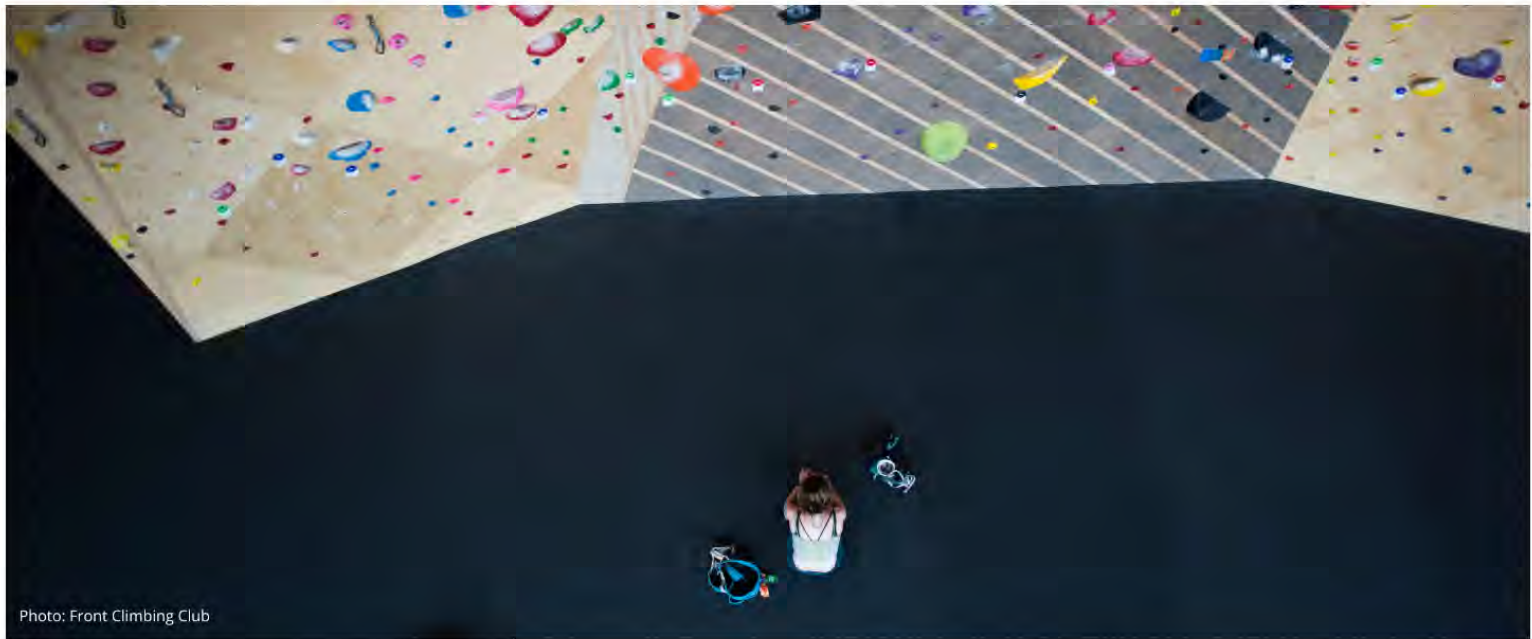


Why & How To Use A Consultant: Part 1

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Posted By: **Paul Terbreuggen** in [CWA Blog](#)



Consulting work is often caricatured as a hot shot in an expensive suit and Porshe 911, swooping in, pointing fingers (Toby McGuire Spider-Man double guns even), telling you how easy it is to make a million bucks.

In three distinct phases of my career, Amazon Operations, Summit Climbing + Fitness, (now part of Movement), and self-employment, I have worked with or as a consultant. Some consultants I hired and others have been hired by the teams above or around me. Navigating a new relationship, one that often includes showing intimate details of your business to a near stranger is always unsettling.

The key to making a consulting relationship successful is easy to state but challenging to execute. Like most aspects of business, it comes down to communication and documentation of expectations for both parties. Scope, timelines, cost, return on investment, and more. The better you communicate and document expectations up front, the more return you can expect on your hard-earned dollars.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Paul Terbreuggen, one of our experienced writers with dozens of articles over the years. Paul has worked in various roles across the indoor climbing industry and in business.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for gym owners, and other senior managers who manage relationships.
- **What Will You Learn:** This is part one of a two part article on consulting in the

indoor climbing industry. This article is giving you a crash course in the 'what' of consulting. Next is the how!

- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** We've got partner resources through [the Climbing Business Journal](#) and other further reading!

In this two-part series, we will identify what you are seeking from an outside consultant (part 1) and then how to effectively prepare, engage, contract, and build an ongoing relationship (part 2) with a business consultant.

My time as a gym owner, consultant, and CWA Summit attendee led me to three specialists in the field who helped provide context for the insights that followed. We sat down to discuss consulting in the climbing industry and their insights helped to shape this article.

Short bios and a link to their websites below:

Gavin Heverly, Rise Above Consulting

"I have been operating, opening, and scaling climbing gym businesses for 25 years prior to Rise Above. With Rise Above I partner with passionate owners and leaders to overcome operational and cultural challenges so they can scale success and drive high performing culture." [View their website here.](#)

Todd McCormick, Keystone Climbing Consultants

"I've worked in the climbing industry for about 20 years and got my start at university gyms running university walls and outdoor pursuits style programming. I helped open a commercial gym in Pittsburgh in 2017 and then started Retail Consulting for climbing gyms in 2020. I help gyms to run more efficient retail operations with things like product selection and scaling appropriately." [View their website here.](#)

Ty Morrison Health, Adventure a Day Marketing

"I own Adventure Day Marketing. My goal is to work with Climbing gyms to build micro, targeted advertising that really dials in their ideal customer. I specialize in getting really good. Ad return on Ad spend, basically very low dollar spend for highest returns is my goal." [View their website here.](#)

In addition to the three gentlemen referenced, many other folks are offering industry-relevant services.

