

32 DEGREES

THE JOURNAL OF PROFESSIONAL SNOWSPORTS INSTRUCTION | *winter 2014*

Ride Here

Ride Now

Building a Buzz
That Lasts

PG. 42



PGS. 20-46

You Don't Say!

How to Work Magic
Without Words

PG. 56

Teaching Tip

Take a 'Can-do' Approach
in Adaptive Lessons

PG. 66





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Cover Shot: The perfect blend of friends, snow, and sun makes for epic days, like this one at National Academy 2013 in Snowbird, Utah. Pictured from left to right are Nat Hammerli, Cole Dissinger, PSIA-AASI Snowboard Team member Scott Anfang, and Walter Luke. Photo by Sherri Harkin.

32 DEGREES

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You Play a Key Role in Growing Ski and Snowboard Participation

By Eric Sheckleton, PSIA-AASI Chairman of the Board

Two distinct memories resonate with me from the 2011 International Ski Instructors Congress in St. Anton, Austria. One is taking an hour to walk a block with American ski icon Glen Plake and his wife Kimberly – both proud PSIA-AASI members.

With his legendary mohawk in full plume, and a genuine desire to share his love of skiing, Plake stopped to honor every photograph and autograph request he received, which I imagine is a regular occurrence for him in ski towns.

The other memory is of the standing room-only crowd of instructors from around the world waiting to hear the PSIA-AASI presentation. After decades of innovation that's included the Skills Concept, student-centered teaching, and being the first snowsports teaching association to adopt standards for snowboard instruction, PSIA-AASI's reputation as forward thinkers has earned us international renown.

The PSIA-AASI Teams continued to cement that reputation in St. Anton, setting the bar for instruction by presenting a variety of leading ideas. Among our more popular topics were the importance of freestyle to the future of skiing and snowboarding, how to harness the advent of rocker, and how to continue creating an even greater sense of partnership with students on the hill. "It's about building a relationship between what our students bring to the table and how we meet their needs," PSIA-AASI Alpine Team Captain Michael Rogan told an eager and attentive audience.

An Industry Aligned with Us

Two years later, our mission is exactly the same: helping people from a variety of backgrounds with different skill sets – and riding all kinds of equipment – fall in love with skiing and snowboarding.

What *has* changed, at least in my eyes, is how what you do each day inspires the rest of the ski and snowboard industry to develop initiatives that dovetail so seamlessly with our mission. The National Ski Areas Association's Model for Growth, expansion of Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month and the Bring a Friend initiative, and ski areas' renewed focus on creating beginner's terrain are proof that more resources than ever are helping to market, promote, and support professional instruction.

Benefits of Our Success

The reason for this is simple – when we're successful, the entire industry benefits. Every person we get stoked on snowsports is that much more likely to spend money on lift tickets, equipment, hotels, on-mountain meals, and, yes, more lessons. That's one of the reasons the theme of this issue of *32 Degrees* is "What's Working." We want to highlight best practices and give kudos to the ski and snowboard schools that are getting those first-timers to come back and also re-energize those people who may, for whatever reason, have taken a break from skiing or riding.

Of course, I doubt turning someone into a lifelong customer is your foremost thought when you first meet the students in your lesson. Finding out who they are, what they do with their lives, and why they want to recreate in the mountains is a much more likely scenario. What all of the economic data about our sports often misses is that good health, happiness, and the opportunity to ride your board(s)

through the wonderland of winter are our main focal points. FUN is what PSIA-AASI members are selling.

With that in mind, here are three things PSIA-AASI members can do to help make learning to ski and snowboard even more fun, while growing the sports for the benefit of everyone:

- **Set a goal to achieve a higher level of certification.** In terms of professional development, I've found the process incredibly satisfying. And it results in a better lesson for my students. The more educated you are, the more tools you have to help your students achieve a breakthrough or begin to enjoy the sport for the first time. Whether it's achieving your Level I, II, or III, or earning your Children's or Freestyle Specialist credential, this is the most straightforward way to improve what you are already doing.
- **Make sure your ski area is participating in Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month.** This national program, which promotes professional instruction throughout the month of January, highlights areas that inspire beginners to come out and learn (see skiandsnowboardmonth.org). Talk to your supervisor or your ski and snowboard school director, and let them know how this initiative can benefit them.
- **Bring a Friend.** I'm always amazed how even in the most diehard mountain towns there are still people who don't actually go sliding on the mountain. I encourage you to find one of them, and introduce them to the wonders of professional instruction.

When it comes right down to it, *you're* "what's working." Your passion and professionalism are what gets me excited. What do *you* think is working? Drop me a line at chairman@thesnowpros.org ☺



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National Academy: The Experience That Changed My Career

BY TANYA MILELLI

When you're a ski instructor under the age of 35 it's easy to wonder when your time is going to run out. As instructors, we see people around us who have enjoyed long and successful careers and think, "I'd love to do that." But when you're just starting out, it can seem nearly impossible. You can only go so long living on ramen noodles, in a house with five roommates, piecing together odd jobs to get you through the off season. That's what I thought and why I've always kept one foot firmly planted in another profession, until last season. I went into the 2012-13 season with one

goal; to figure out if I can do this – if I can really ski for a living.

I had no idea how to begin to answer my own question, so I did what any respectable ski bum would do; I skied and hoped the rest would come to me. I knew that if I was really going to do this I would have to take my skiing and teaching to the next level. I knew that being good was no longer enough. I would have to be great. So I started with the obvious – training. I moved to Tahoe with no formal training or instruction and started working at Heavenly when I was 20, then later moved

to Northstar at age 25. My skiing today is very much a product of the clinicians in the West.

As much as I love being in the Tahoe bubble, it was time for a change – time to see what else and who else is out there. I heard about PSIA-AASI's National Academy in the past, but frankly the price tag made it out of my reach. Then I read about the PSIA-AASI Western Division's Education Foundation Scholarships and the wheels in my head started turning. I was convinced a trip to National Academy and a week of training at a new resort with

WHAT PSIA-AASI HAS DONE FOR ME

BY INDIA BAUGHMAN



COURTESY OF INDIA BAUGHMAN

At age 23, I married an excellent skier who has PSIA-AASI Alpine Level II certification. I, however, had never skied a day in my life. After spending a decade learning how to ski as an adult, I decided I'd like to learn to teach skiing. In January of 2007, I got my Alpine Level I certification, which sparked my interest in

becoming a classroom teacher – this was the first of many doors PSIA-AASI opened for me.

In 2011, I completed my Children's Specialist 1 certification. I was so excited with the new skills I learned, I couldn't wait to use them! I used those skills to create a sister program to the Snowflake Ski Club where I work in Chicago's North Shore area. The Snowflake Ski Club has 1,200 members ages 7-16; I helped to create a program designed to teach skiing to kids ages 5-7, which is an introduction to skiing and a transition into the Snowflake Club. A typical day in my program includes one-on-one semi-private ski lessons, hot chocolate breaks, lunch with

classmates, ski time with mom and dad, coloring, and lots of fun! PSIA-AASI taught me the basic skills needed to teach children, create and execute lesson plans, modify my classes based on the needs of the students, the ability to think on my feet, and the tools to provide constructive feedback for my students. This knowledge allowed me to realize my passion for teaching and inspired me to get involved in teaching off the snow, too.

I currently work as a substitute teacher and I am pursuing a Master's degree in education. I credit the PSIA-AASI certification process for helping me learn the skills needed to become a successful teacher. Thanks PSIA-AASI for helping me to achieve my dream of teaching children and for bringing out the teacher in me!

My two children (ages 5 and 9), my husband, and I all enjoy skiing with the Snowflake Ski Club more than 21 days every winter. While mom and dad are teaching ski lessons, our kids are taking their own lessons and enjoying the snow. After lunch, we all ski together as a family every Saturday – December through March. Not bad for a family living in the North Shore of Chicago!

*India Baughman
Alpine Level I, Children's Specialist 1
Snowflake Ski Club, IL*



COLE DISSINGER

Most likely to get rad



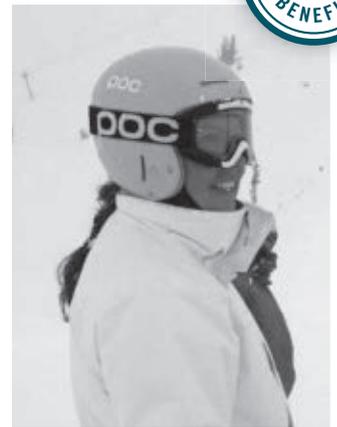
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Most likely to pay attention



ANN GALVIN

Most likely to photo bomb



ANDY DOCKEN

Most likely to carpool to National Academy



KEVIN ASHLEY

Most likely to have you sign his skis

YOUR SPACE

new coaches and new peers was exactly what I was looking for. I was thrilled to end up being selected as a recipient of a Sodergren Scholarship that would allow me to go to National Academy at Snowbird, Utah.

I'm somewhat of a perfectionist, so I spent the month leading up to National Academy researching and planning out every detail, but nothing could have prepared me for the experience I was about to have. I knew the skiing was going to be great, and it was: new snow plus bluebird days. And I knew the coaching would be unparalleled, because you can't go wrong training with the best in the country.

What I didn't anticipate was that I would find people like myself to share the experience with. Admittedly, I thought I was going to a PSIA-AASI event filled with alumni and hobbyists. I didn't expect to find a vibrant under-35 crowd with



NICK HERRIN

Tanya (in plaid jacket) at Snowbird with other National Academy attendees.

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For more information on the program and the peace of mind it can provide, log on to the member center at www.TheSnowPros.org.

I may not be as far along as some of my peers from Snowbird, but they have given me hope for my future.

REACH OUT IN 'YOUR SPACE'!

32 Degrees welcomes your views! Write a letter to the editor, opine on a topic near and dear to your heart, or submit an essay on "What PSIA-AASI Has Done for Me." Email your submission to: 32Degrees@thesnowpros.org, and please put "Your Space" in the subject line.

