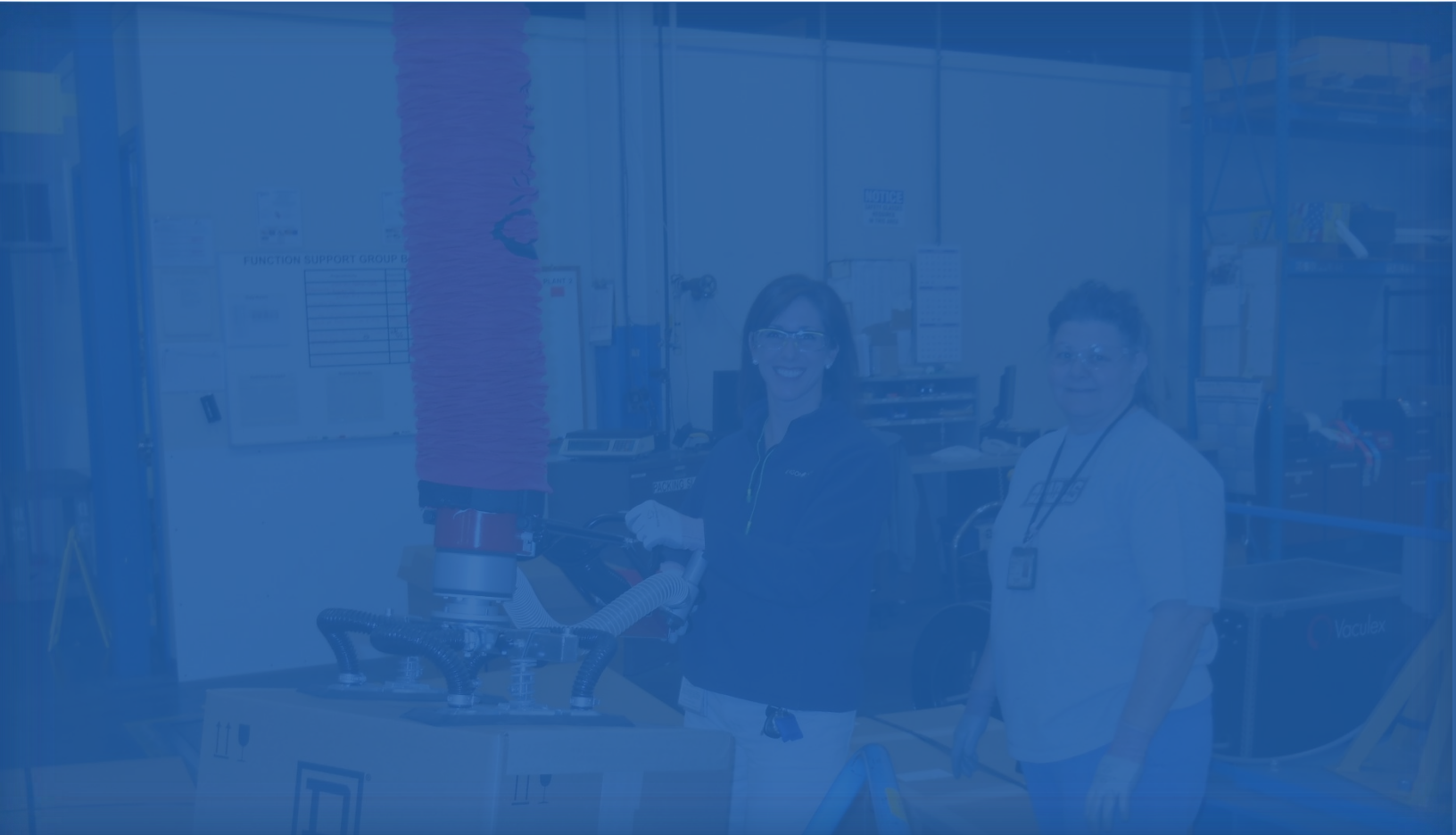


THINK PREVENTION

A Guide To

*Selecting An*

# Ergonomics Consultant



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# Five Questions to Answer Before You Select an Ergonomics Consultant

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By now, you're probably aware of the benefits of good workplace ergonomics.

You know that an effective ergonomics improvement process can systematically identify and reduce injury risk.

