BOOK 2 OF 3

THE GYM OWNER'S OPERATING PLAYBOOK

Know what you keep, build the people, protect the standard.

ANTHONY AMEN.

Accountability is leverage.

READ THIS PART, OR SKIP THE BOOK

I ran nine years on top line only. I did not truly start tracking until about year eight. When I finally opened the books, payroll was close to eighty percent of revenue and I was losing money in the same month I hit numbers I had never hit before. Record revenue. Bleeding cash. At the same time.

Then it got worse and it got clearer. Because I had finally started tracking, I caught a sales manager stealing around one hundred thousand dollars. My gut missed it for years. A spreadsheet caught it in weeks.

That is the whole argument for this book. Selling is the fun part and it is Book 1. This is the part that decides whether any of that selling reaches your bank account, and whether the business survives the person you trust most being wrong about you.

Two gyms. Over two and a half million a year. Private one on one, no contracts. I built this the expensive way so you do not have to.

HOW TO USE THIS

Every section is built the same way. The belief most owners run on. The receipt from my own books that proves it wrong. The point where the new belief breaks, because everything breaks somewhere. Then the moves, and something you can copy tonight.

Read Part 1 first even if you think you already track your numbers. Most owners track revenue and call it tracking. That is the exact mistake that cost me a hundred grand.

PART 1

KNOW WHAT YOU KEEP

1.1 THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS IS WHAT YOU KEEP, NOT WHAT YOU MAKE

The belief. Top line is the scoreboard. Hit a bigger revenue number and you are winning.

The receipt. I was scared to open the books, because somewhere underneath I already knew it was bad. That fear is the signal. You avoid the numbers hardest at the exact moment they are about to bury you. When I finally looked, the business was setting records and losing money at the same time, and the only reason I could see both facts at once was that they were sitting on the same page.

Top line is a vanity metric that can bankrupt you while it is going up.

The break point. Owners who get this then overcorrect and start tracking forty metrics. That is the same avoidance in a nicer outfit. A dashboard you never read is not tracking, it is decoration. You do not need forty lines. You need six, and you need to look at them every seven days.

The moves.

1. Pick one day a week. Same day, every week, not negotiable. Mine is a set morning before anyone else is in the building.
2. Fill in six lines only. The scoreboard below. Do it by hand the first month so the numbers go through your head instead of past it.
3. Compare to last week. Two questions only. What moved, and did I cause it.
4. Any line in the red two weeks running becomes the only thing you work on until it is green. Not one of your priorities. The priority.

Steal this. The weekly operator scoreboard.

LINE	WHAT IT IS	THE RULE
Cash in the bank	The actual balance today	Trend, not vanity. Down two weeks straight is an emergency.
Revenue this week	Collected, not billed	Collected is real. Billed is a hope.
Payroll as percent of revenue	Total labor divided by revenue	Your single most important number. See 1.2.
New members this week	Signed and paid	Future revenue showing up early.
Cancels this week	Left or stopped paying	If this beats new members, nothing else on the page matters.
Owner pay taken	What actually reached your pocket	If this is zero, you own a job that pays you nothing.

Six lines. Seven days. If you look at nothing else in this book, look at these.

Fear of the books is the most expensive habit in this industry. It is also the easiest one to break, because the whole fix is a recurring appointment with yourself that you refuse to cancel.

1.2 PAYROLL IS THE WHOLE GAME

The belief. Pay good people well and the revenue will cover it.

The receipt. At eighty percent of revenue going to payroll I was losing money at record sales. Better trainers do cost more. That part is true and I will defend it to the end, and Part 2 of this book is me defending it. But a payroll percentage nobody watches is how a growing gym quietly goes broke while the owner tells everyone business is great.

The money to pay great people does not appear from nowhere. It comes from your price. It does not come from your margin, because your margin is what feeds your family.

The break point. The wrong fix is cutting good people to hit a number. You do not cut your way to a healthy gym, you price your way there. A high payroll percent is a signal to raise price and raise the standard so the price is deserved. It is almost never a signal to gut the floor. Cut a great trainer to fix a pricing problem and you now have a pricing problem and a product problem.

The moves.