Correction

The photos of PSIA-AASI Alpine Team Freestyle Specialists Kelly Coffey and David Oliver in "Pitch Perfect Park for New Skiers: Terrain Based Teaching Removes Fear From First-Day Lessons" (Fall 2013) were taken by Earl Saline (not Sherri Harkin, as indicated). 32 Degrees regrets the error.

the same mentality and goals as me, but when I did I also found the answer to my question. Amidst that group of ripping skiers and great people were six examiners, a division president, two ski school managers, a training coordinator and a whole lot of people trying to find their place in the industry. Spending a week with them I realized that while skiing might be a stop on the way to something else for a lot of young people, there are also people just like me across the country trying to figure out how to make this a career. The good news is the industry is making room for that new talent. I may not be as far along as some of my peers from Snowbird, but they have given me hope for my future.

It's not always easy trying to navigate this industry, especially when you're young, but it's a lot easier when you have others around you who "get it" and will be there to support and encourage you to keep going. Thank you to the PSIA-AASI Western Division Education Foundation for giving me the opportunity to further my career. 32°

Since attending National Academy, Tanya has earned a spot on the Ski & Snowboard School staff at Coronet Peak in New Zealand and has been named administrative director for the Northstar Team Foundation. She credits much of her recent success to her experience At National Academy in Snowbird, Utah.



RANT WUK
8'4" - 8'8" - 8'0"

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The 2014 Rant is in a category all it's own. This all new short board inspired stand up paddleboard is designed for riding waves at the beach or behind the boat. From small to overhead waves, the swallow tail design reduces the surface area providing a great deal of control into and out of turns. The new aggressive surf style shape enables a responsive and playful feel without compromising stability. Play on the wave, relax on the way out – the new Rant redefines what all-around surf should be.



LINEUP

Sign up online

Log in at TheSnowPros.org and get instant access to all the benefits of PSIA-AASI membership, like pro offers, educational opportunities, association events, instructor tools, and more.

News of Note

Demeter to Help Guide Education

PSIA-AASI is pleased to announce that Beth Anne Demeter has joined its national office staff in Lakewood, Colorado, as director of professional development and credentialing. She



WENDY SCHRUPP

will work with PSIA-AASI stakeholders to provide strategic vision, direction, and oversight of membership education and credentialing programs and resources.

A PSIA-AASI certified Level II snowboard instructor, Demeter grew up in Ohio and taught snowboarding throughout high school and college, and then administered the snowboard instructor training program at Ohio's Boston Mills/Brandywine resorts.

She holds undergraduate degrees in Finance and Retail Merchandising from Kent State University, an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Business, and is a certified project management professional. Professionally, Demeter has divided her time between the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. Living in Chicago since 2000, she most recently provided strategy, consulting, and project management services to large corporations such as CDW, Northern Trust, and Sears. In a volunteer capacity, Demeter serves as president of the Chicago Area Mensa chapter and as the Membership Officer for the national board of directors for American Mensa.

"Beth Anne's accomplished background in project management, systems analysis, and strategic planning will serve PSIA-AASI's membership well as we work

to enhance our national standards and recognition of our education and certification programs," said Mark Dorsey, PSIA-AASI executive director and CEO.

"I am extremely excited to take on such a dynamic role," said Demeter. "I look forward to bringing a wide range of skills and experiences to a group that sets the standard for on-hill education and engagement."

LSSM Promotes Instruction

Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month (LSSM) is about one thing – growing snowsports participation through professional instruction. The fact that the program continues to experience such phenomenal growth each season, from a grassroots month-long event three years ago to a winter-long initiative with multiple sponsors, spokespeople, and high-profile venues, reinforces the value the industry places on the role of snow pros in ensuring the overall health of the sport.

The iconic Warren Miller film tour featured information about LSSM's Bring a Friend Challenge at each of the movie's nationwide stops this fall. And in anticipation of the upcoming 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, the three former U.S. Winter Olympic venues of Squaw Valley, California; Lake Placid, New York; and Park City, Utah, announced they will also provide promotional support.

There are plenty of opportunities for PSIA-AASI members to get involved, from becoming an ambassador or champion through the initiative website at skiandsnowboardmonth.org to making sure your ski and ride school is taking



LIBERTY MOUNTAIN

advantage of all the marketing and publicity surrounding the event. Here are five tips from LSSM to make sure you don't miss out:

1. Go to skiandsnowboardmonth.org to check out all the great information that's been put together for this important initiative. Encourage current customers to tell their friends that January is Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month.
2. Use social media to spread your message to current and new customers.
3. Partner with a local retailer or a product supplier.
4. Organize a "newcomers" bus trip with local clubs, youth and church groups, and other recreation organizations. Offer a beginner package. Use the trip to educate beginners about your facility (like where the ski school and the cafeteria are located), how to dress, different kinds of equipment, safety precautions, etc.
5. Partner with local clubs and organizations to host an LSSM day in early January. Use this as a way to get new customers and help clubs/organizations gain new members. Consider a tie-in with a local charity.

In other LSSM-related news, PSIA-AASI member Jim Dougherty has partnered with LSSM to promote his Pro Snow Video app for iPhone/iPad, which includes a library of ski resorts, snow reports, and a split-screen feature that enables users to view two videos from their device's video album side-by-side. The app, said Dougherty, can serve as a great way for LSSM participants to capture their experience. ☑

Where Do You Read 32 Degrees?



COURTESY OF THE EICHORNS

Level II alpine instructor Steve Shapard has the right idea. The perfect perch for reading about snowsports instruction is on his catamaran, anchored off a beach on the small island of Nevis in the West Indies. "I must be getting too much salt water and sun if I'm pulling out *32 Degrees* here and checking out tips for the next ski season," he writes.

Soon enough he'll be entering his 23rd year at Utah's Park City Mountain Resort, coaching young ski racers in the development program for the resort's Youth Ski League.

Is *32 Degrees* stashed in your duffel bag? Do tell...and show. Send a high-resolution photo and details to 32Degrees@thesnowpros.org.



MATT FOLTS

The Olympics are so exciting; they can sometimes feel like Christmas. But unlike Christmas, the Winter Olympic Games only occur once every four years. With some serious opportunities for U.S. athletes to bring home medals in 2014 – and give kids some new high-flying heroes – the Games in Sochi, Russia, are set to offer ski and snowboard instructors several gifts. Here are just a few athletes to watch.

<i>Rad</i>	<i>Sad</i>
 <p>Getting your Freestyle Specialist certificate.</p> <p>EARL SALINE</p>	 <p>Being too intimidated by the terrain park to get involved in all the creativity it inspires.</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>
 <p>Being a mentor and a resource for younger or less-experienced instructors.</p> <p>SUSAN HODDER</p>	 <p>Only focusing on improving yourself.</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>
 <p>Night riding: from cross country trails to the terrain park, the fun doesn't have to stop when the sun sets.</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>	 <p>Spending every night riding the couch.</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>
 <p>Challenging yourself: attend a new clinic, sign up for a local race, or maybe even participate in a big air contest.</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>	 <p>Getting stuck in a rut (unless it's on a giant slalom course).</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>
 <p>Connecting with your fellow snow pros on social media channels such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Find us: @thesnowpros Tag us: #snowpros</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>	 <p>Missing out on interacting with people like you who are passionate about snowsports.</p> <p>THINKSTOCK</p>

REASONS TO GET EXCITED: *The Olympics!*

- Cross-country skier Kikkan Randall is rapidly becoming one of the greatest nordic racers in U.S. history. Sochi could be her moment in the spotlight.
- Alpine ski queen Lindsey Vonn is back, and ready to defend her gold medal in downhill from the 2010 Winter Olympics.
- Snowboard superstar Shaun White has his eyes set on a third gold in halfpipe.
- Ted Ligety is a strong bet to medal in both the combined and giant slalom events.
- Tom Wallisch could spin his way to gold in slopestyle's debut.
- And PSIA-AASI Adaptive Team Coach Kim Seevers is ready to lead U.S. Paralympic Team athlete Staci Mannella to the podium in the Paralympics. Check out their "Wicked Fast" story on PSIA-AASI's YouTube channel!

ROAD TRIP WORTH TAKING



Big Sky in Montana has always been big. With its recent purchase of Moonlight Basin ski area, it has reached super-sized status.

The two adjoining areas, which have combined operations, offer more than 5,700 acres of rideable terrain, including 4,350 vertical feet, 23 chairlifts, and 10 surface lifts. That's enough steep and deep for a lifetime, but this is the only season you can say you were one of the first to ride the whole enchilada.

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Why They Rock: Fischer returned as a PSIA-AASI ski partner this year and is sponsoring PSIA-AASI Adaptive Team Coach Kim Seevers and paralympic skier Staci Mannella in their quest for a medal at the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia.

What You May Not Know: Fischer is an independent, family-owned ski company that was founded in 1924. The brand owns its own production facility in Austria, which is run with 100 percent renewable energy. Long known for its state-of-the-art ski technologies, Fischer has expanded its offerings with the Vacuum Fit line, an innovative new collection of custom-moldable alpine ski boots.

