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So You Want to Open a Gym?

The No-Fluff Guide to Turning Coaching Passion into a Business

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INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, chances are you've thought about opening your own gym. Maybe you're a coach who loves helping people, and you're ready to build something bigger than yourself. Or maybe you've spent years working in other facilities, knowing deep down you could do this so much better, spending your days imagining what you'd do differently if you had your own space.

The truth is, starting a gym is one of the most rewarding paths you can take in the fitness industry. It's also one of the hardest. Passion for coaching is essential, but it isn't enough. Owning a gym is not just about writing great programs or coaching perfect squats; it's about leadership, systems, and making tough decisions that will determine whether your business survives and thrives.

This eBook was designed for you, the aspiring gym owner. Inside, you'll find practical, no-fluff insights from coaches and entrepreneurs who have been exactly where you are. Each chapter tackles a critical part of the ownership journey, from building your identity and finding the right location to protecting yourself legally, retaining clients, and knowing when it's time to evolve or expand.

Here's what you can expect:

- You're only as good as your people. Learn why the team you build will make or break your business.
- So you want to start a gym? Find your identity. Discover how to define who you serve and carve out your niche.
- Location, location, location. Why where you set up shop matters more than you think.
- Not sexy, but important. The unglamorous but essential foundations like waivers, insurance, and LLCs.
- Client retention and community. How to keep the people you worked so hard to attract.
- Transitioning from coach to owner. What changes when you step off the floor and into leadership?
- Reevaluating goals and scaling. When to push, when to pause, and how to grow smart.

This isn't theory. These are lessons pulled from years of trial, error, and success in the trenches of gym ownership. Our goal is to give you clarity, confidence, and a roadmap you can actually use.

So if you're ready to stop just coaching and start building a business you're proud of—one that changes lives, supports your lifestyle, and stands the test of time—let's get started.

CHAPTER 1: FIND YOUR IDENTITY

Featuring insights from Trent Luecke, Former Gym Owner & Coach

Trent Luecke is a "reformed gym owner" bringing his hard-earned wisdom from running his own facility. His journey included multiple evolutions—starting as a CrossFit affiliate, transitioning into a hybrid model, and eventually refining his business into a small-group personal training studio focused on working professionals. Along the way, Trent learned tough lessons about identity, alignment, and the dangers of trying to serve everyone. In this chapter, he shares candid advice on how to find your niche, define your gym's identity, and avoid the costly trap of operating without a clear vision.

One of the most common mistakes new gym owners make is opening their doors without a clear identity. They know they want to coach, they love fitness, and they're excited to build something of their own, but they haven't clearly defined who they're helping, what problem they're solving, or how their facility will uniquely serve their community. Without that clarity, gyms struggle to attract the right clients, retain members, and build long-term sustainability.

If you're serious about opening your own gym, defining your identity isn't optional—it's foundational.

1. Know Why You're Opening a Gym

Loving fitness and loving coaching are not enough. Passion helps, but your why needs to be more specific and grounded in purpose. Ask yourself:

- What problem am I solving?
- Is there a gap in my community?
- Am I offering something different—or doing something better?

"I just love training people," isn't enough of a reason to open a gym. It's a start, but not a strategy. Your gym should exist for a reason that others can see and connect with. Maybe your area lacks affordable strength training options for busy professionals. Perhaps no one is serving older adults with safe, structured programming. Whatever the reason, identify it and commit to it.

2. Define Who You Want to Serve

You can't serve everyone, and you shouldn't try. One of the fastest ways to create a forgettable brand is by trying to appeal to everyone.

Instead, focus on your ideal member. Get specific. Who are they? What do they care about? What are their daily struggles, goals, and preferences?

Creating a customer avatar is a great starting point. Ask questions like:

- How old are they?
- What do they do for work?
- Do they have kids?
- What kind of music, lifestyle, and culture do they vibe with?
- Why are they coming to the gym what are they really hoping to fix or improve?



Remember, "Everyone is the same as no one. If your message is for everyone, it will be heard by no one."

3. Build Your Identity Around the Member Experience

Once you know who you're serving, design every part of your gym to speak to that person. From the music playing when they walk in the door to the way your staff greets them, everything should align.

- Training style: Does it reflect their goals and limitations?
- Pricing: Is it accessible to your target demographic?
- Facility feel: Is the space welcoming and inclusive?
- Schedule: Does it work with their lifestyle?

If your ideal member is a 45-year-old working parent, the experience should be drastically different than if you're serving college athletes.

Also, visit other gyms. Learn what you like and don't like. Understanding what you don't want to be is often the clearest path to figuring out who you are.

4. Your Identity Will Evolve—And That's Okay

Many gym owners change their model and target audience over time, and that's not a failure. In fact, it's a natural part of growth.

What matters is how you manage that transition. Shifting from CrossFit to small-group training? Changing your pricing or membership tiers? Expect to lose some clients—but that's part of the process.

Growth often means becoming more focused, more specialized, and more aligned with your strengths. Your identity will sharpen as you gain experience.

5. Let Your Personality Shape the Brand

Forget trying to build a polished, corporate image. You are not Nike, and you shouldn't try to be. Your members are buying into you as much as they're buying into your gym.

Own who you are! Your personality, values, and quirks are part of your brand. If you're laid back and like to joke with your clients, lean into that. If you're highly professional and structured, own it. Authenticity attracts the right people and builds trust.

Trying to present a fake version of yourself will burn you out fast, especially when you're pulling long hours. Be real and build a business that reflects who you are.

6. Focus on How They Feel, Not Just What You Offer

You may be passionate about powerlifting, Olympic lifts, or functional training—but your clients might just want to feel better, lose weight, or escape the stress of daily life.

What matters most is how your clients feel in your gym:

- Do they feel seen and supported?
- Are they excited to show up?
- Do they connect with the coaches and other members?

The emotional experience outweighs the technical aspects of training. If they enjoy coming in, they'll stick around. If they don't, it won't matter how great your programming is.

Final Takeaway

Your gym's identity isn't just your logo, training style, or name. It's the lived experience your clients have every day. It's how you solve their problems and make them feel like they belong.

Start with a clear reason for existing. Define who you're here to serve. Build your systems, environment, and experience around them—and let your identity evolve as your business and community grow.

Because the clearer your identity, the stronger your impact.



CHAPTER 2: Location, Location, Location, Location

Featuring insights from Stu Brauer, Founder of WTF Gym Talk

Stu Brauer is a veteran gym owner, business coach, and founder of WTF Gym Talk, where he consults fitness entrepreneurs on branding, operations, and growth. After scaling his own successful microgym in Charlotte, NC, Stu transitioned into mentorship and consulting, helping gym owners worldwide avoid common pitfalls and create sustainable, profitable businesses. When it comes to choosing a location, a decision that can make or break your gym, Stu's hard-earned insights are invaluable.

1. Why Location Matters More Than You Think

You've probably heard the phrase, "Location, location, location." For gyms, it's not just a cliché, it's a survival strategy. Your space determines who walks through the door, how many leads you generate organically, and what kind of business model you can realistically sustain.

Choosing the wrong location can lock you into years of high overhead, poor foot traffic, or a community that doesn't match your ideal client. Choose wisely, and your environment does half the marketing for you.

2. Know Who You're Serving Before You Sign a Lease Before scouting spaces, clarify your ideal client avatar. Hmm, where have we heard that before? (See Chapter 1!)

