

The 10-Step Path Into Adaptive Programming Most Fitness Operators Are Missing

Hal Hargrave Jr. has spent 18 years building adaptive fitness infrastructure. His framework defers capital commitment until operational evidence justifies it.

"You don't need to bite off more than you can chew. You don't need the full buildout. You need to start."

— HAL HARGRAVE JR., FOUNDER & CEO, THE PERFECT STEP

I

PHASE ONE

Build Internal Capacity LOWEST COST

1

Start with education, not equipment

Train leadership and key staff before a single dollar is spent on capital improvements. Education reduces fear and liability concerns, and surfaces operational questions equipment alone cannot answer.

2

Identify an internal adaptive champion

Designate one vocal leader inside the club to advocate for inclusion. The champion carries the project through the quiet stretches when other priorities compete for attention.

3

Ensure basic accessibility features

ADA compliance is the floor, not the ceiling. Look beyond entryways and restrooms to the gym floor itself: is there enough space between equipment for a safe transfer? Asking the disability community to assist with an audit is a strong starting point.

II

PHASE TWO

Test the Market MODEST INVESTMENT

4

Introduce one adaptive-friendly zone

Not a full adaptive gym. One zone, with one reasonable piece of adaptive equipment that has a documented track record. The point is to test whether the programming gets used before scaling the capital commitment.

5

Offer a respectful membership structure

Design a tier that reflects the reality that adaptive members may not use every amenity, while still extending a genuine invitation to be part of the club. Honest pricing builds trust faster than a full-price membership wrapped in inclusive marketing language.

6

Host an open house for the adaptive community

Issue a public invitation. Ask the community what they need, not what the club assumes they need. This is where most operators discover the gap between their assumptions and the actual needs in their market.

III

PHASE THREE

Operationalize OPERATIONAL LIFT

7

Build referral and community partnerships

Reach out to local rehabilitation hospitals, physicians, and therapists. Make them aware that the facility has trained professionals who can continue therapeutic work after insurance runs out. Referral pipelines do not build themselves.

8

Pilot one integrative adaptive program

A single class, an adaptive strength training group, or a neurologically-focused training session for a small group. The pilot produces real-world data on demand and delivery, and builds internal confidence before broader rollout.

IV

PHASE FOUR

Scale CAPITAL COMMITMENT

9

Invest in staff continuing education and certifications

Expand the training footprint beyond the internal champion. This is where one person's passion becomes an organizational capability — and where staff retention tends to improve, because team members see investment in their professional development.

10

Consider becoming a fully licensed facility

Only at this step does the question of formal licensure enter — including the possibility of franchising the model, ongoing referrals from a parent network, and full integration of adaptive programming into the club's identity. By now, the decision is grounded in operational evidence, not aspiration.

THE RIGHT SEQUENCE

What makes the framework notable is not its components — it's the order.

The fitness industry has a long history of treating specialized populations as either a full strategic pivot or a non-starter. This roadmap challenges that binary by front-loading the cheapest interventions and deferring capital commitment until operational evidence justifies it. *"Something is better than nothing,"* Hargrave said. *"If operators switch on that perspective, they'll action the first item and get the ball rolling."*

Adapted from "The 10-Step Path Into Adaptive Programming Most Fitness Operators Are Missing" — a reported guest feature by Joy Keller for ActivSport Advisory.

Hal Hargrave Jr. is the Founder & CEO of The Perfect Step and the Be Perfect Foundation, based in Southern California.