Locker Room Talk

	Name/Area/Certification	Member Since/Division	What's the key to boosting snowsports participation?	What advice do you have for new instructors?	What's on your "must-buy" list?	What does being a PSIA-AASI member mean to you?
	Sandra Guzman Snowbird, UT Snowboard III, Alpine III, Telemark I, Freestyle 1, Children's Specialist 2	1998 Inter- mountain	Share more than just the mechanics of the sport; share yourself and be genuine.	Have fun, listen, try everything, be patient with yourself (and others). Try lots of different gear – borrow it, use the rental stuff, ask a rep, switch with your friends. And, HAVE FUN!	A new pair of snowboard boots (Burton W Supreme). I melted mine drying them over a wood-burning stove in Chile this summer.	It's an opportunity to be involved with great people. I need the feedback of these high-caliber individuals to keep pushing myself toward improvement – mentally, physically, personally, and professionally.
	Gary Elliott Mammoth Mountain, CA Alpine III	1971 Western	Repeat business. Use your smart phone to take a ski shot of a student and send it to them or post it on their Facebook page. Follow-up is very important; stay in touch.	Be a student in your own class. When explaining something to your students, don't just recite what you've read or been told. Think about and fully understand what you're saying.	A new ski condo	Professionalism, belonging to a great organization, and being a good representative of the skiing community.
	Bruce Senn Schenectady Ski School and Adaptive Sports Foundation, NY Alpine III, Children's Specialist 1	1969 Eastern	Share your passion. Search your own experiences and transform your most enjoyable moments into lesson plans that emphasize fun.	Every day is an opportunity to invent new and creative ways to coach your students and discover something new and exciting about skiing and teaching.	Maybe a new pair of boots, although the ones I have are warm and comfortable and seem to do the job.	Being able to tap into the knowledge, skills, and experience of the best clinicians and ski teachers in the country.
	Faith-Esther Ferkel Snow Trails Winter Resort, OH Alpine Level I, Children's Specialist 1	2012 Central	I recommend "Learn to Ski or Snowboard Month" discounts. I don't know if that translates into more participation, but one conversation about snowsports per week amounts to 50 people influenced.	Observe experienced instructors teaching lessons as often as possible. Take as many clinics as you can.	New glove liners; mine are getting packed out.	PSIA-AASI membership opens the door to a worldwide kinship of snowsports, joy, and a wealth of knowledge freely shared; where I've never been looked down upon no matter what level I am, and nearly everyone is either taking someone under their wing or being taken under someone else's wing.

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ProFile:

FRAN BELCHER

Level I Cross Country Instructor; Canton, New Hampshire

How did you first get into skiing?

Having grown up in suburban Philadelphia, I wasn't familiar with snowsports until I moved to New Hampshire in the mid-eighties. I was introduced to snowsports in my twenties by a professional ski instructor who lived nearby. She taught my husband and me in her living room and we excitedly ran off to Gunstock Mountain to practice our new skills.

I fell in love with nordic skiing 15 years later while watching my son and daughter race for the Holderness School in Plymouth, New Hampshire. I became enchanted with the fluidity and grace of nordic skiing, as well as the grit and athleticism of racers. I attended most of Holderness' races, mostly to support the team and feed kids from the back of my (what else?) Subaru wagon. Secretly, I was also eavesdropping on the coaches to collect pointers for my own skiing.

What have you learned about starting a sport later in life?

I was athletic growing up, so I expected quite a lot (perhaps too much) of myself in picking up a new sport at age 40. My experience in swimming was helpful in body and spatial awareness, but obviously not a ticket to success on snow. I had to learn to be more patient with myself with skiing, especially when I picked up

skate skiing, and to set (and celebrate) achievable annual goals. I scaled back my expectations and focused on maximizing efficiency by developing micro skills. This approach allows me to celebrate small successes and look forward to every season.

What does it mean to be able to share your passion for nordic skiing with your family?

If it weren't for my kids' interest in nordic skiing, I would never have had opportunities to grow with this sport. I am so indebted to my kids, Ben and Aubrey, for being willing to have their mom hang around races and pepper them with questions about technique on the drive home. Ben was an especially patient and encouraging coach who (on days off from practice) skied behind me and cheerfully barked at me to increase my tempo (Hup! Hup! Hup!). More than once I had to beg for mercy and remind him that there are fewer fast twitch muscles in my body than his.

And how about as an instructor?

As a late-in-life learner, I recognize how hard it is to be a beginner at anything when one is accomplished in other aspects of life. Because of this, I especially enjoy teaching adult beginners. Many adults have a fear of looking silly and seem eager to start the lesson by explaining what they believe they

“already know” from their alpine skiing experience. In addition to teaching basic nordic skills, I offer an introduction to nordic culture. I encourage adult students to be less focused on performance and instead use the basic ski skills as a way to enjoy the restorative aspects of being outdoors on a quiet trail.

The importance of play is something that gets lost in adulthood. I know when my snow time is limited by other commitments, I tend to be too focused on skill development and am less able to just play on skis. Consequently, I try to introduce a game or two into every class – even if the adults grumble – because it loosens everyone up and we can all giggle a bit.

Why do you enjoy working with seasoned students so much?

I'm interested in personality traits and other indicators of resilience that contribute to physical and mental wellness in older adults. Last year, as an assignment for a class in human development, I volunteered with the Waterville Valley Silver Streaks Nordic Club. It was truly a delight to be with folks in their seventies and eighties who are still active in the outdoors, grateful for sunny bluebird days on the trail.

These are interesting, vital people who've led fascinating lives. Our time was spent in animated trailside conversations on topics that ranged from my recent research on geriatric substance misuse to the biomechanics of race walking to world travel and a captivating discussion of the evolving face of primary care. They were a fun bunch and I certainly learned more from them than they did from me.

How does this dovetail with your other professional career?

At age 53, I'm in the latter part of a post-Master's training program in clinical mental health. Though I was already interested in geriatric mental health, my experience with the Silver Streaks sparked my interest in outdoor and movement therapy for older adults. I'm on my way toward licensure as a professional counselor and hope to continue working with elders outdoors. Clinical mental health counseling can be draining work, but being with the Silver Streaks was so restorative for me that I know I will incorporate the outdoors in my clinical work to keep me fresh. ☺

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Q&A

JEFF BOLIBA

VP Global Resorts, Burton Snowboards

Jeff, over the summer you moderated a session at the NSAA National Convention on “Strategies for Growth and Snowboarding’s Future.” What was the main message of that presentation?

We wanted to give resorts a more complete overview of the current state of snowboarding while offering ideas and takeaways to help adjust their business plans. Part of this was informing them on how to take advantage of the snowboarding market as it matures and evolves. The biggest takeaway is that in order to grow the sport, we have to improve the first-time learning experience in order to convert more newbies into lifelong riders.

Terrain-based learning was one of the main examples we encouraged resorts to incorporate into their learning programs in order to improve the experience and conversion rate. We also talked a lot about things we’re doing at Burton Snowboards to make snowboarding more accessible and increase participation. The Global Riglet Tour we did last year was a great way to bring snowboarding to cities around the world, offering kids a free and accessible introduction to snowboarding.

What are the biggest contributing factors in the current participation trends in snowboarding?

A majority of the kids who grew up riding are now in their family-building and

career-building years. Some of them have dropped out of the sport to take on a new job and/or raise a family. This is a great opportunity for us as an industry to invite these snowboarders back to the sport by encouraging families and youth to ride together. Creating accessible and fun snowboarding environments for family and youth is crucial to creating another successful generation of snowboarders.

That said, we’re seeing a lot of growth among beginner snowboarders, especially with kids ages six and under. Our Riglet Park program has seen exponential growth over the past three years and is helping pave the way for resorts’ success with young kids who want to stand sideways from the start.

One factor is related to snowboard lessons. Last season, even though we saw a decline in overall lessons, the average rate of people taking lessons increased. This is important for retaining more people. If they have a good coach and lesson, the chances of them having success on a board and becoming a lifelong snowboarder increases.

And what do you think are the most important ways to re-establish a growth pattern?

I still believe the lowest hanging fruit for the snowsports industry is to increase the conversion rate for first timers by creating accessible and fun terrain-based learning programs like I’ve mentioned above.

It’s also important to recognize that, like all sports, snowboarding needs to continue to mature and evolve. The resorts that are learning and understanding the Gen Z’ers and this evolving market are doing well. They are actively making adjustments to their business plans and the ways they market to snowboarders. Coming up with innovative and progressive programs that bring new riders in, keep them engaged, and encourage them to come back for more is critical.

At Burton, we do so much to help bring new people to the sport and make sure their experience is a good one. We are working on a variety of Learn to Ride programs that will continue to make the snowboarding experience better at resorts for new riders of all ages. One new youth-specific program we recently tested incorporates snowboarding into physical

COURTESY OF JEFF BOLIBA

education classes in schools. Although this is a very new concept for us, we had a ton of success when we tested it out in Vermont schools earlier this year, and we plan to continue the program this winter.

What can even the smallest areas do to make it easier for new participants to get involved in snowboarding?

There are still some resorts out there that are not teaching young kids how to snowboard, which is a real missed opportunity. There is a second generation of snowboarders who want to share snowboarding with their children and resorts need to take advantage of this.

Terrain-based teaching is a great example of a new way to teach people how to snowboard that is yielding a much higher retention rate when done properly. We have focused on our Learn To Ride program since 1998 and now have Burton Learn To Ride programs at 190 partner resorts around the world. These resorts are committed to giving people the best introduction to snowboarding possible and making their first snowboard experience a fun and successful one.