Are you serving:

- Young professionals who value boutique training experiences?
- Families looking for convenient, community-driven fitness?
- Athletes who need specialized programming?



Your client determines your neighborhood, your square footage, and even your parking requirements. If you don't know who you're targeting, you'll end up with a space that doesn't align with your business model.

"Don't pick the location first and hope people show up. Pick the people first, then find where they live, work, and play."

3. Size, Layout, and Flow

Bigger isn't always better. Many new gym owners overcommit to square footage, only to discover they can't fill it or pay for it. Here are a few things to remember:

- Start lean. Rent only what you need to serve your first 50–100 members.
- Focus on flow. Does the space allow smooth traffic between training, storage, and community areas?
- Avoid wasted space. High ceilings look cool, but can be inefficient to heat and cool. Odd layouts create dead zones that don't generate revenue.

Your space should work as hard as you do.

4. Visibility and Accessibility

The best programming in the world won't save you if nobody knows you're there. The worst thing you can do is hide in plain sight. Consider these:

Visibility from the road matters for walk-ins and awareness.

Parking availability can make or break the experience, especially in suburban areas.

Proximity to other businesses (coffee shops, grocery stores, office parks) can help you tap into consistent traffic.

If clients can't easily find, park, and enter your gym, they'll go somewhere else, no matter how great your offer is.

5. Lease Negotiation: Protect Yourself Early

Many gym owners rush to sign their first lease. Remember you're a coach, not an attorney.

There's a reason why. Don't make these mistakes; you'll only regret it later.:

- Don't go it alone; hire a real estate lawyer or agent to review terms.
- Understand your responsibilities for repairs, maintenance, and utilities. Negotiate for tenant improvement allowances if the space requires build-out.

A lease isn't just rent—it's a long-term contract that can either support or strangle your business.

6. Think Long-Term, But Act Short-Term

Most gyms don't need 10,000 square feet to get started. Focus on:

Breaking even quickly in a smaller, manageable space.

Building culture and proof of concept.

Expanding only when your systems and demand justify it.

Growth is easier when you scale up intentionally, not when you're locked into an oversized lease you can't afford.

7. The Community Factor

Location isn't just physical, it's cultural. The neighborhood you choose influences the community you'll build. A gym in a trendy urban district will attract different clients than one in a suburban strip mall. Neither is better; it just depends on your goals.

Ask yourself:

Do the people here fit my ideal client profile?

Can they afford my services?

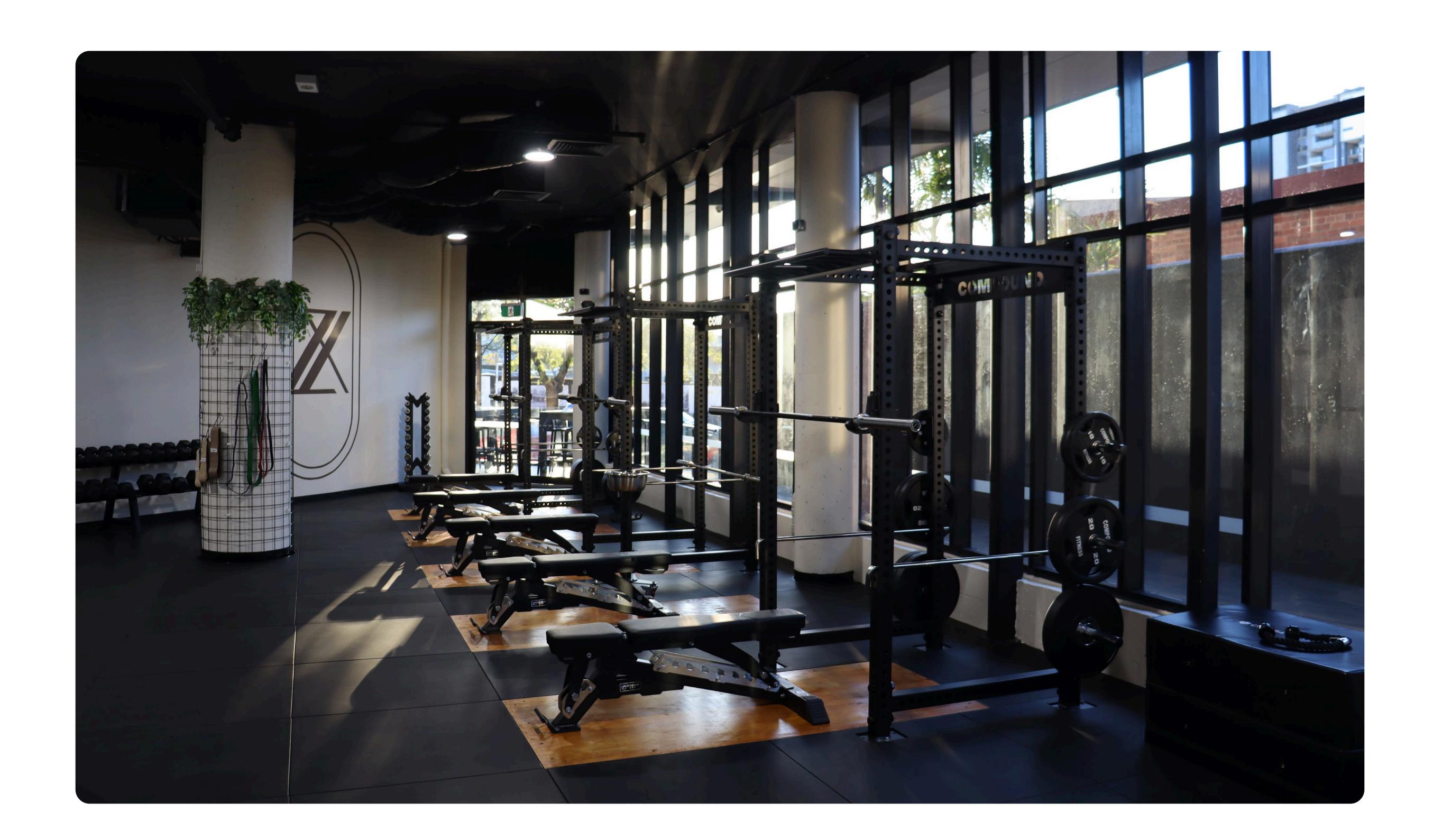
Will they stay for the long haul?

Align the culture of your space with the culture of your neighborhood, and retention becomes much easier.

Final Takeaway

Don't let yourself justify a location just because it looks cool. Choosing your gym's location is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. Get it right, and you set yourself up for sustainable growth. Get it wrong, and you'll be fighting uphill battles with rent, retention, and reach.

Your clients are the star of the show, driving all your decisions. Start with your client avatar, find a space that fits their lives, negotiate wisely, and always think in terms of sustainability. Your business model should dictate your location, not the other way around.





Featuring insights from Hewitt Tomlin, Co-Founder and CEO of TeamBuildr

Hewitt Tomlin has built TeamBuildr to over 50+ employees over the past 13 years. Thanks to a fine-tuned hiring process, clear company standards, and transparent communication on employee/employer expectations, Hewitt can proudly say that no employee has ever elected to leave TeamBuildr in its 10+ year history."

In the fitness business, like any business, your people are your greatest competitive advantage. Whether you're an employed coach looking to start your own facility or a new gym owner building a staff, it's critical to understand that success hinges not just on your business plan, equipment, or location—but on the people you hire, empower, and retain.