You understand the role good workplace design plays in not only preventing common and costly injuries, but also in maximizing human performance and making steady gains in productivity and product quality.

You've seen many other leading companies have success with their ergonomics initiatives.

You recognize that it is your responsibility to provide a job within the capabilities and limitations of the person you are asking to perform that job.

And finally, you've made the logical decision to implement (or improve upon) your workplace ergonomics process.

Congratulations!

Your next logical question is ...

## What's next?

Creating an effective, sustainable ergonomics process is hard.

But it's not hard like climbing Everest or launching eBay.

Many companies have been able to create a successful ergonomics process using internal resources, and many have been able to do so with the help of an ergonomics consultant.

The goal of this Ebook on selecting an ergonomics consultant is to guide you through the decision-making process of either hiring a consultant or simply managing and guiding the ergonomics process using internal resources.

You might be wondering why we would ever guide you to use internal resources when we would benefit from you hiring us. The simple answer to this question is that there are many situations where it wouldn't make sense for you to hire us and it will save us both time if you can recognize them. We only partner with companies who fully buy in to our founding principles and who we know we'll get outstanding, long-term results for.

But enough about us – let's talk about you.

## Question 1 - What are your challenges?

The first question you'll need to answer is, "What are my challenges?"

- Have you had costly musculoskeletal injuries and disorders at your facility in the past year?
- Are you effectively identifying and removing ergonomic risk factors in your workplace?
- Is your workforce healthy, fit and engaged? Are you measuring this?
- Do you have management buy-in for ergonomics?
- Do you struggle to create a culture of safety and wellness across your organization or facility?

These are a few of the common challenges we're seeing today. A good place to start understanding your specific challenges is to conduct an audit of your entire ergonomics and MSD prevention process. This will let you know where your challenges reside and give you a good indication of the kind of resources needed to make improvements.

(If you need a handy MSD prevention and ergonomics audit, you can download ours for free. Just [click here to go to the download page.](#))

## Question 2 - What are your goals?

Second, you need to set goals for your ergonomics process. Get a crystal clear picture of where your process currently stands and where you want it to be. Look at your list of challenges and set SMART goals for your process.

- What do you hope to accomplish with your ergonomics process?
- What are your goals for reducing risk and improving workplace design?
- What are your goals for creating a healthy, fit and engaged workforce?
- What metrics are you going to use to measure success and what is your timeline?

Additional questions to consider are:

- How do these goals align with your company's overall goals and objectives?
- How do these goals align with other OHS goals?

Every company is unique, so the answers to these questions will be different for everyone. But once you have your challenges and goals firmly in your mind, you can begin to determine if you have the internal resources to accomplish your goals or if you'll need the expertise and experience of an ergonomics consultant and the collective resources of a consultancy.

## Question 3 - Do you have the internal expertise?

Maximum human performance is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce. Because of this, you will need internal expertise in two areas: the science of ergonomics and the art of creating a culture of safety and wellness.

In addition to these two areas, your internal experts will need to implement these two elements of human performance in a comprehensive and integrated process.

Do you have an in-house ergonomics expert with the qualifications and skills to implement and maintain an effective ergonomics process?

Your in-house ergonomics expert should be capable of:

- Implementing and maintaining the ergonomics process. At the heart of this process is identifying and reducing ergonomic risk factors with cost-effective workplace improvements. This expert should be able to conduct ergonomic evaluations, prioritize and implement solutions, and evaluate those solutions for effectiveness.
- Because we know that maximum human performance is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce, you will also need an internal expert in the art of creating a culture of safety and wellness.

This internal expert should be capable of:

- Educating and training your workforce on MSD prevention, ergonomics and wellness.
- Implementing and maintaining an [early intervention process](#) – a proactive strategy to uncover early warning signs of MSDs and prevent them from happening. (You can learn more about early intervention [here](#).)

It is vitally important that all of the parts to this process are implemented in a comprehensive and integrated way for the best results – for maximum human performance.

## Question 4 - Do you have the internal experience?

Albert Einstein once said that, “The only source of knowledge is experience.”

Do you have internal resources with experience implementing a process that includes ergonomics, education / training *and* early intervention? Do they have the business management experience to implement this process in an integrated and comprehensive

way and evaluate it for effectiveness? Do they have experience obtaining leadership support for a new initiative and integrating it within existing operations?