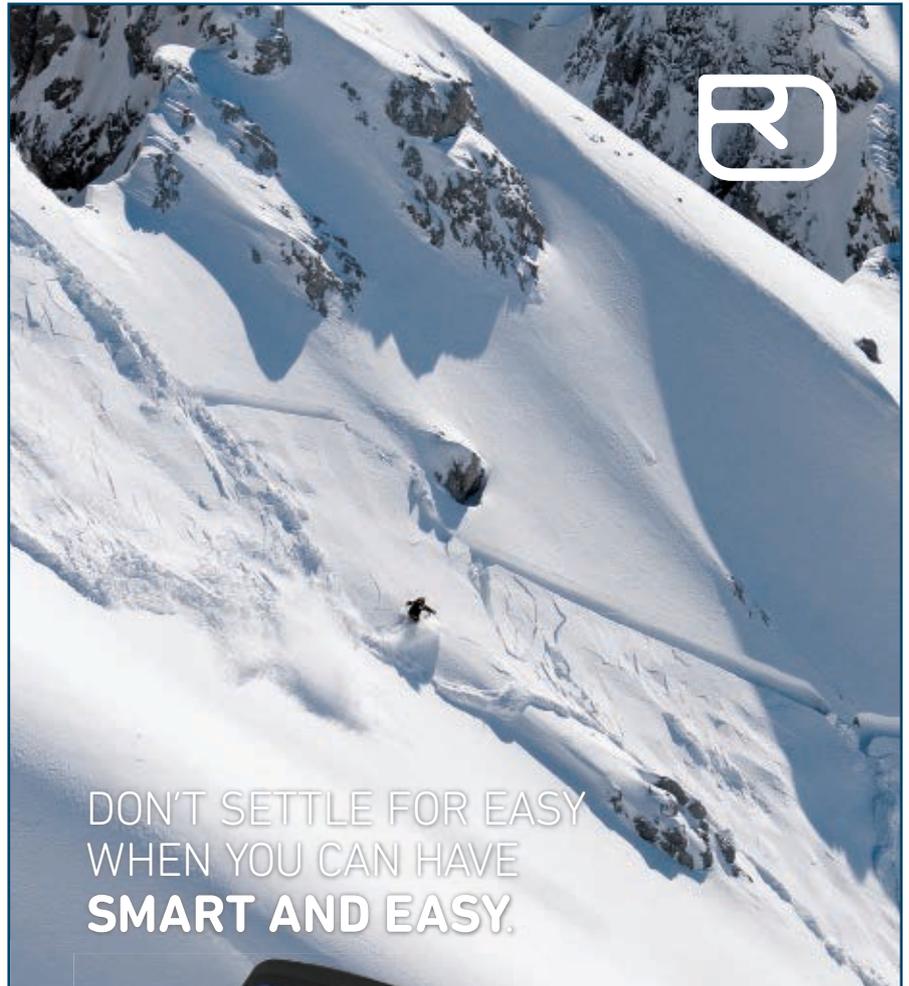
Other small things coaches can do is keep learning ratios low so they can actually support the first-time rider by helping them fall less and making sure they have a great overall experience.

Where do you see snowboarding in the next five to 10 years in terms of participation?

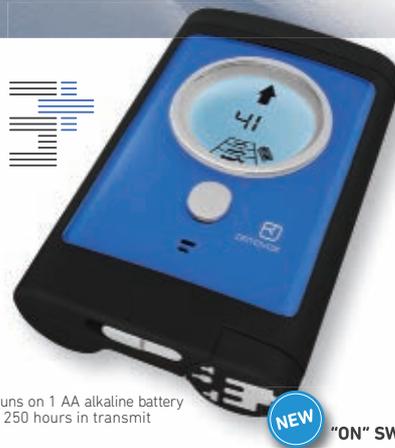
The pace at which Generation Z is living is incredibly fast, and how much information they are taking in is amazing. You have to realize this is the first generation to not know the world without the Internet. They are completely integrated into social networks and they are changing the way things are done – our industry needs to pay close attention to that and adapt accordingly.

I think family snowboarding is something you will see more in the future as we re-engage this second generation of riders and invite their kids to snowboard too. Embracing this will be key to participation.

Also, I think terrain utilization at resorts will become even more creative, expanding beyond parks and learning environments.



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We're continuing to do everything in our power to address the growth of participation in our sport, so that snowboarding continues to thrive for generations to come. And this past season, we saw some positive figures. Not only are snowboarding participation and resort visits up year to date, this season the industry made progress in growing beginner conversion from 17 percent to a little over 18 percent at the local level. There was key growth in the number

of days on the hill for both the beginner and core snowboard category.

Additionally, women's overall participation in the sport has been growing over time and this year we saw an increase in participation from 18- to 24-year-olds. Women are key to creating new snowboarders as they manage most purchase and vacation decisions, so this is great news. Based on all of this, we believe snowboarding is in a good place for the long-term. 



HOW INSTRUCTORS ARE HELPING TURN THE TIDE *In The Conversion Battle*

BY PETER KRAY



potential customers would be more interested in cruise ships and all-inclusive golf vacations, leaving our fresh, white slopes as worthless as desert sand, with nothing but first tracks for snow pros to sow.

But a few things happened on the way to skiing and snowboarding's funeral. Rather than declining, snowsports participation actually jumped between 2000 and 2010, with skier visits breaking the 60 million participant mark for the first time ever in the 2007–08 season, and again in 2010–11. One reason was that passholders stepped up to the chair, putting in more days at their favorite hills. Another was that lapsed skiing and snowboarding families returned, with their kids in tow. And according to an article in the *NSAA Journal* by Nate Fristoe of RRC Associates (the firm that conducts market research for NSAA), “retaining existing aging guests longer than we had anticipated” helped stem the tide, too. Score one for the old school.

What didn't change, at least not dramatically, was the conversion rate of new skiers and snowboarders. The number of first-timers who want to stay with the sport remains anemic, and, according to Fristoe and NSAA, the conversion rate has only risen to 16.7 percent in the past 10 years.

What's worse is that last season the number of people trying skiing and snowboarding for the first time dropped below one million, to about 930,000 according to NSAA's *National Demographic Survey*. Which means our efforts to inspire lifelong riders potentially rely on a smaller pool.

The good news is that if conversion rates are ever going to dramatically increase, the time for it to happen is now. That's because ski and snowboard instruction programs across the country are undergoing a kind of renaissance in terms of how beginners are taught, with new ideas and exciting new programs showing marked improvement in getting newcomers to keep coming back to the hill.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL EQUATION

The biggest impact the *Model for Growth* might have had on PSIA-AASI members is that it re-emphasized just how important professional instruction is to the overall health of the ski and snowboard industry. There is a saying that “what gets measured gets done,” and by providing an annual report card on industry conversion rates, mountain managers and marketing departments were suddenly more aware and potentially more invested in helping ski schools realize their instructional goals.

One the most obvious offshoots of the study was the creation of Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month and the subsequent Bring a Friend initiative, both industry supported programs that tout the benefits of professional instruction. By marketing professional instruction on a national level; providing substantial lesson, lift, and equipment packages to first-timers, as well as prizes for participants; the two programs do more to explain and promote the benefit of professional instruction than any ski school could ever do on its own.

Having some of the most influential people in the industry support that message helps as well. In a 2002 interview with NSAA President Michael Berry for TheSnowPros.org, Berry was clear in how he perceives the importance of PSIA-AASI instructors. “To a

When the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) first released the *Model for Growth* in 2000, it was as if someone had sounded an alarm bell. That's because despite all the excitement surrounding snowsports at the time – from the continuing explosion of snowboarding to the advent of fat skis to what may have well been the high-mark of telemark participation in the U.S. – the report identified several potential clouds on the industry's horizon, and they weren't filled with snow.

The problem? Of the more than one million people who tried skiing or snowboarding for the first time each year, only about 15 percent decided it was something they would continue to do. The industry was failing to inspire more than 80 percent of the people who had decided to give our favorite sports a try. And worse, many of our most valued repeat customers – especially that greatest generation of skiers, the Baby Boomers – were aging out of the sport.

In NSAA's worst-case scenario, from 2000 to 2010 snowsports would lose up to one million participants each year. And all our

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resorts have announced their commitment to similar programs this year. Bromley Mountain in Vermont, Cranmore Mountain Resort in New Hampshire, Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort in Massachusetts, and Snowshoe Mountain in West Virginia have all partnered with Snow Operating, LLC, a snowsports instruction consulting company, to initiate terrain-based learning practices at their respective resorts.

“Terrain-based learning is much more than just shaping snow. It’s an entirely new teaching methodology compiled with a specially designed on-snow experience,” said Snowshoe’s president and chief operating officer Frank Deberry in a recent press release. “It’s a full cultural shift for a resort that focuses on removing the anxiety and fear around first-time skiing and boarding, and leaves the learner with the fun and excitement of snow-play.”

But TBT – with an emphasis on the “teaching” aspect – also benefits from the skill and experience of the instructor running each class. And Jiminy Peak, along with areas such as Park City in Utah, has long favored having some of their most accomplished instructors teach beginners to even further ensure their success. It’s this focus on creating an absolutely memorable and professional experience right from the first lesson that is starting to pay big dividends in raising the conversion rate, especially at areas like Mountain Creek, where more than 40 percent of the first-timers they taught last season came back for more (see “Conversion Cup Winners Share Their Secrets” on page 24).

Other areas are also enjoying the results of innovative approaches to instruction. Perfect North Slopes in Indiana offers 400 vertical feet of skiing and riding, and serves more than 200,000 ski days each season (along with an additional 100,000 snowtubers). Given the region, Perfect North Slopes President Chip Perfect said a majority of visitors are first-timers, which is why he includes a free beginning ski or snowboard lesson – that’s right, free – with every lift ticket he sells.

Customers might come once a year for three or four years before they buy in, Perfect said, “Which is why we include a new skier or boarder lesson in every ticket.” He added that, economically, the area raised the price of all lift tickets by \$2 to offset the loss of lesson revenue. Philosophically, he said, “What other activity do you go do where you pay for admission, then have to pay more to learn how to do it? I can’t imagine how any customer would find that appealing.”

Before the new policy, Perfect North Slopes taught about 10,000 ski lessons per year. Now they do 40,000. And any customer who rents equipment – which Perfect estimated at about 63 percent – can also swap between skis and snowboards if they want, and even take two beginner lessons before the day is through.

It’s an interesting example of how one ski area made a major change in how it serves beginners, by removing any obstacles for interacting with the ski and snowboard school. With all of the other options our customers have, it seems that in order to keep reaching them – and then inspiring them – we need to keep learning too. ❄️

Peter Kray is the lead content officer for PSLA-AASI, focusing on emerging ski and snowboarding trends and on-snow innovations. He skis, telemarks, and snowboards out of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is co-founder of the Gear Institute (gearinstitute.com), a website founded to professionalize the testing of outdoor equipment.

large extent, instructors are our foot soldiers to the cause. At the end of the day, it’s the experience that will drive return visits and repeat lessons,” said Berry. “Of course we’re talking about the entire resort experience – from the parking lot, to the rental department, ticket window, learning center, lift line, cafeteria, and back to the parking lot – we have to deliver a remarkable experience each time and at each touch point. Nevertheless, given the time spent with our guests, and the intimacy of that interaction, instructors will always serve as a key force in delivering a lion’s share of that memorable experience.”