Your company is only as strong as its culture. Your company culture is the foundational principle to help you build a strong team culture, hire effectively, and lead with intention.

1. Your Network Is Your Best Hiring Tool

When it's time to hire, most people start by posting a job online. But by that point, you're probably already behind. The best hires often come from your existing network. That's why you have a network. If you're an aspiring entrepreneur, you should be constantly building relationships, through your customers, at events, in local communities, and even through social media, long before a job opens up.

Pro tip: Create a "future hires" list. These are individuals you've connected with, respect, and believe might fit your business. When the time comes, reach out to them first...before you post publicly.

2. Design a Thorough Interview Process

Just because you're a small operation doesn't mean your hiring process should be simple. In fact, thoroughness is one of your greatest tools. Consider requiring multiple interview rounds, even for entry-level roles.

Why? Because people can fake a great first impression. But over multiple interactions, true character, and culture fit become clear.

What to look for:

- Integrity and honesty
- Strong work ethic
- Alignment with your gym's mission and values

Don't be afraid to take your time. A great hire can transform your business. A poor one can set you back months.

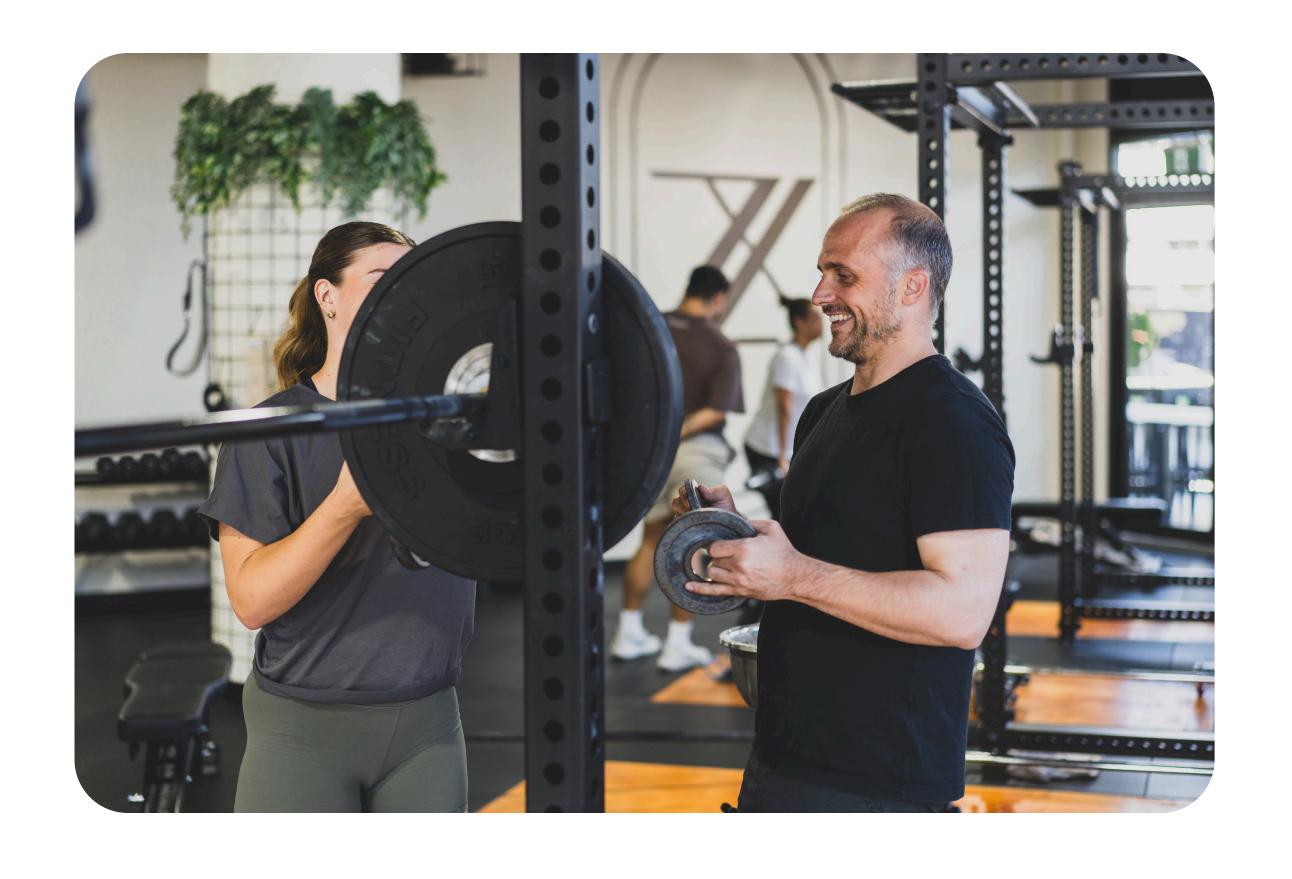
3. Hire for Values, Train for Skill

In the fitness industry, technical skills can be taught, but character and drive cannot. You're better off hiring someone who aligns with your core values and is hungry to grow than someone with a polished resume but a poor attitude.

Build your team around individuals who:

- Are coachable
- Show initiative
- Handle feedback well
- Are dependable and accountable

Your company culture will allow you to create a team that evolves and grows with your business. That is invaluable.



4. Check References—Every Time

It's tempting to skip this step, especially when a candidate feels like a "home run." But reference checks provide essential insight you won't get from interviews. Unfortunately, all the employees I failed to do reference checks for had to be let go. Don't be like me; call the references.

Ask previous employers about:

- The candidate's reliability
- Their work ethic and attitude
- How they handled adversity
- Whether they'd hire them again

If someone struggles to provide references or their references are vague, that's a red flag.



5. Create Opportunities, Don't Wait for Them

If you find someone exceptional but don't yet have a full-time position, create a pathway. Offer part-time work, internships, or project-based opportunities that allow them to prove themselves. Great talent won't wait around forever.

Smart hiring often means finding ways to align opportunity with potential before your competition does.

6. Set Boundaries and Expectations Early

Today's workforce, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, value flexibility, work-life balance, and autonomy. That's not a weakness, it's a generational shift. As an employer, your job is to set clear expectations and define what success looks like.

Ask yourself:

- What hours and responsibilities are essential?
- Where can you offer flexibility?
- What are your non-negotiables?

Make these expectations clear from the beginning. When people know where the lines are, they're more likely to succeed—and stay.

7. Prioritize Your Team's Growth and Happiness

Happy employees are productive employees. But happiness doesn't just mean free snacks or gym memberships. It means being seen, heard, and valued.

Simple steps:

- Regularly ask your staff how they're doing
- Celebrate small wins
- Provide feedback and opportunities for development

You don't have to solve every problem, but showing you care goes a long way in building loyalty and trust.

8. Prepare Your People for What's Next—Even If It's Not With You

No one stays at a job forever. You're living proof of that. A wise gym owner prepares team members for their next opportunity, even if that means leaving your business. That mindset helps you invest in your people rather than try to hold onto them out of fear.

Let your gym be a place where:

- People learn valuable skills
- Employees grow into new roles
- Future business owners are developed

When people leave better than they arrived, your business reputation grows—and so does your impact.

CHAPTER 4: What Should You Charge?