Chances are good that you know someone at your company who has at least some experience in one or more of these areas. The key is to get all of these pieces of the process working together as one, and the best way to do that is through an experienced professional who has been there before and understands how all parts of this process work together.

(*Note:* One red flag that you do not have the right amount of internal experience is that an effective and sustainable ergonomics and human performance improvement process does not exist at your facility. If the right people with the right experience are already in place, your process should already be up and running with great success!)

## Question 5 - Do you have the other internal resources?

So far you've uncovered your challenges, developed SMART goals and determined if you have the internal expertise and experience you'll need for execution.

The next question is, do you have the other internal resources you need? Namely, time and buy-in from leadership.

If you do have someone with human performance expertise and experience, do they have the time to execute and maintain this process? Are they willing to dedicate themselves to it? Do they have the credibility and leadership support to take this process and run with it?

If you've found the internal expertise and experience you need, make sure they are both capable and available to execute this process for the long term.

## In Conclusion

Deciding whether or not to hire an ergonomics consultant can be a difficult decision. Answer these five questions and you'll have a clearer understanding of the decision-making criteria.

If you find that after answering these questions, you feel like you're fighting an uphill battle, it may be time to explore the option of hiring an ergonomics consultant.

A great ergonomics consultant will bring the expertise, experience and passion for injury prevention and human performance that will help you win that battle.



# Understanding the Different Types of Ergonomics Consultants

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If you've followed our advice in Chapter 1 of this series, you've uncovered your challenges, developed SMART goals and determined if you have the internal expertise, experience, time and leadership buy-in to execute a comprehensive process to prevent injuries and improve human performance at your facility.

If you've completed this short audit of your internal capabilities and you feel as though you're fighting an uphill battle, you could benefit from partnering with a human performance and ergonomics consultant.

Professionals in several different fields call themselves ergonomics consultants, and when you begin your search for the right ergonomics consultant, it can become confusing. The goal of this article is to sort through the confusion, clearly explain the types of ergonomics consultants and outline the situations where you could benefit from each.

There are two broad types of ergonomics consultants - ergonomists (engineers) and healthcare professionals such as athletic trainers, physical therapists and occupational therapists.

## Ergonomists / Engineers

[Ergonomists](#) come from the engineering field. They are typically highly trained in ergonomic design and are capable of solving complex ergonomic issues.

According to the International Ergonomics Association (IEA), "Practitioners of ergonomics, ergonomists, contribute to the planning, design and evaluation of tasks, jobs, products, organizations, environments and systems in order to make them compatible with the needs, abilities and limitations of people."

Ergonomics consulting firms consisting of ergonomists offer ergonomics training, program management and workplace design services. Again, they typically approach human performance from an engineering perspective and focus on complex projects.

**Benefits of hiring an ergonomist:** The benefits of hiring an ergonomics consulting firm with ergonomists is that they are well-suited for large scale ergonomic projects. When designing new products and processes, ergonomists can provide the engineering support you need to ensure an ergonomically efficient workplace design. Ergonomists are also well suited for training your internal engineers on ergonomic design principles and practices.

## Health Care Professionals

Health care professionals come from health-related fields. These practitioners of ergonomics include Certified Athletic Trainers, Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists. These professionals have a deep knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of people and are capable of performing ergonomic evaluations and making practical and cost-effective workplace improvements.

In addition to providing services in ergonomics, health care professionals are capable of providing a host of other health and wellness-related services. Their approach to human performance is typically centered on creating a healthy, fit and engaged worker along with a team approach to making systematic ergonomic improvements.

**Benefits of hiring a health care professional:** The benefits of having a health care professional at your facility managing your ergonomics and human performance process is that you get a comprehensive approach to human performance. Health care professionals are able to conduct ergonomic evaluations and develop solutions with a team approach to improve workplace design. They are also able to educate and train employees on how to properly use their bodies to perform their job as well as conduct early intervention screenings to uncover early signs of fatigue and discomfort.

## In Conclusion

When making your selection, it's important to recognize that there are different types of ergonomics consultants and there are benefits of hiring each type.

*(Note: At Ergonomics Plus, we use Allied Healthcare Professionals (workplace athletic trainers) to help our clients prevent injuries and enhance human performance. With that said, we recognize the value ergonomists provide to business and industry and we often refer business to them when we feel they are a better fit.)*

# 15 Quick Tips for Selecting the Right Ergonomics Consultant

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If you're in the market for an ergonomics consultant, you have lots of choices and not very much time. Selecting the right one can be tricky.