In discussing the findings of SnowSports Industries *America’s Participation Study*, SIA Director of Research Kelly Davis agreed, saying her data showed “When it comes to growing the sport, ski and snowboard instructors play an absolutely critical role.

“When you look at the difference between someone learning to ski from, say, their boyfriend, or learning from a professional instructor, the pro will teach you the right skills in a conflict-free situation, and maybe save your relationship too,” she said. “The industry absolutely needs ski and snowboard instructors to survive. They are the first ambassadors for our sports, and have the knowledge and experience to introduce newcomers to not only the mechanics of skiing and snowboarding, but the depth of the experience as well.”

ON-SNOW APPLICATION

Of course all those kudos won’t move the needle unless there is buy-in from the individual resorts. This season may prove pivotal as the number of areas committed to terrain-based teaching continues to grow.

Highlighted in the Fall 2013 issue of *32 Degrees*, terrain-based teaching (TBT), also known as terrain-based learning, is predicated upon the design of both natural and manmade features such as rollers, ramps, and spines – which all function to help beginners slow down or stop naturally, and more quickly experience the movements of skiing and snowboarding on their own.

Since that fall issue came out, which pointed to areas such as Breckenridge and Vail in Colorado, Northstar in California, and New Jersey’s Mountain Creek as hot spots for TBT, several other

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CONVERSION CUP WINNERS SHARE THEIR SECRETS

The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) named New Jersey's Mountain Creek Resort as the winner of its third annual Conversion Cup Challenge, sponsored by Head Wintersports. Other finalists for the Cup included Oregon's Mt. Bachelor (winner of the 2012 Cup) and Pennsylvania's Camelback Mountain Resort. Conversion Cup applications are judged on a number of key skier and snowboarder conversion indicators, including:

- » Increases in Level 1 lesson volumes
- » Level 1 lesson volumes in relation to total skier and snowboarder visits
- » Quantifiable success of multi-lesson packages
- » Season-to-date sales and repeat sales data on specific "learn-to" packages
- » Overall data collection and tracking capabilities and sophistication
- » Marketing ingenuity, creativity, use of new media, etc.

This year's award winner and two runners-up share their secrets of success, and how your ski school can join in.

Mountain Creek Banks on Terrain-Based Teaching

Mountain Creek Director of Sales and Marketing Hugh Reynolds said that before the area first committed to terrain-based teaching, they were seeing the standard 15 percent conversion rate. "If you were running a restaurant with only a 15 percent return rate, I don't think you'd be in business very long," Reynolds said.

An evaluation of their overall beginner experience also found that most beginners "don't get the experience they imagine when they first come to the mountain, which is that they'd actually be riding the chair and coming down the slopes," he said. With terrain-based teaching, "Guests feel connected to the culture, because with mini-pipes, rollers, and return walls, they can start to slide right away, and learn at their own pace. It also helps begin building the muscle memory that they'll need as they progress."

Now, almost 40 percent of those first-timers return for a second visit. And more than 50 percent of those guests are returning to complete their third lesson. "By removing the barriers of fear from the learning process, guests are having more fun, learning faster, and creating positive connections with our sports that make them to want to come back and do it again," Reynolds said.

Mt. Bachelor Conversion Success Built on Multi-Year Vision

"When the NSAA first put out the *Beginner Handbook*, which outlines different theories and initiatives to get beginners committed to the sport, we came up with our own program offering the kind of significant value we thought people wouldn't be able to pass up," said Andy Goggins, Mt. Bachelor's director of marketing and communications.

Through Mt. Bachelor's "Ski or Ride in 5" program, never-evers are offered introductory deals to get them into the sport, and those who



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stick with it get substantial pass discounts for the next two seasons after that. For \$199, guests ages 6 and up who have never skied before receive five days of lift tickets, lessons, and rentals. Upon completion of the program, adults receive a 12-day pass for the remainder of the season, while kids and teens receive a full season pass.

Going two seasons further, "graduates" of the program can purchase a season pass for the following season at 50 percent off. The second season after they complete the program, they still get 25 percent off a full pass.

Since its inception, Level 1 lesson volume at Mt. Bachelor has increased more than 20 percent. And from the 2011–12 season to the 2012–13 season, participation increased from 583 to 883 participants. More importantly, when Goggins looks back at that first wave of never-evers who enrolled in the program in 2009, he finds that 27 percent of them bought a pass last season — at full price.

Camelback Capitalizes on Discount Deals

According to Camelback Snowsports School Director Tony Keller, one of the biggest factors in creating new skiers and snowboarders was marketing programs the area already had. "We've had our Explorer's Program — which includes three lessons, lifts, and rentals — for many years, but three years ago started marketing it and really pushing it," he said.

Keller said that after selling a total of 650 Explorer Program cards during the 2010–11 season, Camelback sold almost 4,300 cards at \$99 a pop last season (if purchased before December 23). In addition, Camelback offers the Camel Card, a \$49 discount card with which purchasers get every third lift ticket for free. Keller said 69 percent of the students in the Explorer Club program return at least once to the area, and 11 percent purchased the Camel Card.

While the discounts are key to getting new students on the snow, the lesson experience is what keeps them coming back. "For the people who do come to try it, they have already made a decision that this is something they can do, and so we have to ensure that they enjoy it the first time," said Keller.

The three-lesson plan helps boost that enjoyment by making sure new students understand there is a progression to learning a new sport. "At the end of each lesson, we make a point of letting them know what to expect next," he said. "We make it clear there are always new levels they can reach."

— Peter Kray



ANDY MAHRE
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KEEPING WOMEN ON SNOW



THINKSTOCK

Women account for more than half of the U.S. population. According to travel research, the moms among them also make the decisions on anywhere from 65 to 90 percent of a family's vacation destinations, ultimately deciding whether the kids hit the beach or the snow. At the retail level, SnowSports Industries America recently reported that women accounted for \$1 billion in ski and snowboard gear purchases last season, with 59 percent of those dollars going to ski and snowboard apparel. For all the professional ski and snowboard instructors reading this article, women are also a force of continuing inspiration, income, and life-informing education, providing the impetus and energy for much of what we do.

Yet there is a concern they are leaving the sport – especially after the age of 30 – for reasons ranging from professional to personal, and often based on time constraints, family

responsibilities, and fitness considerations. This is bad news for everyone who makes their living on the snow; because when we lose their ideas and enthusiasm, we often lose that same spark from their friends and family as well. Bottom line: if mom isn't on the chair, it's a good bet the kids are off doing something else, too.

In the following series of articles, we wanted to take a closer look at what helps mom – and women of all ages and backgrounds, whether they have children or not – stay involved with skiing and snowboarding. A PSIA-AASI Nordic Team member, two *32 Degrees* regular contributors, and lots of *you* took the time to share personal experiences and insights. After you read the following features, we'd certainly enjoy hearing more ideas from you. Please send an email to 32Degrees@thesnowpros.org with your best practices for keeping women happy, fit, and on skis or a snowboard all winter long.



Reach Women

SO THEY CAN REACH OTHERS & STAY INVOLVED

TEXT BY MEGAN SPURKLAND; PHOTOS BY SCOTT DICKERSON

In the world of cross country skiing it's often said that the strength of a community is determined by how many women know how to ski – and love it. In my experience, women who learn to love the sport go on to teach their families to ski, organize youth programs, coach school teams, and raise money for ski equipment.

I've seen this play out in my small community of Homer, Alaska. As women become more technically advanced skiers, they gain the confidence to take on leadership roles with Girl Scout ski groups, junior nordic programs, and junior high and high school race teams, and are willing to instruct their own peers in adult lessons. I believe that if we create teaching styles and unique programs that encourage women to return to, or learn a snowsport, we can increase participation across *all* age groups and genders.

Developing and coordinating a women's cross country skiing group for the past five years has given me much insight into why

women stay involved in skiing. From my perspective, there are two major tenets to abide by when instructing women: make the technical social and create a positive-feedback environment.

MAKE THE TECHNICAL SOCIAL

I've found that almost all women who take a group or individual ski lesson are there not only to learn to ski, but to connect with other people. Most women find that a group or an instructor can play a major part in their understanding of skiing and their ability to dedicate time to master new skills. Indeed, because of their continuous social activity, multi-day or multi-week clinics are very popular with women.

As Michael Berry, the president of National Ski Areas Association indicated at PSIA-AASI Fall Conference 2012, the snowsports industry is seeing a decline in participation by women, starting around age 30. We have to examine what in their lives is causing this and how we can offer them something valuable.



Megan Spurkland's women's cross country ski group offers a year-round opportunity to get in the groove or get on a roll together.



As a 34-year-old woman with a toddler, a business, and a husband, I know I have to be very careful with my time or else something will be left unattended. You likely know – or are – a woman who, in true caretaker fashion, puts the needs of others ahead of her own. The beauty of cross country skiing (and any snowsport for that matter) is that it offers a great way for women to take care of *themselves*, particularly their physical and mental health.

I can maintain great physical health by skiing on my own two hours a day, but that leaves me with little time left to socialize – and without social connection, my mental health might not be as good as it could be. That's why I've chosen to be involved with a women's ski group; it keeps me on top of my physical health and allows me to spend time with like-minded women who have become a pillar of my mental health. How do we incorporate this gender-specific idea into ski instruction? We make the *technical* social.

Here's an example. Fellow PSIA-AASI Nordic Team member David Lawrence once led me and other clinic participants through an exercise for how to kinesthetically identify the area of our foot that we should have most of our weight on throughout the majority of cross country skiing techniques.

First, he had us stand in our boots and lift our toes until they were bumping against the top of our boots. Then we relaxed our feet. Next, we had to stand on our toes and lift our heels up away

from the ground. Then we relaxed again. Lastly, he had us lift our heels *and* toes up and asked us where all our weight was. It was on the ball of our foot. He named this the "sweet spot" and told us that is where we should strive to be while we skied.

Several years later, I took that technical instruction and modified it to fit the setting of a women's beginner clinic. I had all the ladies stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, and pull their toes up against the tops of their boots. While they stood like this, we went around the circle and offered a brief description of something we did in our lives that wasn't our favorite thing to do. "Dishes." "Sitting at my computer." "Grocery shopping." Then we relaxed our feet.