Featuring insights from Tim Caron, Owner of Allegiate Gym

Tim Caron brings a rare blend of elite coaching experience and business acumen. After 15 years in the strength and conditioning world, serving in roles at Georgia Tech, USC, and as head strength coach at Army West Point, Tim transitioned into gym ownership in 2017. Since then, he has built Allegiate Gym into a thriving multi-location facility, while also launching an educational platform for coaches and authoring several books on performance training and programming. His perspective combines high-level coaching credibility with real-world entrepreneurial lessons, making his insights on pricing and offer structure essential reading for any aspiring gym owner.

Stop underselling yourself! One of the most critical decisions new gym owners face is how to price their services. Charge too little, and you risk undervaluing your time, your expertise, and your business. Charge too much without building perceived value, and you may struggle to attract and retain members.

1. Start With Your Value Proposition

Before choosing a number, ask yourself: What am I offering that others aren't?

Your value proposition isn't just about your coaching certifications or years of experience. It's the unique combination of service quality, community, results, and client experience. If you've worked in elite performance settings or have a deep skill set, that's part of your value. Not only do you need to know your value, but your community needs to know it too.

Remember: perceived value drives pricing. If you believe your service is worth \$400/month, you need to clearly show how that price delivers a better return than the \$150/month gym down the street.

2. Study the Market—Then Differentiate

Do your homework. Identify the median price point in your area for similar services. Look at:

- Low-end offerings (e.g., commercial gyms, budget group classes)
- High-end competitors (e.g., boutique training, semi-private studios)

From there, determine:

- Where does your service quality land?
- Are you a high-skill, high-touch gym?
- Do you offer something no one else does?

The easiest way to fail is to charge more just because. It's okay to charge more, but only if you can back it up with better outcomes, deeper relationships, and a clear experience advantage.

3. Build to Scale, Not Just to Survive

On the flip side, a common pitfall is undercharging to get people in the door. This strategy might get short-term revenue but often leads to burnout and limited growth.

Instead, think ahead:

- What will it cost to replace worn equipment?
- How will you cover rising rent or payroll?
- What's your margin when you start hiring coaches?

As you grow, your pricing needs to support not just your salary, but your ability to scale and improve.

Pro tip: Budget for an annual price increase (~5%) to match inflation and rising operational costs. Communicate this clearly with clients from the start to set the right expectations.

4. Let Demand Drive Pricing Increases

As your classes or schedule fill up, use that demand as your trigger to raise rates for new members. Your early adopters may remain at their current rate (a loyalty reward), but new clients should reflect your growing reputation and results.

This keeps your pricing flexible and sustainable while rewarding long-term loyalty.

5. Simplicity Beats Complexity

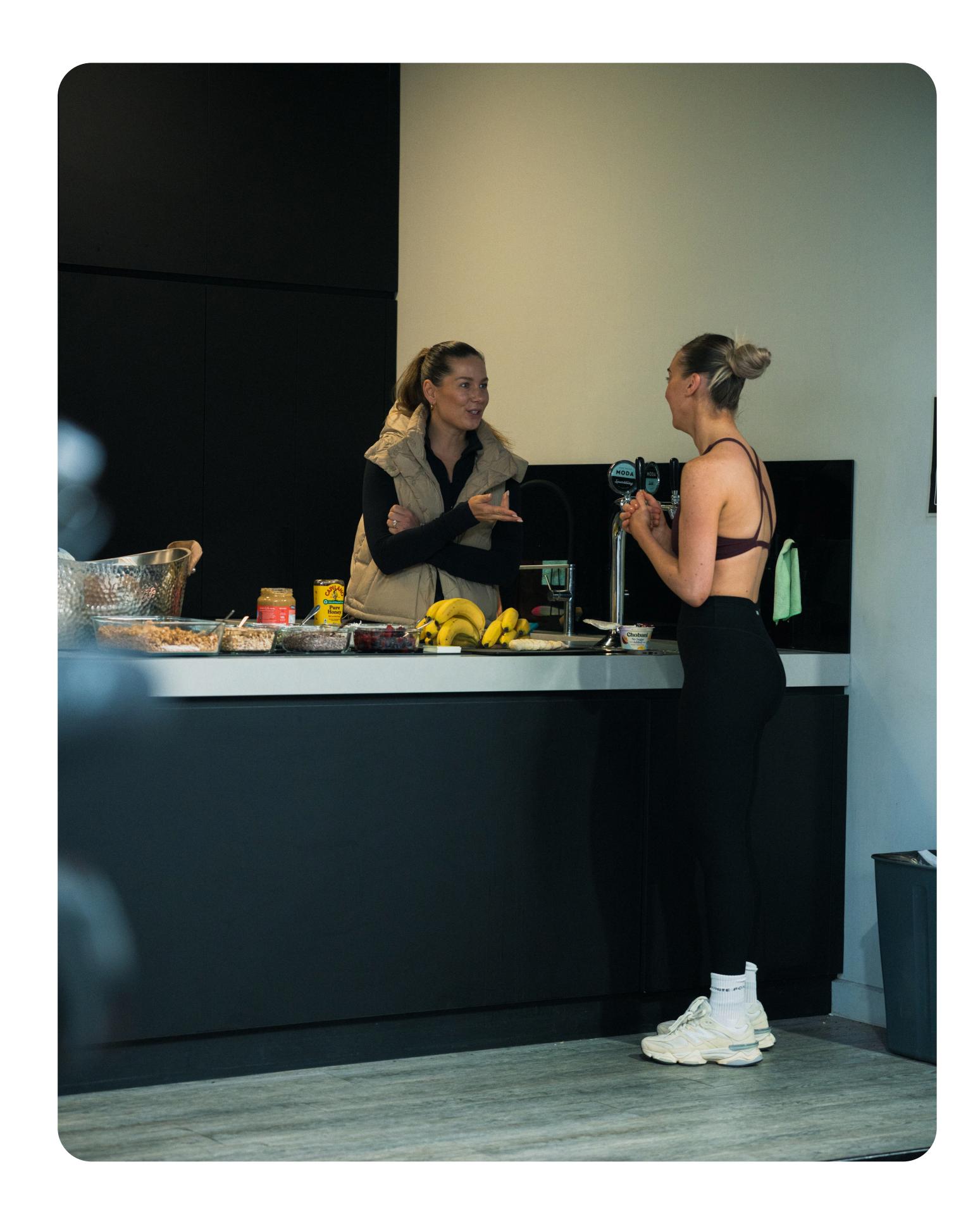
Offering too many options or "stacking" services like nutrition, supplements, and tracking might seem like a good idea, but it can quickly become overwhelming for both members and staff.

Instead, start with a clear, inclusive base offer, such as:

- 2–3 sessions per week
- Personalized coaching
- Community access

If you want to offer add-ons (e.g., nutrition consults, performance testing), make them simple and optional, not something that detracts from the core training experience.

Upsells should never interfere with your #1 priority: helping clients feel great and get results.



6. Retention > Acquisition

Marketing is important, but no amount of paid advertising will save a gym that constantly loses clients. The best growth strategy? Keep your clients happy, healthy, and progressing.

Focus on:

- Injury prevention: Nothing kills retention faster than a tweak or strain.
- Results tracking: Show clients measurable progress.
- Community and culture: Relationships drive retention. Make your gym the best part of their day.

Want less stress about generating new leads? Keep your members longer. This will save thousands on marketing and increase lifetime value.

