

1. Interviewer: Why did you open Boathouse? How did it come about?

Andy: Well, I worked for many companies, organisations, and councils throughout my career – and don't get me wrong, they were all awesome and delivered good sessions. But while running the climbing walls for a council, I noticed that there was a need for a better, more developing climbing wall in the area, one that supported the community and grassroots, so to speak.

Unfortunately, the Council didn't have the means to develop it, so I went it alone. Emma-Jane (my wife) and I had spent a lot of time and money on other potential buildings, but they fell through for various reasons.

Then I read an article about Conwy Council and Mostyn Estates wanting to attract more people to Llandudno in all weather and all year round. I sat down with them, and after some talks, we secured the old lifeboat station. So, all hands on deck, and Boathouse Climbing Centre was born!! Made that sound easy, but it wasn't.

2. Interviewer: So, have you always been into climbing?

Andy: I suppose I climbed all my life – trees, fences. I was brought up in Bradford, so buildings and playgrounds were my playgrounds. Not always running from someone! *Laughs* But rock climbing didn't start until I took myself back to college in my 20s to study Outdoor Ed. And now, I've climbed all over the UK and Africa – ashamed to say not much in Europe.

3. Interviewer: Why did you go back to college to study Outdoor Ed?

Andy: Well, I didn't do that well at school due to being Dyslexic, which back then was new, and no school wanted to admit Dyslexic was real. So I worked for my old man as a Structural Glazer (big Glass buildings), and one day was moaning about the boss (my dad). As I didn't want to jeopardise my relationship with him, I stepped away. But as I had no other qualifications, I couldn't work for a rival company. I saw a course advertised for Outdoor Ed at Craven College Skipton, and fell in love with outdoor adventure – oh, and got a statement of Dyslexia out of it as well. I have not looked back since – had some amazing lectures and instructors, and learnt loads from them – ethics and safety skills in outdoor education and adventures.

4. Interviewer: Back to climbing – Why do you climb?

Andy: In the past, it was to prove I could, but now it's the love of the individual personal challenge and mindfulness that it gives you – that can help you in your day-to-day life.

I used to climb bag – aka bagging routes (this has a totally different meaning now *Laughs*). But I would travel around all over just to do climbs for my logbook to say, "Look, I've done it!" I remember doing Cenotaph Corner – it was wet and slippery, and I hated it but did it on not so good day just to say I've done it.

I belayed a mate on Cemetery Gates – I was frozen, and it took him ages. I drove from the coast all the way to Worlds End Llangollen, only to then travel all the way through to Holyhead Mountain to climb in the sun. I decided then I climb where the sun is or somewhere I want to – not just for the sake of climbing it for someone else!

Climbing's for everyone, no matter what grade or route you climb!

5. Interviewer: What's the hardest route you've done?

Andy: Well, if you asked a good few years ago before kids *Laughs*... it properly be some E3 in the valley or 6c 7 on the Orme. But now I'm older and wiser (aka not got as much time to play), and this sounds daft to some, but Llyn VS 4c Clogwyn y Tarw (The Gribin Facet) I think.

I had walked away from it many times over a year or so, and I was E1 average at the time, but for some reason, it freaked me – never slipped or fell on it, I just did not feel it, so kept bottling out. To this day, no idea why, as when I did do it, I just did it... The brain, it's a funny thing, but that's climbing for you – 80% headspace.

I have another story about this climb regarding the difference between an instructor and a coach, but that's for another day.

6. Interviewer: Have you only done single-pitch routes, or have you done bigger climbs?

Andy: Well, I have stood on top of Batian (5,199 metres / 17,057 feet), Nelion (5,188 metres / 17,021 feet), and Point Lenana (4,985 metres / 16,355 feet) of Mt Kenya. Many multi-pitch climbs – in fact, my first multi-pitch was when I was at college, Merlin Tremadog.

Sea cliffs, I think one of my first was seconding Dream of White Horses behind Martin Chester, who nicely placed a high HEX on the last pitch traverse – it's a nightmare to get out as a second, and yes, I led it since and done the same to my 2nds *Laughs*.

But the biggest in my head and stands out is probably Flower Power. Can't remember where that is, limestone, it's a VS, at Attermire Scar, I think??? And that's when I decided, "yes, I want to teach in the outdoors", this is cool, can't wait to help the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts. How do I move on, what do I do next?

It was the turning point in my life and set me on the road to working in Outdoor Ed.

7. Interviewer: You mentioned that Boathouse Climbing Centre was born out of a need for a more inclusive climbing wall. How do you ensure that the centre caters to diverse groups of climbers?

Andy: Well, we welcome everyone at any stage of their climbing journey! We treat everyone with equal respect, regardless of where they come from or how they identify themselves. Climbing is a universal language that brings us all together to better ourselves. At Boathouse, we promote peer-to-peer coaching and encourage our staff to actively help anyone who seeks assistance. Our aim is to create a safe and inclusive space for all.

Personalised instruction and advice are at the heart of what we do. We focus not only on climbing skills but also on life skills, building self-confidence, and physical abilities that benefit everyday life. By delivering a personalised approach, we make sure every individual feels seen and heard. Boathouse is not just a conveyor belt of climbers; we genuinely care about our climbers' well-being and experiences.

Through these principles, we appeal to people from all walks of life, fostering a diverse and inclusive client base. Our goal is to make climbing accessible to everyone and work together to fulfil their needs.

8. Interviewer: Dyslexia played a role in your decision to pursue Outdoor Ed. How has your experience with dyslexia influenced your approach to teaching and coaching others in climbing and outdoor activities?

Andy: Dyslexia has indeed impacted my teaching approach significantly. When instructing navigation, for example, I avoid using the words "left" and "right" to prevent causing panic in individuals with dyslexia. Instead, I find multiple ways to convey the same information, ensuring everyone understands.