Next, I asked them to stand on their toes and lift their heels up off their skis. Again, we went around the circle naming things that we found ourselves doing in our daily lives that we didn't really want to be doing. "Laundry." "Carpooling." "Waiting in line at the post office." Once everyone had chimed in, we relaxed again.

Finally, I had them lift both their toes and heels off the ground. I asked them where their weight was. They answered that the weight was now on the ball of their foot. I told them that this was the "sweet spot," and that the goal should be to find their weight on this sweet spot as they skied. If they found their weight was on their heels or the tips of their toes it was like they were folding

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laundry *again*, and they needed to find their way back to the sweet spot. As a finale, we went around the circle while standing on our sweet spots and said what the sweet spots of our lives were. “Skiing with my grandkids.” “Running.” “Cooking good food.”

With that short exercise, a ski lesson can be transformed into a social experience that almost every woman will enjoy. Not only do they learn a bit of technical information, they leave the day knowing some details about each other’s lives, which is how women can form friendships. Weaving social interaction into technical information requires a lot of creativity, but it can be short and almost invisible when done well.

CREATE A POSITIVE-FEEDBACK ENVIRONMENT

When we learn about movement analysis as instructors, we are often told to observe, describe, and prescribe how to change. Usually somewhere in the describe part, a phrase like this will slip in: “Wow, your ski-to-ski weight transfer is really nice and complete, but when you do it you are letting your hips fall back.” As a woman, I’ve found that the word *but*, followed by a description of what we are not doing well, can completely deflate us and make us wish we hadn’t signed up for that lesson at all. In my experience, performing movement analysis and having a constructive conversation about technique with a female client without mentioning anything in a negative context can be a huge challenge.

Think about that 30-something woman who got up at the crack of dawn but woke the baby too early when she ground the coffee beans. Then she actually managed to get all the kids’ gear in the car but forgot the water bottles. Then she got everyone

THAT’S WHY I’VE CHOSEN TO BE INVOLVED WITH A WOMEN’S SKI GROUP; IT KEEPS ME ON TOP OF MY PHYSICAL HEALTH AND ALLOWS ME TO SPEND TIME WITH LIKE-MINDED WOMEN WHO HAVE BECOME A PILLAR OF MY MENTAL HEALTH.

– Megan Spurkland

to the ski area in time for the first lift, but forgot her wallet in the car and had to walk back to get it. By the time she’s in her lesson, she doesn’t want to be reminded of the thing she’s doing wrong; she would appreciate praise for what she is doing well and encouragement to do it better. (And, yes, the same scenario could play out with a sleep-deprived and harried dad.)

A woman who feels encouraged by the instructor will be a more receptive learner. And, frankly, this is a great approach with *all* students, no matter their gender or age. As instructors, we should learn to mentally identify what it is students need to change, but not voice it as a negative. Here is an example from my experience as a student:

At last fall’s Team Workshop at Copper Mountain, Colorado, I found myself on the slopes in borrowed tele gear with some of the nation’s most accomplished telemark instructors. As a cross country specialist who lives 250 miles from the nearest chairlift, this was kind

of like walking on the moon. I was a total beginner and it felt *weird*. Me: “Um, guys, can we put the bar down? Please?!”

On the manmade snow (that stuff is slippery!), I was suddenly in a mock exam, attempting ridiculous maneuvers like short-radius, no-poles turns on black diamonds, leaping turns with lead changes, and narrow-corridor hockey stops. Let me tell you, I was the 30-something woman who got her boots in the bindings, but felt like I couldn’t do anything else right.

Then along came Scotty McGee, our esteemed team coach, who continually impresses me with his amazing ability to teach. He didn’t disappoint. He skied up and said, “Wow, you are looking great. I have something for you to try. When you make your turn, I want you to pull your foot back, just slide it backwards in the snow until you are in the tele position. Just pull it back like you are spreading icing with a butter knife.” He could have thrown a thousand “buts” at me, or said that I wasn’t doing this or that; and instead he was simply positive and effective. I wasn’t left with anything negative to mull over or feel dumb about. I believe this technique is absolutely key to instructing women.

Try to catch yourself before serving up that old sandwich; you know, the one with a description of what your student is doing well, followed by what he or she is doing badly, and then another thing done well. Stick with just the bread of that sandwich – serve up only the positive: “I really like where your

hips are. Let’s see if you can move them even farther in front of your ankle!”

This is a tricky skill and one that I work to master daily. Can you imagine if we could master this skill in all of our relationships, not just the instructor/female client ones?

WHAT WOMEN WANT

I believe that in order to keep women involved in snowsports, we need to change our philosophy on teaching them. Why not start by incorporating social elements into technical instruction and conducting movement analysis in an entirely positive manner. We can do both of these things without sacrificing the integrity of our lesson content, and the result will likely be a receptive and happy client who wants to come back for more.

Ultimately, the woman who grows to love skiing extends her reach to embrace a role in women’s ski groups, clubs, and school race teams. And *that’s* great for everyone involved. ☑

Megan Spurkland directs a popular women’s ski program in Homer, Alaska. She spends the winter instructing cross country skiers, ski racing, and enjoying her time as a PSIA-AASI Nordic Team member. She spends the summer aboard her 52-foot seine boat in Prince William Sound in Alaska, catching salmon and “getting out of shape.”

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COURTESY OF ASPEN/SNOWMASS

If Mama's Skiing, Everybody's Skiing

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR GETTING MORE FAMILIES ON THE MOUNTAIN

BY KEVIN JORDAN

Let's face it; our mothers have given us some great advice through the years. Whether it's been to wear clean underwear, finish our vegetables, mind our manners, or any other cliché – mama usually knows best.

That certainly can be the case when it comes to deciding whether skiing or snowboarding is a priority. According to Mary Jo Tarallo, executive director of Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month and the Bring a Friend Challenge, "Women make 80 percent of the buying decisions in a family – regardless of their background. If mom is convinced that skiing and snowboarding are good investments for her family, then chances are the family will start skiing or snowboarding."

So what are resorts doing to target mothers and make snowsports vacations easier for families? Here are a few examples of the challenges the industry faces, and some solutions that are working.

CONVERSION UP, PARTICIPATION DOWN

Conversion of beginners to lifelong skiers and riders is a hot topic in the industry at the moment. In 1999–2000, the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) came out with the *Model for Growth* and presented research that out of a 100 first-time participants, 85 say "no thank you" to skiing and snowboarding after initially trying either form of sliding. The other 15 percent convert to core or lifelong participants, resulting in a 15 percent conversion rate. NSAA recently published more findings showing that the industry has improved the conversion rate from 15 percent to 17 percent. But at the same time, the overall population of first-time participants is declining.

Here's one issue; skiing and snowboarding have many variables. No two days are alike, which is why many of us are so passionate about the sport and enjoy wondering what tomorrow will bring. However, this means we have very little control over certain variables, like the weather. For example, instructors know that

rain in the base area could mean snow up at higher elevations. A storm today can mean an epic powder day tomorrow. While this is part of the allure for us, beginners and less experienced riders often can't read these nuances on their own.

Another issue is that snowsports often require people to conquer vast logistical obstacles, from booking flights, hotels, and lessons to dealing with how weather may affect travel to their destination. Just finding a place to park on a busy day can be a huge accomplishment! As core participants of this sport, we've grown accustomed to the logistics involved in our sport. Plus, according to NSAA research, 94 percent of core skiers and riders were introduced to the sport of skiing and snowboarding by someone they know and trust. In other words, they had initial help overcoming the logistics involved with these sports. This is one of the reasons the Bring a Friend Challenge has become a component of Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month.

ADDING A KID TO THE EQUATION

The logistics become exponentially more difficult when kids become part of the equation. Just getting from the parking lot to a base lodge can seem like a daunting polar expedition with kids. Kristen Lummis, author of the blog, the Brave Ski Mom recounts:

“When our kids were really little, they had rolling ski and boot bags nearly as tall as themselves. All of their gear was put into these bags and they pulled them to the Powderhorn lodge every Saturday and Sunday to get ready to ski. We had season passes, so we never had to wait in line. For us, skiing should have been a breeze. But it wasn't. Some weeks, socks were all bunched up and wouldn't fit into boots. Other weeks, mittens got wet and cold and lost. Then there would be bathroom emergencies when pants wouldn't come off quite quickly enough. It was trying, especially on a powder day!”

Imagine yourself in a beginner family's shoes. Sure, they may have done some research, but they have not been through the process of attempting to ski and snowboard for the first time, let alone just get to the lift. Going back to the weather factor, a first-time participant might not even know that you need goggles in a snowstorm; they might never have heard of a neck gaiter or even be aware that their jacket has a powder skirt. Such a guest would most likely give up trying to learn the sport because they are tired, cold, and wet. So they go into the base lodge or on-mountain restaurant to warm up. Here they find out that a hot chocolate costs more than they hoped lunch would. Another strike against skiing!



COURTESY OF ASPEN/SNOWMASS

WHAT IS WORKING?

Lucky for us and the whole snowsports industry, innovative programs and strategies abound.

Nanny McSki

So what's being done to ease the burden on families – mom specifically? Enter the Nanny McSki Doorstep Program at Crystal Mountain, Michigan. According to Ron Shepard, director of Crystal Mountain, “Nanny McSki was specifically designed to take the burden off mom. We've noticed how moms tend to get the raw end of the vacation deal – from breakfast to bedtime, they spend their vacation seeking gloves, wiping noses, arranging activities, and planning meals.”

Nanny McSki instructors contact parents before they arrive at the resort to gather sizing information and get details about the children. These instructors also show up to the family's lodging with all the appropriate forms for rentals and more. Children will start skiing or snowboarding right away, or be taken to get rentals via the resort's shuttle bus. The experience includes breakfast and lunch and has a 3:1 ratio of students to instructor for \$389 per day.