1. Calculate it this week. All labor cost, meaning wages, taxes and benefits, divided by collected revenue. Not billed. Collected.
2. Write down your ceiling and put a date on it. On a high touch one on one model, once labor crosses the line where there is nothing left for the business and nothing left for you, you are subsidizing everyone except yourself. Mine hit eighty and that was a five alarm fire.
3. If you are over the ceiling, the order of operations is fixed. Raise price first. Then raise the standard so the price is deserved. Then and only then address the people who are not delivering.
4. Recheck it every single week on the scoreboard. It is the line that hides the bleeding, because it moves slowly and it never announces itself.

Steal this. The payroll draw check.

> Ask one question every week. If every person on payroll delivered their best possible work this week, would the price they generate cover their pay and still leave the business healthy?

If the honest answer is no, you do not have a staffing problem. You have a pricing problem wearing a staffing costume. Go read Book 1 and fix the price.

1.3 THE PERSON YOU TRUST MOST IS THE ONE WHO CAN ROB YOU

The belief. Controls are for big companies. My people are family, and putting checks on them says I do not trust them.

The receipt. A sales manager took around one hundred thousand dollars from me. I liked him. He was good. My instincts told me nothing for years, and my instincts are not bad. The spreadsheet told me in weeks. That is not a story about a bad person, it is a story about a system that made stealing possible and invisible, and I built that system by not building one.

Then it turned into a cash emergency. I had ten days to raise sixty thousand dollars or miss payroll, and if you miss payroll once you can kiss your staff goodbye, and losing your staff loses the gym. I raised it from the clients I already had. That play is in Book 1 because it is a selling motion. What belongs here is why I needed it at all.

The break point. Controls do not stop a determined thief. That is not what they are for. They shorten the window. The difference between catching this in three weeks and catching it in three years is the entire difference between an annoying quarter and losing the business. If you install controls expecting them to make theft impossible, you will get sloppy the first time they feel like paperwork.

And the second break point, the one nobody says out loud. Controls that only apply to staff are not controls, they are surveillance. The owner has to be inside the system too.

The moves.

1. Separate the person who sells from the person who touches the money. Whoever closes should never be the one recording what was collected. If your team is too small for that, the second pair of eyes is yours, every week, without exception.
2. Reconcile two independent sources every week. What the payment processor says came in, against what the CRM says was sold. They should match. When they do not, that gap is either an error or a person, and you want to know which one inside seven days.
3. You hold the bank login. Not shared, not stored in a team password vault, not delegated because you were busy. This is the one thing you never hand to anybody.
4. Every discount, comp, free month and account credit gets recorded with a name attached. Theft in this industry rarely looks like cash out of the drawer. It looks like generosity with your money.
5. Nobody, including you, is exempt from the weekly reconciliation. Make it boring. Boring is what makes it survive a busy month.

Steal this. The two source check.

> This week, collected in the processor: ______ This week, sold in the CRM: ______ Difference: ______ If the difference is not zero, name the reason before you close the laptop.

Five minutes. Once a week. That is the whole thing. I paid a hundred thousand dollars to learn a habit that takes five minutes.

PART 2

BUILD THE PEOPLE

2.1 HIRE ABOVE YOUR FLOOR, AND STOP SELLING THE JOB

The belief. Hiring is convincing good people to come work for you.

The receipt. My most expensive mistakes were never rent and never marketing. They were people. I overhired for roles I did not need and I kept the wrong people far too long, and it cost me real money on both ends. Every bad hire also cost me something that does not show up on a P and L, which is the standard of everybody standing next to them.

The break point. When you sell a candidate on the job, you get people who need to be sold. People who need to be sold quit the first time it gets hard, because nothing about the job was ever their idea. Flip the direction. Make them sell you.

But flipping it has a cost, and you should know it going in. You will lose candidates. Good ones, sometimes. That is the price of a floor, and it is cheaper than the alternative every single time.

The moves.

1. One rule above all the others. Never hire someone worse than your current worst employee. Follow that every time and your floor only ever goes up. Break it once and the whole standard resets to the new low, because everyone calibrates to what you tolerate.
2. Do not interview anyone who shows up late. If they cannot bring their best behavior to the one meeting that decides whether they get the job, you already know what the Tuesday after month three looks like.
3. Open the interview by telling them this is the hardest job they will ever work, and that their job in this room is to convince you they want it. Then stop talking and let them.
4. Hire for the standard, not the resume. The question underneath every question is whether this person takes accountability for themselves, because nobody holds a client accountable at a level higher than they hold themselves.