With that in mind, we've put together fifteen quick tips for selecting an ergonomics consultant to get you started on the right check.

Let's get started.

## 1. Select a consultant with expertise

When you hire an outside consultant, you have a lot riding on their ability to perform the job. Make sure you hire a consultant with the expertise to get the job done right and the first time. Check their credentials and make sure they're actively involved in their field.

## 2. Make sure they have the right experience

One of the reasons you're hiring an outside consultant is because you need to shorten your learning curve and get results faster than you could have by doing the job internally. In short, you're hiring a consultant for both their expertise *and* their experience.

Make sure you partner with a consultancy with the experience and battle-tested know how. Often, these battle hardened consultants will have proprietary systems, processes and methodologies that can be customized to fit your facility that will make your life easier and get the job done faster.

## 3. Be aware of their approach to injury prevention and human performance

Consultants often have a different skillset and approach. Make sure you understand the different types of ergonomics consultants and make an informed decision on what would be best for your situation.

#### 4. Look at their clients and case studies

The truest measure of performance is the success of a consultant's clients. When you're researching your options, look for a library of case studies, testimonials and other client information. If this information is missing from their website or not available upon request, that should raise a giant red flag in your mind.

#### 5. Study their bottom-line results

Many consultancies will study the results they've been able to achieve for their clients and make those available on their website or per your request. Find out what is possible for you based on their previous results.

#### 6. Make sure they have cost-reduction data

Similar to the previous point, make sure you're able to make a clear business case for the ergonomics consultant's services. Many consultancies will have cost-reduction data available for you.

#### 7. Make sure you're comfortable

Before you sign on the dotted line to make your new partnership official, arrange a few phone calls and meetings to make sure you're comfortable. You're entrusting another person with responsibilities to you and your company. Your reputation is on the line. Make sure you have a good "gut feeling" about it before you make it official.

#### 8. Are they committed to the industry?

Is your consultant committed to the industry and actively involved in the ergonomics, injury prevention and wellness community? Do they regularly publish information, helpful resources and contribute to the conversation? A consultant with a true passion for helping other people and companies will be demonstrating their thought leadership and adding value to the conversation even if they aren't being compensated for it. Passion fuels success and you want to partner with a consultant and firm that is truly committed.

## 9. Beware a bargain

“Caveat emptor” they say, buyer beware. If your 1965 Shelby Mustang GT350 is having engine trouble, do you take it to the pricey Shelby Mustang specialist who has spent half his life under the hood of the car, or do you take it to the quickie oil change place with the kid who's always wanted to fix a Mustang? That's right – you go to the specialist because it's worth every penny.

The benefits of a well-run, efficient ergonomics improvement process will far outweigh the costs. Get the job done and get it done right. It's worth it.

## 10. Know your options – research different vendors

There are lots of ergonomics consultants out there. That means you shouldn't limit your research to one consultant or firm. Do some digging and find the right consultant for you.

## 11. Conduct an interview

Most ergonomics consultants will offer a free consultation or assessment. Take them up on it! This is your chance to get a feel for what your relationship will be like. Take the opportunity to interview them and get to know more about their experience and see how they approach your situation.

## 12. Set up a plan for evaluation

A good consultant will set up a plan for continuous improvement and evaluation of their work. If they don't, make sure you're up front about how they will be evaluated. You deserve to get results and have them reported back to you. A good consultant will thrive with this challenge.

### 13. Hire a professional – not a hobbyist

When you're looking for a partner, it's best to select someone who is doing this full time as opposed to a part-time hobbyist. Find someone who eats, sleeps and breathes injury prevention and human performance.

### 14. Make sure they can effectively communicate

Good communication between business partners is critical. Make sure the consultant communicates early, often and when in doubt. They should default to over communication to make sure you are satisfied with their services and you know the plan for continuous improvement.

### 15. Find a true partner

The best consultants are true partners. They will treat your business as if it were their own. At the end of the day, this is best for them and it's best for you – the sign of a true partnership.

# A 5-Step Checklist to Selecting the Right Ergonomics Consultant

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This is the final chapter in our Ebook on selecting an ergonomics consultant. This chapter will serve as a quick review of what we've covered so far and offer you a five step checklist to get you up and running fast.