Shepard adds, “We bring the kids home safe, tired, and happy. If the parents wish to have a quiet evening out, or mom wants to schedule a spa treatment, we can accommodate this as well.”

Crystal Mountain also offers a wallet-sized “Dad Card” displaying information about their child's height, weight, and shoe size. Generally speaking, fathers don't have these numbers as dialed in as mothers do. The card helps dads be more engaged in getting rentals and shopping for their kids.

Budget-friendly Options

The costs associated with skiing and snowboarding can often be prohibitive for new participants. Some resorts, like New Hampshire's Bretton Woods, offer a Family Interchange lift ticket. For \$79, both mom and dad can ski on one lift ticket that prints out the same bar code. While they cannot ski together at the same time, the Family Interchange ticket alleviates some of the costs and also frees up a parent to help a child in the base lodge. California resorts Sugar Bowl, Northstar, Sierra-at-Tahoe, and Tahoe Donner all offer similar lift tickets.



FUSE

Seven Springs Mountain Resort in Pennsylvania offers a private one-hour “Ski with Me” lesson for \$86 (weekdays) or \$107 (weekend and holidays) in which the parents are actively involved in the lesson. Many other resorts offer a similar product called “Mom and Me” and target both mothers and younger age groups, typically ages 3 and up. New Mexico’s Ski Apache offers a “Mom and Me” and a “Dad and Me” private lesson at \$199 for two people.

Women-only options

Catering to moms doesn’t just mean catering to her kids. California’s Squaw Valley is one of several resorts that offer dedicated women’s clinics and camps. “For Women, By Women” and “Women of Winter” are two women-lead camps and clinics designed for women to improve their skills in a supportive learning environment. Women with children can enroll their kids in ski school at the same time so both mom and child can enjoy learning environments specific to them.

Customer-service Excellence

Remember the parking lot expedition mentioned previously? Deer Valley, Utah, has this one figured out. They offer valet parking and guest-service attendants whose main job is to help you and your family with curbside loading and unloading. Just having an extra person carry some equipment can help a new family conquer the maze that is the parking lot. This may be one reason why Deer Valley continues to garner the number one guest service ranking in *SKI Magazine’s* reader surveys.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We are all passionate about the sport and are familiar with the logistics. But how we market the sport often fails to connect with the beginner. Take a look at your resort’s marketing materials. If there are only photos and/or videos of “extreme” skiing and powder shots, ask about incorporating images of families.

On a more personal scale, the next time you’re walking through the parking lot at your home area, see if you can lend a hand to parents with kids in tow. It could make their day. ☺

Kevin Jordan is the children’s coordinator at Aspen/Snowmass’s Buttermilk Mountain. When not on the slopes, he writes for Examiner.com as a national and Denver ski instruction examiner.

FIVE SIMPLE TIPS to Make a Family’s Day

1 Smile

When you make eye contact with a guest, smile. It does not matter whether you are in uniform or not. Smiling is contagious, and if a family had a rough trudge across the parking lot, smiling might just help them relax.

2 Take a photo

If you see parents taking photos of the children, offer to take a photo of the whole family. Many guests want a family portrait but are not certain who to ask. Offering takes the guesswork out of the equation, and most families will take you up on your offer.

3 Decode the trail map

If you see a guest looking at a trail map, ask if they have any questions or need help finding the right terrain. You know your home mountain better than most; share the knowledge. You never know, those guests could turn into your next clients.

4 Lend a hand

You don’t have to be in uniform to offer help with carrying skis across the parking lot. Being friendly and offering to help can go a long way in building customer loyalty.

5 Share the local lowdown

Many families only get to ski or ride for one week a year or less. Give them the local beta by suggesting your favorite restaurant or an event that might be going on in town. Many guests want the insider info but don’t know how to ask. If you know the bar menu is cheaper than the full restaurant menu, give them the tip. They’ll feel like they have some special resort knowledge and want to come back.

—Kevin Jordan



REACHING WOMEN: SnowPros Share Their Best Practices

With recent ski and snowboard studies showing declining participation by women age 30 and over, we asked PSIA-AASI members to weigh in via Facebook on how best to keep women involved in snowsports. Here is the trove of insights our inquiry generated:

I specialize in teaching women over 30. One of the main things I see is that resorts tend to put older ladies with younger male instructors, which is not very comforting to the lady. When I teach these women they almost always comment on how happy they are to have an older female instructor who understands their fears and their responsibilities to their family, work, etc. They do not want to get hurt and do have a fear that I believe only a female can understand and work through.

To date, I have had no disappointing lessons. They leave happy and satisfied that they were able learn a new sport and enjoy the snow in a relaxed setting; and they return for more lessons.

I know there are not many female instructors, but I think the resorts would benefit from the return of female older clients if they set them up with female instructors, which would undoubtedly set them up for success.

— *Deborah Fergus, Central Division, Alpine III*

I agree with Deborah Fergus. Most women over 30 will learn best from another woman. We move differently. We learn differently. And we have different goals. I love teaching women and specialize in those who have been traumatized by a man on the ski slope with the “just-follow-me tactic.” Last season I found two women in the bathroom sobbing. Their men had “over-terrained” them. I now have two new students!

— *Tammi Sjoden, Rocky Mountain Division, Alpine II*

As an over-30 woman, the best thing I ever did to up my skills was a weekend women’s workshop. We had two days of lessons in small groups with the same female instructor as well as basic avalanche awareness. Social evenings were a big part too, with yoga class, hot pools, and bubbly! We all stayed on site in the lodge together, and the friends I made that weekend have gone on to become some of my closest friends.

— *Sarah Hampton, Eastern Division, Alpine I, Snowboard I*

Weekend women’s groups where the kids are taken care of on site. A mom in that age group is most likely to pass on treating themselves to expensive sports in lieu of kid activities. Then it’s harder to come back into it.

— *Caroline Ahrens; Alaska Division, Alpine III, Children’s Specialist 2*



ISTOCK PHOTO

Women’s-only clinics that have a social component to them. Weekends would be best because many of the women who can afford to take these clinics work during the week.

— *Anne Royar Kerber, Central Division, Alpine II, Children’s Specialist 2*

Talk to women who have parked themselves at a table for the day in the lodge. Show an interest in them. Find out why they aren’t skiing. Invite them to take a lesson. Pass on your enthusiasm. Let them know they can succeed at their own rate.

— *Catherine Sue Douglass Ashley, Northwest Division, Alpine I, Children’s Specialist 1*

Women over 30 often have increased fears – of injury, cold, fitness level. The ski industry needs to address these fears with more information about skiing safely and increasing fitness through skiing or riding.

— *Barbara Krichbaum, Rocky Mountain, Division, Alpine III, Snowboard I*

Daily women-only mountain tours run by a woman. Give improvement tips, but mostly get some miles in. Try different terrain and recommend things to focus on. I’m over 50, a non-instructor, and having a friend bring me into a group got me back into skiing.

— *Cathy Beerman, Weston, Vermont*

This is not happening in Europe; we probably we have more women 30 and over coming back to ski – telemark, cross-country, skinning up, and snowshoe activities are growing. Freeskiing, off piste, powder, etc., are also growing. As ski instructors, we are not keeping up with the market. Now finally we are talking about terrain like it is a new way to teach... just ski and be safe and have fun.

— *Massimo Cavalli, Eastern Division via Zuoz, Switzerland, Alpine III, Telemark III*

Kids’ activities are the culprit; volleyball, basketball, soccer, etc. We need to attract the mother, the kids, and the father.

— *Joe Herson, Central Division, Registered*



POWDER SHOTS & SUPERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Confessions of a Ski Industry Mom:

HOW A DAUGHTER'S BREAKTHROUGH MADE AN ENTIRE FAMILY HAPPY

BY KRISTA CRABTREE

My chin dropped against my helmet strap as I watched my 7-year-old daughter rip down the fall line in an athletic stance, with ski edges tipping effectively and hands forward. This was the moment I dreamed about through all those missed ski days during pregnancy, those powder days I passed up during the early sleep-deprived years.

My husband and I were the couple who placed plastic skis in the toy box before she could walk. We took her out on snow just before her second birthday. That poor parenting moment resulted in tears (on my part) and frustration (my husband's) because all she wanted to do was make angels in the snow.

Not so secretly, we felt as if our kid needed to ski and needed to ski *now* because skiing was our life. We love to ski; our relationship began on the slopes and this new addition to our life better love it too.

SETTING OUR OWN LIMITS

To our credit, over the next five years we pulled ourselves together and kept our little-league-parent fever in check. As two ski industry professionals, we made a conscious effort not to over-terrain our daughter, Trinity. We worked our way from Magic Carpets to green runs and, slowly, to blues. That's not to say we didn't have our foibles, like when we took a wrong turn onto a

WE SMARTENED UP AND ENROLLED OUR DAUGHTER IN SKI SCHOOL. AS WE TOOK ON THE MOUNTAIN AT ADULT SPEED, SOMETHING MAGICAL HAPPENED DURING TRINITY'S TWO DAYS OF LESSONS IN UTAH.

mogul field at a new resort or when a beginner lift closed and we had to ski challenging terrain down the mountain.

We'd watch her ski defensively, brace her turns, and drop her hands, all while screaming and complaining. But those were exceptions to our rule. We enrolled her in ski school, and I remember her first half day at the Tree House at Snowmass (*she* cried when we dropped her off, and *I* cried because she was all smiles when we picked her up), multiple days at Vail (where she got to meet Lindsey Vonn), her first powder days at Crested Butte (they taught her the joys of tree skiing!), and stints at Aspen Highlands, Eldora, Monarch, A-Basin, Copper, Breckenridge, Keystone, and Beaver Creek. She had fun during her lessons and we reinforced what the teachers said during our family free-ski time.

Why then, did we break our rule so blatantly at Snowbird (another bad parenting moment) one day as we shot directly up the tram on our first morning of the trip? I'll admit the allure of powder on a challenging, steep mountain proved too strong. My husband and I salivated at the snow report and wanted to ski off the top as we'd done together before we had a child. We thought that since she'd been skiing black-diamond terrain with us in Colorado she could handle the 'Bird. Long story short: The powder, the steeps, the cold, and the low visibility induced major feelings of fear in our otherwise fearless child. She cried, I cried, and my husband and I fought as we strained to follow the "easiest" route down one of the most challenging mountains in North America.