The Climbing Business Journal maintains a great Rolodex of consultants and those that offer services.

Clients approach consultants because they are missing one of two key resources to accomplish a task and they need to purchase those resources.

Resources fall into one of two categories:

Expertise (often based on Experience)

Expertise can be likened to “practice makes perfect.” For many people, becoming “good” at something comes with time, some faster than others. In Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, he famously popularized the concept of 10,000 hours to become a true expert in a field. At the end of the day, a consultant with more innate ability and/or experience in a field than you could be a powerful addition to your network.

Time (often paired with Expertise)

Most owners/operators are busy. Impossibly busy. 80 hours per week busy. When tackling complex problems, new situations, or major changes, hiring someone with a similar, additive, or complementary skill set but more available hours in their week allows multiple projects or larger projects to move forward more quickly, or just more smoothly.

Owners may articulate a desire to build a program, increase revenue, decrease payroll or solve a problem. They want someone to provide one of the two items above, often a combination of both. Expertise is often accompanied by a network of support, such as the work history between Rise Above Consulting and [Chris Ryan Studio](#) or Keystone Climbing with [Edelrid](#). Good consultants will help you identify what combination of the two will best serve your needs. All four consultants agreed that articulating the details of that combination in the contract is key.

READ ALSO: [What Do Brands Want From Indoor Climbing Gyms](#)

Additionally, it helps to think about the problem to be solved and if it is working on the business or in the business.

1. On the Business - big picture, strategic or forward-thinking

i. Examples:

- Gavin from Rise Above has helped new or existing gym owners to create long-term, strategic annual plans.
- My work under TerboMGMT has helped gym owners create sustainable retail program plans as well as the standard operating procedure to run it themselves.

2. In the Business - tactical or day-to-day operations

i. Examples:

- Ty at Adventure a Day can create and execute a comprehensive, highly detailed ad campaign and adjust real-time to optimize the best possible ad spend.
- Todd at Keystone currently helps to execute retail plans for multiple gyms, overseeing the day-to-day buying, ordering, and operations

To simplify the two topics above, this chart breaks the needs of a business into four categories based on the combination of expertise and/or time and in vs. on the business.

Business Needs: Expertise & Time In/On Business

	Specialist	Mentor	Contractor	Employee
Expertise	• Yes	• Yes		
Time	• Yes		• Yes	
On	• Yes	• Yes		
In	• Yes		• Yes	• Yes

- Specialist- hiring someone with a skill set your team lacks to do a task you do not have time for.

Example: Ty might create and execute your marketing needs. He has highly specialized skills and bandwidth to achieve results you are not capable of and may not have time or desire to learn.

- Mentoring- hiring someone with experience you lack to teach you tasks you are prepared to do yourself.

Example: Gavin or I might oversee a major operational change to ensure you are covering all your bases and that your plan is sound. We have unique backgrounds and

skill sets that help us see around corners that you may not and are adept teachers as part of our strengths.

- Contractor- hiring someone to do a task you do not have time to do or choose not to do.

Example: Once Todd has set up systems for a gym's retail, they often ask him to stay on and run the program after the initial setup. The initial setup and creation of a program is a specialist-type role but when it comes to executing day-to-day, it becomes a contractor relationship.

- Employee- if you are not hiring someone with a skill set you lack or to accomplish a higher-level task, you may be better served to just hire an employee.

Example: In most cases, the rates justified by consultants are going to be higher than your average employee to pay for experience and the independent costs associated with being a consultant. If the task at hand is not particularly specialized, it may be better to just hire to fill the position with an employee!

Understanding each of the previous qualifiers, what do you do with this information? The key is matching your needs to the correct type of support and again, to build your needs and expectations into the contract before work commences.

In Part 2 of this two-part series, we will dive further into how the principles discussed above translate into establishing contact with a consultant, executing the initial discovery conversations, and then negotiating a contract that is mutually beneficial for both the hiring organization and the consultant selected.

Part 2 will dive into topics such as appropriate scope and preventing scope creep, fixed flat rate vs. hourly vs. monthly retainer compensation structures, and how to ensure contracts ensure mutual accountability for both the hiring organization and the consultant.

About the Author



Paul Terbrueggen, aka Tall Paul, is an operations leader with 10+ years of experience. He offers small business consulting for gyms looking to streamline operations, increase retail revenue or otherwise grow their business. Previously he worked at [Summit Climbing, Yoga & Fitness](#) as the Retail Director and then Chief Operating Officer for their eight locations in Texas and Oklahoma. Prior to Summit, he led teams of up to 4,500 for Amazon Fulfillment Operations

An avid boulderer, he can often be heard claiming to be "more tall than talented" at 6'6". Paul enjoys all manner of activities, indoor or outdoor, especially when shared with his fiancée Becky

and two puppies Penny Lane and Lil McGill (but everyone knows her as Nancy). In addition to consulting and writing for the CWA, Paul is an analyst for End 2 End Outdoor, representing La Sportiva, Petzl, and Big Agnes.



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