checklist training outline
- Actionable items for how they can progress in their role

These items could include attending rescue training, CPR/ AED certification, lead climbing certification, CWI certification, or training from each department. Think about the bigger picture of what your gym needs.

Include the date for their performance reviews, the range of compensation associated with each level of responsibility, and how to exit when it comes time.

Follow up, and mark your calendar with your team's hire dates, training dates, certification dates, and review dates so they know that you care about their growth and what their goals are.

I was inspired by Jason Gilmore's progress tracker for his recreational team at the [ASCEND Pittsburgh](#) and adapted his idea for my coaching team.

As our new hires find their voices as coaches, staying connected is paramount.

Ask what their climbing goals are and climb with them, listen, and understand what is important to them.

Would they like to attend a setting clinic, help guide an outdoor trip, or learn how to be an instructor? As leaders and managers, we are strongest when we know our team's strengths and values. For example, as my head coach, Jess Malloy, prepares to scale up with our new location, it is important to her that she maintains a connection with her climbers. Knowing her team on a personal level is fulfilling for her, so we will create a schedule that allows her to work with every climber on her team at each location.

READ ALSO: Lessons for Climbing Coaches from an Olympian

Create a Path to a Career

The younger generation of employees depends on more tenured employees as leaders and mentors to show them how to make the career of indoor climbing coaching sustainable.

As climbers, we all yearn to earn. If they have high pay expectations, they should know the duties associated with the levels of compensation. It is rewarding to overcome challenges and accomplish goals. We are already in the habit of witnessing progress as their coaches, and we will reap the benefits of priming our teams for years, dependably creating longer-term employees.

We develop climbers to become camp counselors, coaches, instructors, and managers. We will have instructors who inspire climbers to become guides. We train our teams so well that they take our place, and we create new roles for ourselves. We get to grow our focus on the most inspiring parts of our careers.

Continuing to develop our teams professionally will create sustainability in our programming. We evolve when we ask our head coaches to debrief after programs regularly and create opportunities for coaches to train the new coaches.

When coaches have a hand in improving their own programs, they can recognize the value and input we crave from them as people. It's about showing your employees that you truly do care about how to help them grow into their roles. As we create a pipeline of employees learning, developing, and creating the best team possible, our realm of influence ripples through the climbing community.

Our teams and members will see the caliber of employees we develop and want to be a part of it. We will create a sustainable, desirable, and fulfilling workplace.

**Coaching climbers is a professional career path.
Don't miss the best resources for indoor climbers,
at the 2023 CWA Summit in Pittsburgh, Pa.**

About the Author



Hailey Caissie is the Programs Manager at [The Crag Climbing Gym](#) in Nashville, Tennessee. Hailey has been a climbing instructor since 2006 and loves seeing new climbers discover their abilities. She finds it especially fulfilling to coach young athletes toward discovering their potential. She works to inspire generations of climbers to become more intentional, influential, and inclusive.

THE INDOOR CLIMBING INDUSTRY NEEDS CERTIFICATION

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