7. Know the Difference: Practice vs. Business

Ask yourself: Are you building a practice or a business?

- A practice relies heavily on your personal skill, time, and attention. You can charge more, but you're limited by how many people you can coach directly.
- A business builds systems and trains staff so your service can scale beyond you.

If you plan to stay hands-on with every client, charge accordingly. If you want to grow a team and locations, that's the price for margin and repeatability.

There's no wrong answer, but you need clarity to avoid pricing yourself into a corner.

8. Don't Apologize for Charging What You're Worth

Stop undervaluing yourself! If you've invested years in education, internships, and real-world experience, charge for it. Clients don't value what they get for free, and they're more likely to commit when they're financially invested.

Start by building a roster of members who believe in your approach, and then raise rates as demand increases.

Be transparent, be firm, and be confident. If someone doesn't see the value in your price, they're not your ideal client.

Final Takeaway

There's no one-size-fits-all pricing model, but there is a right mindset: confidence, clarity, and value-first thinking. Price for the service you provide, not for what you think people want to pay. Be consistent, protect your margins, and never sacrifice long-term sustainability for short-term gain. In the end, it's not just what you charge, it's what your clients get in return that will set your gym apart.



CHAPTER 5: The Transition from Coach to Business Owner

Featuring insights from Dr. Mike Young, Founder of Athletic Lab

Dr. Mike Young is the owner of Athletic Lab Sports Performance Training Center in Cary, North Carolina. With over 16 years of gym ownership experience, he also holds a Ph.D. in Biomechanics and an extensive background in coaching, performance science, and education at the collegiate, professional, and national levels. Mike has lived at the intersection of elite coaching and business ownership—balancing the grind of entrepreneurship with the purpose-driven passion of helping athletes perform their best. In this chapter, Mike offers clear-eyed advice on what it really takes to go from coaching on the floor to running a business behind the scenes.

1. The Big Wake-Up Call: Coaching ≠ Business

A good coach does not make a good business owner, but it can if you know what you're doing. One of the biggest misconceptions new gym owners have is assuming that passion and skill in coaching naturally translate into running a successful business. They don't. In fact, they require entirely different skill sets. Many talented coaches fail when they try to run their own gym—not because they don't know how to train, but because they never learned how to run a business.

"Just because you love to train people doesn't mean you'll run a good business. I've seen excellent coaches fail miserably in the private sector."

If you're preparing to make the leap, understand that you're stepping into a new world, one where your time, energy, and resources will be pulled in directions you've never experienced as a coach.

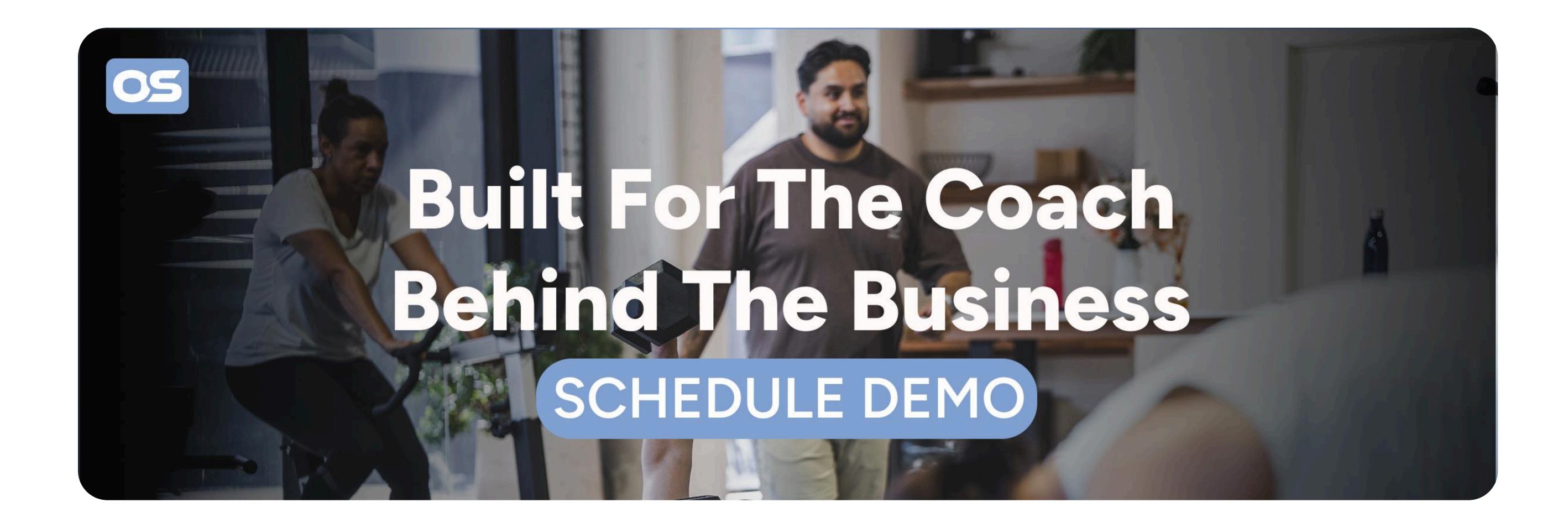
2. Master the Business Fundamentals First

Before you open your doors, learn the following (or partner with someone who knows this stuff):

- Basic accounting: Know your P&L, cash flow, and overhead.
- Operations: Who's responsible for utilities? What happens when the HVAC breaks?
- Legal and licensing: Get your business structure, licensure, and contracts set up from the start.
- Staffing: Understand employment law, how to hire and onboard properly, and what roles you'll eventually need.
- Systems and processes: Start designing repeatable processes right away—even if you're solo.

"Don't wait to scale before creating systems. Build your business so that it could run without you."

The earlier you can implement automations and systems for daily tasks (like billing, onboarding, and communication), the faster you'll be able to scale and reduce burnout.



3. Entrepreneurial Mindset: Grit Over Glamour

Business owners aren't built overnight, they are often inspired by people close to them. Deing able to see firsthand the grit it takes, not just vision, is what sustains a business long-term. We want you to succeed and be the best gym owner you can be, but you have to remember some realities:

- Long hours.
- Financial risk.
- Personal sacrifice.
- Taking ownership of everything—even the broken toilet.

Success isn't guaranteed, and the journey can be lonely. But if you're willing to endure the pressure, the rewards, both personal and professional, can be life-changing.

"You are the last stop. When something breaks, when payroll is due, when a decision has to be made, it's on you."

4. Know When to Charge, Say No, and Make Tough Calls

Valuing your time and setting boundaries can be one of the hardest lessons to learn. Most business owners burn out before they even recognize it. Don't let yourself burn out for the wrong reasons.

- You must charge what your services are worth.
- Not all clients are a good fit.
- Your time is your most valuable asset.

"You're not doing anyone any favors by undercharging or overdelivering. That leads to burnout and an unsustainable business."

This mindset shift, understanding that profit enables passion, is essential for longevity.

5. Passion Still Matters—It Just Looks Different

Despite the operational chaos, Mike never stopped coaching. He still works 60+ hours per week and spends over 25 of those coaching athletes across professional sports, general fitness, and youth training.

Why? Because it keeps him connected to the "why" behind the business.

"If you want to keep the sword sharp, you've got to use it."

But being able to coach and run a business long-term requires structure. Redundancies need to be built in; manuals, systems, trained staff, so the business can operate without him in the room every day.