Let's get started!

## 1. Evaluate your need for an ergonomics consultant based on your goals and your internal resources.

First, determine if you need to hire an ergonomics consultant in the first place. This will begin by taking an honest assessment of your challenges and goals and determining if you have the internal resources required to accomplish your goals.

Some of the benefits of hiring an outside ergonomics consultant are:

- Expertise
- Experience
- Proven Methodology

By hiring an ergonomics consultant, you will have access to a specialist in ergonomics who is experienced and brings a battle-tested methodology with proven results. This can shorten your learning curve and free up the time, money and additional internal resources you would have spent creating a program from scratch.

## 2. Determine what type of consultant you want to partner with.



Ergonomics consultants come from a variety of fields. The two broad categories of consultants are: ergonomists and health care professionals.

There are pros and cons to each. Educate yourself on the different types of consultants and decide which type is the right fit for meeting your specific challenges and goals.

### 3. Research and evaluate the top candidates by expertise and experience.

One of the reasons you're paying a premium for a consultant instead of using internal resources is to gain the instantaneous advantage of added expertise and experience on your team.

Make sure the consultant you select has the proper credentials and the firm they represent has experience in the field.

### 4. Verify the past performance of the ergonomics consultant by researching their clients and results.

The truest measure of any consultancy's performance is the results they get for their clients. Review the case studies, testimonials, cost and injury reduction data and references provided by the consultancy as part of your evaluation process.

In addition to evaluating the consultant, you can also start to build the business case for their services if you need additional leadership support for the program.

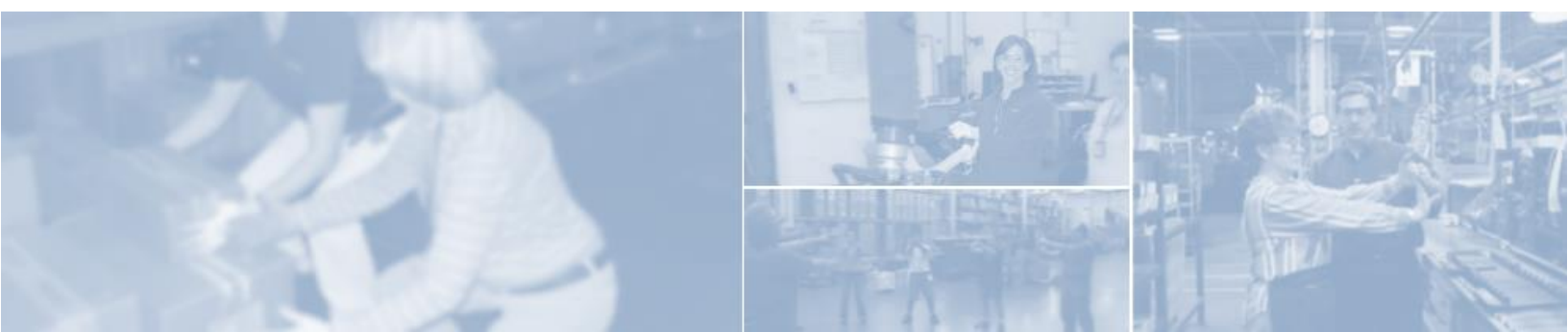
### 5. Get to know the ergonomics consultant through a free consultation or assessment.

Before signing on the dotted line, take the consultant for a test drive through a free consultation or assessment. This will help you get a feel for their style and approach. Find out how they will approach your challenges and meet your goals.

# Make your selection

You know your challenges and goals. You know what kind of ergonomics consultant can meet your needs. You've done your research and so far you're impressed with the candidate you've met with.

Now it's time to make your selection!



## About Ergonomics Plus

Ergonomics Plus was founded in 1989 as a one-man operation with the mission of preventing costly and painful musculoskeletal (soft tissue) injuries and improving human performance for local companies. Since those humble beginnings, we've grown into a nationwide consultancy, helping thousands of people across the United States remain healthy and productive at work every day.

Although we continue to grow and evolve as a company, our mission has never changed: We're dedicated to helping you and the workers at your company achieve high levels of human performance.

[Visit us at www.Ergo-Plus.com](http://www.Ergo-Plus.com)