Steal this. The hiring scorecard. Score one to five on each line. Anyone who does not clear your current worst employee's score does not get hired. No exceptions, no "but we are short staffed."

WHAT YOU ARE SCORING	1	5
On time and prepared	Late, or winging it	Early, researched us
Wants it	You had to convince them	They convinced you
Accountability for themselves	Blames circumstances	Owns their own gaps
Raises the floor	Weaker than your worst	Stronger than your best
Coachable	Defensive about feedback	Leans into the hard note

The magic is the fourth row, and it only works if you are honest about who your weakest person actually is. Write that person's name at the top of the page before the candidate walks in. If the person in front of you is not clearly stronger, hiring them lowers the whole gym.

2.2 PAY FOR PERFORMANCE, NOT FOR TENURE

The belief. Loyalty should be rewarded. Time served earns the raise.

The receipt. My newest trainers often out earn people who have been here for years, because the system pays what someone produces and not how long they have been in the building. That gap is not a problem to be smoothed over. It is the clearest picture I have of who my best and worst people actually are, and it updates itself every month without me having to run a review cycle.

I also pay the roles that touch the client at the top of my market, full time, with health, dental and a 401k match. Not because it is nice. Because a great trainer with no reason to leave does not leave, and replacing one costs more than paying one.

The break point. Pay for performance goes wrong the second the metric is only revenue. Pay purely on sales and you will build a floor full of people who sell hard and coach poorly, and they will quietly torch retention while their commission looks incredible. Whatever you reward, price the client experience into it, or you are paying people to sell your gym out from under you.

The moves.

1. Decide what a person is paid on, write it down, and let them see it. Pay that nobody can explain feels arbitrary, and arbitrary pay is why good people start taking calls from other gyms.
2. Fund the top of market pay from your price, not from your margin. If you cannot afford to pay well, you are underpricing. That is Book 1 again, and it is the same answer to almost every operations problem.
3. Make the benefits real. Health, dental, a match. This is the part almost nobody in this industry does, which is exactly why it works.
4. Never let tenure alone move a number. Time in the building is not a contribution.

Steal this. The replacement math. Before you argue that a great person costs too much, price the alternative honestly.

> What I pay this person per year: ______ Cost to replace them: recruiting time, interviews, onboarding weeks at partial output, plus the clients who wobble during the handoff: ______ Now the real question. Is this person expensive, or is the door expensive?

Nine times out of ten, the door is expensive.

2.3 FIRE IN FOUR MINUTES

The belief. Firing someone should be soft, slow and heavily cushioned. That is what being a decent person looks like.

The receipt. Being slow to fire is the most expensive weakness I will admit to. I once carried a six figure director about two months longer than the work justified, purely because I liked her. The people you like are always the ones you let cost you the most, because liking someone feels like a reason and it is not one.

When I finally learned to do it clean, firing takes me four minutes or less. No speech, no build up, no long walk to the point.

The break point. Fast does not mean cruel, and this is where people get it wrong in both directions. The cruelty is never the four minutes. The cruelty is the six weeks before it, where they can feel it coming, where you avoid eye contact and shorten conversations and let them keep making plans. A clean, quick, honest ending is the most respectful version of a thing that is going to hurt no matter how you do it.

The other side of the break point. Four minutes only works if the decision was already earned. Firing fast is not firing without cause. Everything before this section, the standard, the scorecard, the clarity on what someone is paid for, is what makes four minutes fair instead of reckless.

The moves.

1. Decide fully before you walk in. The meeting exists to inform, not to debate. If you are still deciding in the room, you are going to negotiate yourself back into another two months.
2. Sit down. Four minutes or less.
3. Say the line. Do not soften it into something they have to interpret. Ambiguity is not mercy.
4. Handle logistics in writing, not in the room. Final pay, keys, access, systems. Same day, in an email.
5. Do not justify, do not relitigate, do not offer false hope. The word "unfortunately" is doing all the softening this needs.

Steal this. The four minute script. Say it close to word for word.

> I need to keep this short and respectful. Unfortunately, starting today, you no longer work here and we have to let you go. This decision is final. You will get everything about your final pay and next steps in writing today. I appreciate the work you put in and I wish you the best.

Then stop talking. The silence after that is uncomfortable and you have to let it sit. Every word you add after "I wish you the best" is a word you are saying to make yourself feel better, and it costs them their exit with dignity.