The message is clear: don't lose your passion in the process of scaling. Make room for it intentionally.

6. Balancing Business and Family

Running a gym isn't just about serving athletes; it also means bringing your family on the journey. Whether you have one now or have aspirations for one in the future. Your family and your business are a package deal. That can be a powerful asset or become one of your biggest challenges.

There will be times when you'll have to choose between finishing payroll and being present at home. There will be sacrifices, but that also comes with clarity.

"If I get free time, I'm not spending it watching Netflix. I'm spending it with my daughter or going on vacation with my family."

Business and family may both demand your energy, but your time should reflect what matters most to you.

7. Don't Quit Too Early

"You might be right on the edge of success, but it's going to get uncomfortable before it gets good."

The early years are tough, emotionally, financially, and physically. But with perseverance, structure, and a deep belief in your purpose, success is possible.

It happens sooner than others, but for most, the turning point comes in year three. Systems come together, finances stabilize, and the vision starts to take off. Don't let yourself give up, right before that tipping point.

Key Takeaways

- Coaching and business ownership are not the same; prepare for a learning curve.
- Set systems early to avoid burnout later.
- Don't undervalue your time, energy, or expertise.
- Stay connected to your "why" by continuing to coach.
- Success takes time; don't quit just before the breakthrough.

CHAPTER 6: Not Sexy, But Important

Featuring insights from Trent Luecke, Former Gym Owner & Coach

1. Do Waivers Really Protect You?

Short answer: sort of.

A waiver won't make you lawsuit-proof, but it's a strong deterrent. More importantly the enforceability of waivers varies by state, so it's crucial to consult a local attorney. Either way you don't want to be caught with your pants down, so having a waiver in place is far better than not. It creates a legal layer of defense and can discourage someone from bringing a claim in the first place.

Think of your waiver as a "speed bump" for potential legal action.

2. What Should a Waiver Include?

To be effective, a liability waiver should do three things:

- Acknowledge risk: Clearly state that the client is participating in a fitness program that carries inherent physical risks.
- Release liability: Include an indemnity clause to release you from responsibility should injury or accident occur.
- Define consent: Outline that the participant understands and voluntarily assumes the risks involved.



Add-ons to consider:

- Photo release clause: Especially if you plan to use client images for marketing.
- Youth participation clause: If training minors, a parent or legal guardian must sign a separate waiver explicitly naming the child as the participant.
- Equipment damage: You may want to include language that holds clients accountable for intentionally damaging equipment.

Important: A waiver isn't a gym policy sign. If you want something to be legally binding in order to hold them liable for damage, iit needs to be in your waiver or contract, not just posted on a wall.

3. Insurance: What Kind Do You Actually Need?

There are many types of insurance available, but two are must-haves for gym owners:

1. General Liability Insurance

- · Covers medical costs and legal fees if someone gets injured at your facility.
- Often includes coverage for your physical space and equipment.
- Depending on your setup (e.g., CrossFit-style vs. traditional gym), the insurer may ask for an inventory and inspection.

2. Property or Equipment Insurance

Covers damages or losses to your equipment due to accidents, theft, or disasters.

Many providers offer combined packages that cover both. Don't skimp on this, it's surprisingly more affordable than you think, often only a few hundred to a couple thousand dollars annually, depending on your gym's size and offerings.

4. Why You Should Form an LLC (Even If You're Just Starting)

Don't be lazy, make sure you form a Limited Liability Company (LLC) to protect personal assets.

Here's why:

- If someone sues and you don't have an LLC, they can go after your personal property, your home, your car, your bank account.
- If you have an LLC, they can only pursue your business assets.

Even if you're running sessions out of your garage, protect yourself. Filing for an LLC is relatively inexpensive and offers significant legal protection.

Tip: Encourage your 1099 independent contractor coaches to form their own LLCs, too. Their personal insurance won't cover them inside your space unless they're protected individually.

5. Covering Your Contractors and Coaches

If you're allowing independent contractors to use your space:

- Require that they carry their own liability insurance.
- Encourage them to form an LLC to protect themselves.
- You may be able to temporarily cover them under your policy, but that could come with added cost and paperwork. Always check with your insurer.

Don't assume your policy covers everyone. Spell this out clearly in contracts and check with your insurance provider.

6. Read Your Lease and Then Have a Lawyer Read It Again

Don't become another cautionary tale when it comes to renegotiating a lease. You might be trying to save money, but landlords know how to stack the deck in their favor.

Always get a lawyer, or at least a real estate agent, to review your lease before signing. It's worth the short-term cost to prevent long-term pain.

Also consider: your lease might make you responsible for things like plumbing, HVAC, or exterior damage. Know what you're on the hook for before something goes wrong.

7. Outdoor Workouts & Events: Are You Covered?

Outdoor training can add value, but it can also open legal gray areas. If someone is hit by a car while running laps in the parking lot, liability can get murky, are they suing you, the landlord, or both?

Also, if you're hosting competitions or events:

- · All non-members should sign a waiver specific to your facility, even if the event itself has separate insurance.
 - Cover your bases the same way you would for regular members.

8. One More Thing: Yes, Your Music Might Be Illegal

If you're playing Spotify in your gym, technically... you're not allowed to.



Using music in a commercial setting requires a business music license. Services like Fit Radio or Pandora for Business are affordable and cover your legal bases. Fines for violations can be up to \$750 per song played.

It might feel silly, but protecting yourself here is no different than with waivers or insurance.

9. Final Advice: Get a Lawyer on Speed Dial

You don't know what you don't know. So drop the ego and find your people.

Whether it's:

- Reviewing your lease,
- Drafting your waiver,
- Navigating an injury claim,
- Or renegotiating terms with a contractor...

A lawyer can save you thousands of dollars, and hours of stress, before anything goes wrong. Don't wait until you're in trouble to find one.

Final Takeaway

These aren't the glamorous parts of owning a gym. But they're the foundation that keeps your business safe, operational, and stress-free.

Handle them now—before you have to. Waivers, insurance, LLCs, and legal support may not be flashy... but they'll protect the business you've worked so hard to build.

CHAPTER 7: Client Retention, Building Your Community, and Keeping Them

Featuring insights from Ken Andrukow, Entrepreneur and Gym Owner

Ken Andrukow brings nearly three decades of experience as both a coach and an entrepreneur. He has founded, scaled, and successfully exited multiple businesses across industries, with the majority of his career rooted in health, fitness, and wellness. Ken's unique perspective blends hands-on coaching experience with the mindset of a seasoned entrepreneur who understands that success in fitness is about more than sets and reps—it's about building community, creating value, and retaining clients for the long term.

1. Retention Is More Valuable Than Acquisition

It costs far less to keep than to chase. Too many gym owners obsess over marketing and sales while ignoring the goldmine that is retention. If you're constantly replacing clients, you'll stay stuck in survival mode.

Instead, focus on lifetime value. A member who stays three years is worth ten times more than one who stays three months. Retention is the foundation that allows for sustainable growth.

2. Retention Starts With Relationships

Clients don't just buy workouts, they can go anywhere for that, they buy a relationship. They want to feel seen, supported, and connected. Your clients need to feel they belong to something larger than themselves.



Practical ways to build those relationships include:

- Coach check-ins: Regular touchpoints, not just when a client shows up.
- Celebrating milestones: Birthdays, PRs, anniversaries in the gym.
- Small community touches: Remembering names, kids' activities, and client stories.