I remember a specific incident at the route "Llyn" (VS 4c) that highlighted the importance of understanding different learning styles. A distressed climber was struggling during an abseil, and the instructor's instructions weren't helping. I stepped in, used alternative explanations, and immediately saw the difference in her reaction. This experience reinforced my commitment to finding effective ways to make climbers understand and feel at ease.

Having experienced difficulties in learning from others, I empathise with those struggling to grasp concepts. It drives me to seek diverse approaches, teach with patience, and find innovative solutions tailored to each individual. Dyslexia has given me a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of climbers, and I'm constantly striving to improve their learning experiences.

9. Interviewer: Climbing can be both physically and mentally challenging. What advice would you give to someone who's just starting their climbing journey, particularly when it comes to overcoming mental barriers?

Andy: First and foremost, know that you're not alone! Climbers pushing themselves or working on a problem face similar mental challenges, whether they're beginners or experienced. The stress, indecision, and worries are universal feelings that come with the territory. So, take comfort in knowing that these emotions are part of the climbing experience and a sign that you're fully engaged in the sport.

When you encounter mental barriers, it's crucial to be mindful of your emotions and reactions. Notice when you're pushing yourself too hard or feeling overwhelmed. Recognising these moments allows you to address them effectively.

One effective approach is to take a short break and climb a route you are comfortable with and enjoy. This helps rebuild your confidence and reminds you of the joy of climbing. Avoid repeatedly attempting a challenging route without taking a pause, as it may lead to frustration and reinforce incorrect techniques.

At Boathouse, we follow the "rule of 7," which means not trying the same challenging route more than 7 times consecutively. Instead, we encourage climbers to move on to something different and then return later with a refreshed mindset.

Various techniques can help in overcoming mental barriers. Some climbers find it helpful to close their eyes briefly or focus on deep breathing to centre themselves. And yes, we've got your back at Boathouse and provide support and exercises to help you overcome these challenges.

If you ever feel unsure or stuck, don't hesitate to seek guidance from someone who understands both climbing techniques and the mental aspects of the sport. Sometimes, a fresh perspective or a set of exercises tailored to your needs can make a world of difference.

Remember, climbing is a continuous learning journey, and mental growth is an integral part of that process. Embrace the challenges, be patient with yourself, and with time and practice, you'll conquer mental barriers and experience the joy of climbing to the fullest.

10. Interviewer: You've climbed in various locations around the world. Are there any dream climbing destinations still on your list?

Andy: I don't, is that sad? As I said earlier I just climb wherever, I have no dream place anymore, I did have plans El Cap and Joshua tree area, but to be honest if I was going to plan a trip again, I want to go somewhere people don't talk about or relatively new.

11. Interviewer: As a climbing instructor and coach, how do you balance pushing your students to achieve their potential while also ensuring their safety and well-being?

Andy: Striking the right balance between pushing students and ensuring their safety is crucial. When top roping, safety is more assured, so we can push climbers to reach their potential. However, bouldering poses unique challenges. As an instructor, I rely on open communication with the climber. Emma-Jane's advice, "if you feel wibbly wobbly, just climb back down," is a valuable reminder. Climbers must feel comfortable communicating their feelings on the wall.

To push students effectively, I assess their needs and focus on specific areas, such as footwork, headspace, body positioning, or breathing. The "fingers higher" approach encourages climbers to move incrementally closer to their goal, breaking down challenges into manageable steps.

Knowing when to stop pushing is essential. I always encourage students to take breaks, work on other routes, and return later. Some climbers need more time and support, and as instructors, we must respect their individual progress.

Climbing should be about continuous improvement. Sometimes, climbers might not reach the top, but they

can improve their technique and mental approach. Breaking bad habits is vital for progress. Creating a supportive environment ensures that climbers feel safe, empowered, and motivated to achieve their goals.

12. Interviewer: What's your proudest moment as a climbing instructor? Is there a particular student's progress or accomplishment that stands out to you?

Andy: It's difficult to pick just one proudest moment as a climbing instructor because there have been numerous instances of success and growth among my students. Seeing young climbers develop a passion for climbing, some of whom now climb for Wales, brings immense pride.

Additionally, passing on life skills and climbing knowledge to students who have pursued careers as teachers, nurses, police officers, merchant navy personnel, and outdoor instructors fills me with joy. These individuals have taken the skills they learned at Boathouse and translated them into various professions, making a positive impact on society.

Boathouse has also facilitated the formation of various climbing groups, such as Dangling Dads and Women with Altitude, which have fostered strong networks and community support. Watching these groups flourish and grow brings a sense of accomplishment.

In conclusion, my proudest moments as an instructor lie in seeing my students evolve into skilled and confident climbers, as well as witnessing the sense of camaraderie and mutual support that has developed within the climbing community.

13. Interviewer: Apart from climbing, what other outdoor activities or adventures do you enjoy in your free time?

Andy: In my free time, I relish spending quality moments with Emma-Jane and our boys, as well as our beloved dog. I also enjoy activities like gorge walking, mountain walking, and climbing. I used to kayak and canoe frequently, especially on graded rivers, but I haven't engaged in it as much since losing my best friend, Phill, to cancer. However, I am working on dedicating more time to personal adventures and rediscovering my passion for paddling.

Running [Boathouse](#) and now [GeckoHouse](#) takes up a significant portion of my time, and I find immense joy and fulfillment in this work. Tuesday nights at Boathouse feel like my night out to a pub, filled with climbers who were once students and are now dear friends.

Though my outdoor activities vary, what matters most to me is creating a positive impact on people's lives, whether through climbing or other adventures.