Have the access checklist done before the meeting, not after. Keys, alarm code, gym management system, payment processor, social accounts, shared drives, the phone number clients text. If a former employee still has a login on Friday, you did not finish firing them on Tuesday.

PART 3

PROTECT THE STANDARD

3.1 PROTECT THE STAFF OVER THE CLIENTS

The belief. The client is always right, and the client always comes first.

The receipt. The most common mistake I see in this industry is owners valuing clients more than the people who deliver the actual product. It should be the other way around. I have fired clients over how they treated my staff, and I have never once regretted it. The trainer who watched me do it stayed for years.

Here is what that trade actually is. A bad client who abuses a great trainer costs you the membership if you fire them, and costs you the trainer if you do not. One of those is replaceable inside a month.

The break point. Protecting staff over clients does not mean tolerating weak staff, and if you use this as cover for defending someone who is not holding the standard, you have inverted the whole thing. The protection is earned. Someone earns it by holding the line in Part 2. Then you defend them, publicly, including against a paying client.

The moves.

1. Make it explicit to the team, out loud, that you will back them. Most of them have never worked somewhere that did. Saying it before you have to prove it is what makes them believe you when you do.
2. When a client mistreats a staff member, get the staff member's account first, not the client's. Order matters, and everyone watches who you call first.
3. Fire the client when it is warranted. Do it cleanly, the same way you fire staff. Short, respectful, final.
4. Never negotiate the standard downward for a large account. The bigger the client, the more the rest of the floor is watching what you allow.

3.2 OWN THE RELATIONSHIP AT THE BUSINESS LEVEL

The belief. Great trainers build great relationships with their clients, and that is the product.

The receipt. It is the product, and it is also the exposure. I built this business so that no single trainer can walk out the door with everyone's phone number, because that is exactly how a premium gym gets gutted overnight and most owners never see it coming until the group chat has already moved.

Every client is encouraged to work with multiple trainers, and it is tracked. Nobody belongs to one person. The relationship is with us.

The break point. Rotate too aggressively and you break the thing that makes one on one worth the price. A client who sees a different face every session is in a group model with extra steps. The answer is not maximum rotation, it is a primary coach plus real, regular exposure to at least one or two others, so that a departure is a disruption instead of an extinction event.

The moves.

1. Give every client a primary, then deliberately book them with a second and third coach on a regular cadence. Make it the schedule's default, not a favor you ask for.
2. Track coverage. You should be able to open your system and see, for any client, who else has worked with them and how recently.
3. Own the communication channel. Client texts and messages run through the business, not a trainer's personal phone. This is the single biggest hole in most gyms and it is free to close.
4. Pair the moat with the pay. A moat plus low pay is a cage. A moat plus top of market pay and real benefits is a business nobody wants to leave anyway.

Steal this. The moat test.

> If my best trainer quit tomorrow and actively tried to take clients with them, how many could they actually take?

Answer it honestly, with a number. If the number is large, you do not own your business. Your best employee does, and they can call it in any week they choose. Rotate, track and own the channel until that number is close to zero.

3.3 NO CONTRACTS

The belief. Contracts protect your revenue.

The receipt. I have no contracts. Every gym locks people in and it always felt slimy to me. It is the business's job to serve the client, not the client's job to serve the business. A contract is the business admitting in writing that it cannot keep you on merit.

With no contract, anyone can walk on any day. That is terrifying, and it is the only thing that has ever forced me to level up the product every single week. People do not walk away from relationships they value, and a big box floor is structurally incapable of building that relationship. That is why one on one holds retention that a group model cannot touch.

The break point. No contracts only works if the product is genuinely better week over week. Take the cage away from a mediocre gym and it does not become a great gym, it becomes an empty one. The contract was load bearing there. If you are going to remove it, remove it and simultaneously commit to the standard in the next section, or you are just accelerating the thing you were afraid of.

Also true. Cash flow gets less predictable. You trade certainty for a forcing function. I would make that trade every time, but make it with your eyes open and with cash in the bank, not in your worst month.

The moves.

1. Kill the contract. Let anyone leave any day, with a cancellation that takes one conversation and no fine print.
2. Replace the contract with the relationship. Names, lives, milestones, actual coaching. That is the retention engine and it cannot be automated.
3. Track why people stay the same way you track money. If you cannot say out loud why a specific client stays, you are one bad month from finding out that you were wrong.
4. Exit clean. The person who leaves well and is treated well is the person who comes back, and who sends people while they are gone.