When clients feel like part of a tribe, leaving becomes harder than staying.

3. Create a Culture, Not Just a Service

Retention is cultural. Your gym's "feel" matters as much as the training. From the music to the way coaches greet members, you're constantly reinforcing whether this is a place clients want to come back to.

Ask yourself:

- Does my space feel welcoming?
- Do clients know each other, not just the coaches?
- Is the gym the best hour of their day?

The stronger your culture, the less price or location will matter.

4. Retention Is Built in the First 90 Days

The most critical window is when someone first joins. The majority of drop-offs happen in the first 90 days. That means you need an intentional onboarding process.

Key strategies:

- Guided introductions: Pair new members with coaches and fellow clients.
- Clear wins: Make sure they see results early (strength, weight loss, or simply feeling better).
- Ease of integration: Simplify scheduling, billing, and communication.

Think of it like cement drying: the first 90 days set whether the bond is strong or fragile.

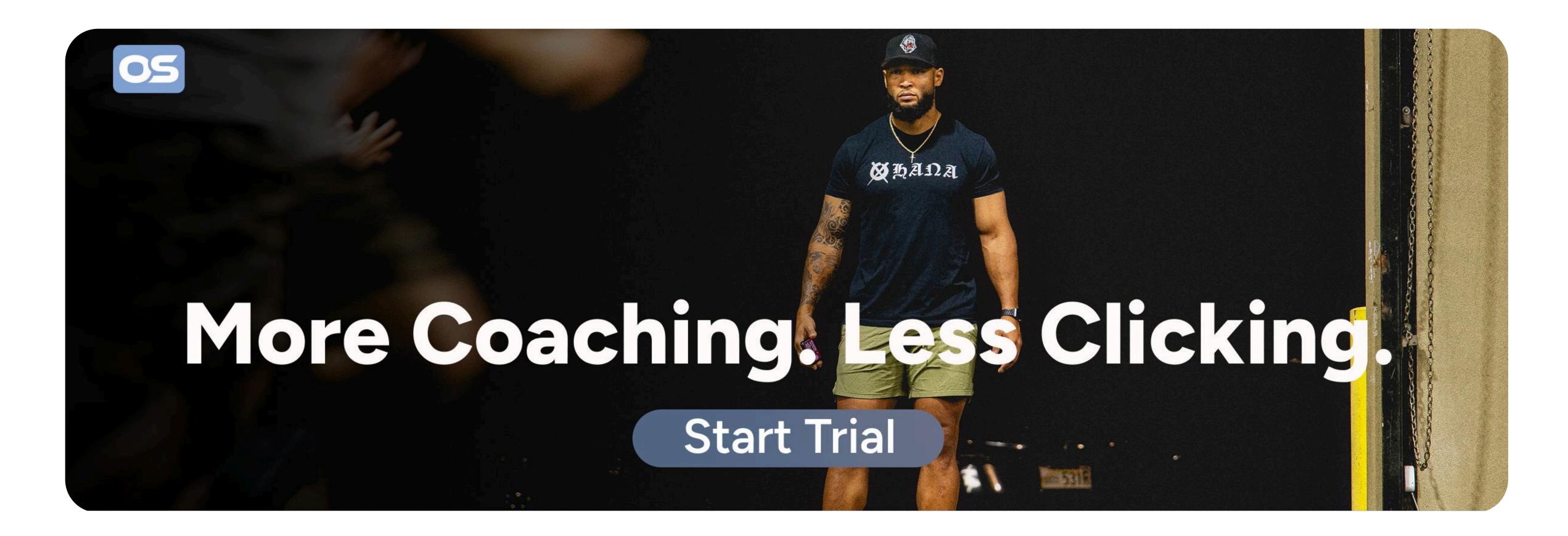
5. Build Systems for Engagement

Retention isn't just "being nice." It's a system. Successful gym owners track engagement the same way they track revenue.

Consider:

- A CRM or software that flags inactivity after 7–10 days.
- A script for reactivating disengaged clients.
- Monthly check-ins or progress reviews.
- Community events (in-house competitions, potlucks, charity workouts).

Systems ensure that every client is seen—not just the squeaky wheels.



6. Turn Clients Into Ambassadors

Your most loyal clients are also your best marketers. When members feel connected to your community, they want others to be a part of it. This creates a retention-growth flywheel: the stronger your community, the more referrals you get, and the more energy you can reinvest in your members. And around and around it goes.

But drop the gimmicks, you don't need it, encourage referrals through recognition and gratitude. A handwritten note or public thank-you often means more than a gift card.

7. Know Why Clients Leave and Act on It

Losing clients is inevitable, it happens to even the best gyms. The key is learning why. Conduct exit interviews or surveys. Was it costly? Life changes? Service dissatisfaction?

Patterns here can guide your improvements. If many leave due to scheduling, adjust your timetable. If it's financial, consider flexible membership options. Don't just watch the back door open, work to close it.

8. Retention Is Leadership

Ultimately, retention comes down to leadership. Are you showing up consistently, modeling the culture, and empowering your staff to do the same? As the owner, you set the tone: if you care deeply about the community, your coaches will too. If you treat members like numbers, staff will follow suit.

Retention is not about locking people in with contracts. It's about making them want to stay.

Final Takeaway

Acquiring new clients may feel exciting, but retention is what builds lasting businesses. Focus on relationships, culture, systems, and leadership. Make your gym a place people can't imagine leaving.

Because at the end of the day, it's not your equipment or programming that keeps clients coming back, it's how you make them feel.

CHAPTER 8: When to Reevaluate Goals and How to Grow Your Business

Featuring insights from Ben Pickard, Gym Owner and COO of BFU

Ben Pickard brings over 16 years of experience in the fitness industry, with more than a decade as a gym owner with his personal training studio in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He's also the COO of BFU (Business for Unicorns), a coaching and mentorship platform helping gym owners build a gym - and life - they love by increasing income, impact, and freedom in their businesses.

From building his own personal training studio to consulting for multimillion-dollar organizations, Ben blends real-world gym ownership with high-level business acumen. In this chapter, he shares how and when to reevaluate your goals—and what sustainable growth actually looks like in the gym business.

1. Redefining Success as a Gym Owner

Success isn't a destination, it's a way of operating. Most gym owners chase revenue targets, client counts, or fancy expansions, but lose sight of why they started. Those all matter, and real success is process-driven: are you building a life and business you can sustain, enjoy, and grow with long-term?

Building a successful fitness business is a long game. Define success as habits and systems you can repeat, not a moment you reach once and forget.

2. The Metrics That Actually Matter

There's no shortage of data you can track, but early-stage gym owners should focus on a few key indicators to drive growth and informed decision-making:

Track weekly:

- Number of new leads
- Number of trial sign-ups (low barrier offers or "LBOs")
- Number of new member signups

Track monthly:

- Total active clients
- Member churn (How many canceled?)
- Revenue, expenses, and profit
- Owner's Compensation = salary + perks + share of profit

These data points help answer four essential questions:

- 1. Are new people finding you?
- 2. Are they becoming members?
- 3. Are they staying?
- 4. Are you making money?

Only add more complex metrics once you have a system to act on them. Don't collect data just to collect it, use it to guide your actions.

