

2024 CWA Summit Session Spotlight: Allies, Not Adversaries (Routesetting)

April 29, 2024

in [CWA Blog](#), [CWA Summit](#)



Since the inception of climbing gyms, there has often been some tension between management and routesetting teams. Both sides want an inspiring facility filled with compelling routes that cater to their clientele. But both sides also have their own priorities, and sometimes those priorities seem in conflict with each other.

Foxman McCarthy-James and Justin Wright have dealt with those conflicts first-hand, and together they are leading the discussion-based session *Allies, Not Adversaries - Navigating the Routesetting vs. Management Quagmire*. They agree that very often good communication, empathy, and an open mind are keys to finding solutions, and their session is about creating some space for these practices.

Article At A Glance

- **Session Title:** *Allies, Not Adversaries - Navigating the Routesetting vs. Management Quagmire*
- **Speaker:** Foxman McCarthy-James and Justin Wright, Vortex Routsetting
- **Who Should Attend:** Managers, AND routesetters!
- **What You Will Learn:** Ideas on how to bridge the gap between managers and setters through communication and a focus on mutual goal
- **Where and When:** At the [2024 CWA Summit](#), May 15-17 in Portland, Oregon.

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CWA

Tell us a little about your background, and what makes you uniquely qualified to lead this discussion?

Justin Wright

I have been setting in gyms across the country for almost 20 years now. I've worked with a lot of owners, and even more managers. In my roles as Director of Routesetting, I am often bridging the gap between routesetters and management/owners. The "\$h*t filter," if you will. I see frustrations coming from both directions and am regularly interpreting/translating challenges and communications.

Foxman McCarthy-James

Similarly to Justin, I'm in a position where I am often interfacing between the ownership and management team and the routesetting team. At any given point, my routesetting team thinks I always side with the ownership team, and the ownership team thinks that I always side with the routesetters. The truth is that we're all on the same side, it's just a matter of figuring out the communication to get us all aligned. I approach most situations with the belief that if we understand each other, we'll find that we have more in common than we might initially assume, it just might be a matter of working through an uncomfortable conversation in order to get to that common ground.

CWA

Your session takes on a challenge facing many climbing gyms. Why does this challenge exist? What are the forces that create the "quagmire"?

Justin Wright

To put it simply: artists vs. business people. Those two groups of people often speak a completely different language. Now, I would hate to spoil the ending—you'll just have to come to the talk. Are we going to solve it in a short Summit presentation? No. But we can at least start some conversations and help move toward a common goal.

CWA

Audience participation is a big part of your session. What do you hope to see happen through that process? Any words of advice for people who are considering attending?

Foxman

McCarthy-James

The audience participation is honestly my favorite part of this presentation. Justin and I have our experience and perspective, but the entire goal of the presentation is to hear and learn from the variety of experiences and perspectives in the room. It's a unique opportunity to talk about this oft-fraught work dynamic *outside* the scope of that work dynamic, with a room full of people who are equally invested in making that work dynamic the most productive it can be. My advice to the audience would be the same advice I'd give to any owners or routesetters: We're all here because we love rock climbing, and we'll all grow if we can work together.

Justin Wright

This session is probably 70% audience participation. In addition to the topics we broach in the talk, we will facilitate conversations from the audience relating to understanding different perspectives, common miscommunications and misunderstandings, how to approach solutions, and managing expectations.

CWA

What do you hope the audience will take away from your session? Who should attend?

Foxman McCarthy-James

We hope the audience walks away with new perspectives and communication tools and strategies for navigating some of the quagmires that often plague routesetting and ownership teams. We encourage everyone to attend; even if you have a great relationship between your ownership team and your routesetting department, you might have some suggestions that will help out someone else in attendance. We're all here to learn and contribute to the collective solution!

Justin Wright

This talk is for owners, managers and routesetters. It will actually be the second time Fox and I have done this presentation.

CWA

You previously presented at the 2022 CWA Summit about routesetting data you've collected. Could you give us a quick update on that project?

Foxman McCarthy- James

Whereas we previously collected most of our data through in-person interviews, we've now expanded to a digital format, so that anyone can access the survey through our website or through a QR code. We've embedded that QR code on stickers that we always have on hand, so that routesetters can stick the codes on their water bottles or kits to share with colleagues as they travel.

Justin Wright

We want this information to be more readily available so routesetters, owners and managers can retain staff and maintain competitive routesetting programming. So, we are hoping to publish another report and/or present again next year.

CWA

For readers who have not attended a Summit before, what would you tell them are your favorite aspects? The reasons you keep coming back?

Justin Wright

The Summit is one of the few opportunities each year where so many industry professionals are all under one roof. It's a great place to network, learn, and talk through challenges—all with people who might have similar experiences but are working on the other side of the country. The last CWA Summit's routesetting roundtable had well over 300 years of routesetting experience in the room.

From a routesetter perspective, I love going to the expo hall and seeing (and touching) all the new shapes. It's like being a kid in a candy store. There have been so many shapes I might have passed on because they didn't look good on a website, but then I'll get the chance to see and feel them in the expo hall and I realize I need them!

Foxman McCarthy-James

My favorite part of the Summit is two-fold: The industry is growing and professionalizing at an incredible pace, and the Summit highlights the latest developments across all aspects of the indoor climbing world. It's also a place where I can see friends from all over the country and learn about their latest projects and adventures. I can't wait to see what Portland's Summit has to offer.

Book Your Tickets Today

This session is about collaboration and so is the CWA Summit. With only two weeks to go, now is the time to get your tickets.

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April 26, 2024