3.4 THE THREE SECOND WALK IN TEST

The belief. Small stuff can wait. What matters is the training.

The receipt. You have about three seconds to make someone decide what you are worth. I walk into my own gym and fix anything I can see that is not premium, down to a dust spot on a mirror. A single visible flaw devalues the entire price, because a prospect cannot evaluate your programming in three seconds but they can absolutely evaluate a smudge.

Your space is exactly the standard you hold it to. Not one inch higher.

The break point. This becomes a problem the moment you make it somebody else's job to notice. The value is not the cleaning, it is the owner walking the floor with fresh eyes. Delegate the fixing. Never delegate the seeing.

The moves.

1. Walk in through the front door, the way a stranger does, at least once a day. Not the back door, not the office entrance. The door your money comes through.
2. Fix what you can fix in that moment. Do not write it on a list. The list is where standards go to die.
3. What you cannot fix in the moment goes to one named person with one date. Not "the team," and not "soon."
4. Once a month, walk it with someone who has never been in your gym and shut up while they talk. You have gone blind to your own building and there is no way around that except borrowed eyes.

PART 4

THE OPERATOR'S WEEK

Everything in this book collapses into a rhythm. Not a system with fourteen tabs. A rhythm you can hold on your worst week, because the weeks you actually need it are the bad ones.

WHEN	WHAT	COMES FROM
Every day	Walk in the front door. Fix what you see.	3.4
One set morning	Six line scoreboard. What moved, did I cause it.	1.1
Same morning	Payroll percent. Two source check on the money.	1.2, 1.3
Same morning	Pick the one red line. It owns your week.	1.1
Ongoing	Hiring pipeline stays open even when fully staffed.	2.1
Ongoing	Anyone below the floor gets clarity or gets four minutes.	2.3
Monthly	Moat test. Say the number out loud.	3.2
Monthly	Walk the building with someone who has never seen it.	3.4

One morning a week and one walk a day. That is the operating system. If you cannot protect that much time, you are not running the business, the business is running you, and no amount of new tactics will fix a calendar problem.

WHAT IS NOT IN THIS BOOK, AND WHY

I would rather hand you a shorter book that is true than a longer one that is padded. Here is what I deliberately left out, and what would have to be real before I put it in front of you.

Marketing and lead generation. That is Book 3. Everything here assumes people are already walking in. If they are not, operations is not your problem yet.

Selling, pricing and the close. Book 1. When a section here says the fix is your price, that is where the fix lives.

A full org chart with role by role cost percentages. I have one. Publishing percentages that are true for a two site private one on one model in my market, and presenting them as though they are true for your model in yours, would be the exact kind of confident nonsense I paid seventy thousand dollars a year to sit through.

Hiring funnel numbers. Applications to interviews to hires. I know mine. I am not going to give you a benchmark until I can give you the real figures and the context that makes them mean anything.

Trainer onboarding, day one to day thirty. This is the biggest honest gap in the book. There is a real version of it in my business and it deserves its own document rather than a paragraph here.

The performance scorecard and the exact pay mechanism. Section 2.2 gives you the principle and the trap. The specific structure I run, what percentage moves and on what trigger, is close enough to my books that I want to publish it properly or not at all.

The software stack. Naming tools ages badly and turns into affiliate flavored advice. What matters is that you can pull two independent sources of truth weekly and see who has trained with whom. Any system that does those two things is the right system.

Churn numbers and the save conversation. I have a save script. I want to publish it with the retention numbers behind it, because a script without a conversion rate is just a nice paragraph.

The full money control stack after the embezzlement. Section 1.3 gives you the five moves that would have caught it, and those five are enough to shorten your window from years to weeks. The complete build is a longer piece of work.

If you want the versions of these with the real numbers attached, stay on the list. That is where they go first.

THE ONE LINE UNDER ALL OF IT

Accountability is leverage. Not a slogan. The operating system.

You cannot blame the market, the economy, the landlord or the client, because the only thing you can actually change is your own behavior. The books, the price, the hire, the ending, the standard on the floor. All of it is yours. The market did not do this to you and it is not coming to fix it either.

Know what you keep. Build people stronger than your floor and then protect them. Keep clients with a relationship instead of a cage. And look at six lines every seven days, especially in the weeks you do not want to.

Now walk in your own front door and fix the first thing you see.

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