3. Use Data to Drive Decisions

Data on its own doesn't create growth, it helps you make better decisions. For example:

- If you're not signing enough clients, are you generating enough leads?
- If revenue is good but profit is thin, where are your expenses leaking?

Let the numbers guide your questions, not your emotions. Gym owners often fall into the trap of "feeling" busy or assuming something is working without numbers to back it up. Growth requires being as objective as you can (as a human).

4. How Often Should You Reevaluate Your Goals?

Build a structured planning system:

- Set goals annually (e.g., in December for the coming year)
- Break them down quarterly into 2–5 actionable priorities
- Track progress weekly through focused tasks and habits

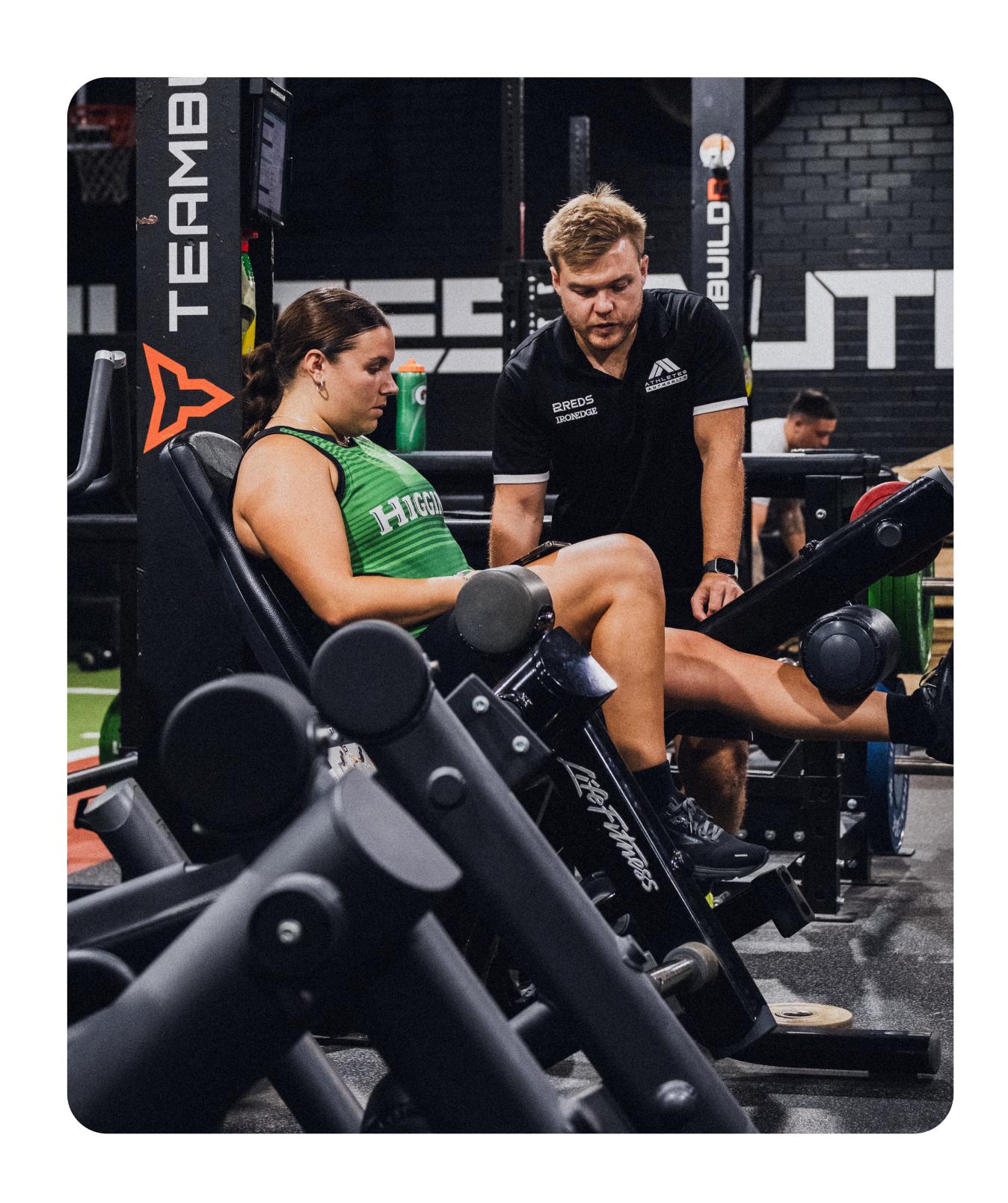
This framework ensures you're not constantly shifting your targets but also allows room to adapt when circumstances change. Stick to your goals unless something significant, like staffing changes, financial shocks, or personal shifts, warrants a pivot.

5. Growth Isn't Always Bigger. Sometimes It's Smarter.

Bigger isn't always better! Everyone dreams of scaling: bigger space, more members, second location. And Ben encourages growth, but cautions that true growth must align with your goals, not just your ego.

Before expanding your gym or opening another location, ask:

- Am I truly at capacity?
- Do I have systems to scale a bigger gym
 - from marketing to operations?
- Does this expansion align with my personal vision?



Scaling isn't always about adding square footage. It might mean:

- Improving operations to free your time
- Increasing average client value through premium services
- Delegating roles (like hiring a GM) to build more freedom

Sometimes, the best growth is inward—leveling up your leadership, systems, and impact without ever adding a second space.

Ironically, when you do that inward growth, it means you are more prepared - and successful - when that second location becomes a reality.

6. Scale Yourself Before Scaling Your Business

A major limiter to business growth is the owner themselves. As John Maxwell says, "The growth of an organization is limited by the growth of its leader." Many gym owners plateau not because their community lacks demand, but because they haven't developed:

- Leadership skills
- Management systems
- The ability to delegate or let go

If you want to grow your business, invest in your personal development. Coaching, mentorship, and learning to lead are game changers. You can't just be a better coach, you have to become a better owner.

7. Don't Wait Until You're Burned Out to Build a Better Future

Far too many gym owners grind for years without a long-term plan. Eventually, they hit a wall, emotionally, financially, or both.

Ask yourself:

- What does your ideal day look like in 5 or 10 years?
- Are you building toward that—or just surviving month to month?
- Would someone want to buy your business one day? Is it sellable?

If the answer is unclear, it's time to revisit your goals. And know that even if right now you feel like you could coach 20 hours a week on the floor forever, you might change your mind and end up feeling stuck in your own business. Plan with the end in mind -even if that "end" is decades away.

8. Get Help: Mentors, Coaches, or Strategic Partners

There's no prize for figuring this out alone. Most gym owners come from training backgrounds, not business. That's why guidance matters.

Mentors and coaches provide:

Clarity when you're too close to the problem

A path forward based on experience

Preemptive insight into future challenges

Personal accountability and encouragement

Growth is never just a business problem, it's an identity shift. Moving from trainer to business owner is a journey, not a job title. Having someone help you walk that path makes all the difference.

To learn more about Business for Unicorns, click HERE to book a free, no-strings-attached Brainstorm Call.

Final Takeaway

Reevaluating your goals and growing your business is not about chasing the next shiny thing, it's about staying aligned with your values, improving your systems, and continuing to evolve personally and professionally.

Whether you're planning your first year or your next decade, stay intentional. Keep your data simple. Build for sustainability. And never be afraid to ask for help.

Because the real goal isn't just a successful gym, it's a successful life.