BACK TO SCHOOL

"Black terrain at Snowbird isn't that different from other mountains, but when you put a foot and half of snow on it, things change and the frustration level raises," explained Rob Sogard, assistant director of the Snowbird Mountain School and coach of the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team. "What steeper terrain or snow variation does is mess with your fundamentals. Our main philosophy is to focus on the basics, such as maintaining a quiet



7-year-old Trinity skis a little powder on Peekaboo, at Snowbird, Utah.

POWDER SHOTS & SUPERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

upper body, standing on the outside ski, and turning your legs rather than your upper body. If kids can learn to ski at the 'Bird, they can ski anywhere."

We had broken the cardinal instruction sin by over-terraining our child and thus ruined a perfectly good powder day. Fortunately, a soak in the hot tub with a view of Gad Valley, burger and fries for Trinity, and a few beers for the adults went a long way toward patching up our painful day.

"The first mistake people make is not putting their kids in ski school," said Sogard. "A lot of our guests come here having skied black terrain at other places and underestimate the day." There's a little solace in knowing we were not alone in our mistake of "underestimating the day," and the mountain. The next day, however, we smartened up and enrolled our daughter in ski school. As we took on the mountain at adult speed, something *magical* happened during Trinity's two days of lessons in Utah.

"What makes Snowbird unique is that the terrain there is consistently challenging," said our daughter's instructor, Andy Ross, a PSIA-AASI Level III from New Zealand who has taught

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT KIDS HAVE A POSITIVE SKIING EXPERIENCE SO THE WHOLE FAMILY GETS TO STAY IN THE GAME. AFTER ALL, A FAMILY THAT SKIS TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER.



Trinity, a Snowbird Mountain School student, thinks about making railroad track turns on Snowbird's Powder Paradise.

POWDER SHOTS & SUPERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

can carve on the groomers, but when you get to the upper Cirque for example, you need to be able to skid. Instructors spend as much time getting clients off their edges and getting them to slip as they do getting them to carve.”

After all the patience, travel, hard work (and money) we put into cultivating an all-mountain skier, Trinity's instructor was able to add the icing to the cake that was her foundation. It all clicked for her on that fourth day in Utah, and as the sun shone on the slopes after the storm she was finally what we hoped and dreamed she would become: a skier.

A FAMILY OF SKIERS - AT LAST

“We encourage parents to send their kids to ski school and then take a family day,” said Nick Herrin, director of the Crested Butte Ski and Ride school, third-term PSIA-AASI Alpine Team member, and a new dad. “We have terrain guidelines and report cards so the parents, the child, and the instructors know what they're working on and where they can go skiing. Matching that to the hill and telling parents where to take the kids sets everyone up for success.”

Ross gave Trinity a trail map marked with their adventures over the 'Bird's three interconnected areas. He had even taken her up the Tram. “It was really fun,” said Trinity of her time with Ross. “He showed me some secret places like the Haunted Forest and also how to do race turns and 360s,” she said. “He was really nice and let me do lots of cool things.”

One thing I witnessed during our trip was how, with the right amount of fun and a student-appropriate message, young skiers can reach the next level in their skiing – and with each level comes new possibilities for the adults. It's important that kids have a positive skiing experience so the whole family gets to stay in the game. After all, a family that skis together, stays together. And if everyone has a great experience, I believe they will stay in the sport and return to their favorite resorts year after year.

“The critical thing to remember is that we all ski because it's fun for us,” added Ross. “That's our big motivation. For kids, they are purely fun-focused.” Skiing reminds us that, at the core, adults are the exact same way. ☺

Krista Crabtree is a Level II alpine instructor and former ski racing coach. She runs the women's program at Colorado's Eldora Mountain resort, teaches for Vail Resort's Her Turn women's camps, and runs her own women's ski testing clinic called She Skis. A freelance writer and gear reviewer, she is also the ski test director for OnTheSnow.com. In her free time, she and her husband happily follow their daughter around the slopes.

for 25 winter seasons in the U.S. and Down Under. “There's a little bit of beginner's terrain and a lot of expert terrain that doesn't really build in a linear fashion. You have to be creative about how you develop skills and where you develop them.”

BUILDING FOR THE BREAKTHROUGH

Through a great combination of creativity and big-mountain, terrain-based teaching, Ross helped Trinity advance her all-mountain skills by honing her athletic stance (difficult for young kids because they have the lion's share of mass above their shoulders), helping her to pressure her tips and edge her skis effectively (“bend like a banana,” he told her). She even referred enthusiastically to the “railroad track turns” she made down runs like Snake Pit and Banana Trees.

“The blend of skills at mountains like Jackson Hole, Crested Butte, or Snowbird tends to be different,” explained Sogard. “You



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HOW SKI SCHOOLS

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Communicate clearly with parents

Parents whose kids ski or ride black terrain can get frustrated with their lessons if the kid spends some time on green terrain. According to Rob Sogard, it's important to respect parent expectations, but instructors should tell parents why it's necessary to go back and work on fundamentals. He advises saying things such as "your child may be able to ski black terrain, but when he does it in a wedge, it's going to hinder his skiing and set him back."

Hire enthusiastic professionals

Being a children's instructor is an important role, and Sogard recommends hiring instructors who work on their own performance and knowledge and want to share it. They should know how to have fun and have the personality for working with different types of people. "We're the go-between for the client and the mountain," said Andy Ross. "The instructor controls the progression for the kid. It's a big responsibility. But it should be a fun journey for everyone, including the instructor."

Keep it fun and simple

Kids like to go places and do things, but instructors know that over-terraining kids will cause them to ski or ride defensively. Seek out the fun places on low-level trails. Ross recommends keeping the message simple, like talking about shapes and drawing them in the snow. "The idea of drawing and using your skis to make impressions in the snow is something they can relate to because they probably draw at home," he said. "It's not rocket science: It's simple because it needs to be when you're dealing with young kids."

Build trust in the first 15 minutes

According to Nick Herrin, the most important thing for instructors to do is to keep the experience family-oriented, organized, and on time — particularly at the beginning of the lesson. "We need to build trust and make the parents feel comfortable," he said. "If mom can focus on herself, then she won't be worried about the kid all day. An instructor has 15 minutes to gain the trust of the parents. In order for the parents to enjoy their time on the hill, you need to make them comfortable — because they're leaving their kids with you for five to six hours. Sometimes it's the first time they've ever left their kids alone."

Watch your pacing

"I don't jump straight from situations that are easy to situations that invoke fear," said Ross. "Build the skills, terrain, and challenge at a realistic pace." If a student does get intimidated, Ross recommends



Snowbird ski instructor Andy Ross has fun while teaching a children's lesson at Snowbird.

POWDER SHOTS & SUPERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

working on skills like sideslipping and traversing. "Students can encounter places where they're not entirely comfortable to make their best turns," he said. "It can happen on any mountain, but particularly at a place like the 'Bird with a lot of sustained, steep terrain that doesn't necessarily build from something easier."

Get on the same page

Report cards, maps, and other post-lesson notes are useful tools to keep parents, kids, and instructors on the same page. At Crested Butte, for example, report cards offer a tactical as well as technical approach by listing what terrain kids should ski and what pace to ski at. "If your kid is at Level 7, for example, then here are three runs to ski and here are five bullet points that she's working on in her technical skiing," said Herrin. "Not only does it empower the child and parents with terrain and technical tips, the report card creates a guideline for the instructors through the different levels and creates consistency for the children's ski and ride school."

— Krista Crabtree

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COURTESY OF BURTON SNOWBOARDS



THE BUZZ IN SNOWBOARDING

WITH NEW EQUIPMENT, TOOLS, AND TERRAIN FEATURES...

WHEN'S THE BEST TIME TO START?

BY
MARK
AIKEN

As a snowboard instructor at Park City, Utah, Jeff Boliba recalls being frustrated with the lack of small-sized equipment – to the point that he actually ground down the toe pieces of children’s ski boots in order to provide young snowboard students with footwear that fit. Years later, while pulling his toddler son Jeffrey in a plastic sled through his Vermont neighborhood, Boliba, now vice president of global resorts at Burton Snowboards, had a thought: why not pull his son on a snowboard?

“At the time, our smallest snowboard was a 100cm,” Boliba says. He drilled a hole in a 100cm board, tied a rope through it, and – *voila!* – Jeffrey was laughing, standing sideways, and balancing. Later still, when Boliba brought his homemade rig to the Magic Carpet at Stowe, Vermont, he was able to get in lots of repetitions without wasting energy strapping and unstrapping Jeffrey’s back foot. “Watching him, a light bulb sort of went on,” says Boliba.

It was an early version of Burton’s Riglet Reel, one of several technological developments that are changing the way we teach snowboarding and expanding what’s possible. Last spring, when the management team at Stowe, my home resort, launched discussions that led to our decision to offer full-day group snowboard lessons to 3-year-olds, I became more interested in the changes that are creating a nationwide buzz around snowboard instruction. What, specifically, *are* the changes and developments that have everyone talking? How can instructors make use of all this new stuff to provide the best experiences for new riders? And when is the best time to start?

THE NEW EQUIPMENT

Bonnie Kolber, a member of Eastern Division’s snowboard examiner training squad, used to think older was better when it



COURTESY OF LIBERTY MOUNTAIN

BECAUSE INSTRUCTORS CAN GIVE THEM A TOW, SMALL RIDERS DON'T WASTE ENERGY UNSTRAPPING BINDINGS AND STAGGERING AWKWARDLY WITH A BOARD STRAPPED TO ONE FOOT.

came to learning to snowboard. “Younger kids didn’t have the motor skill development needed to manipulate a board,” Kolber says. The resources needed to care for the resulting overly-tired kids led snowsports managers to raise minimum age requirements. Recently, however, Kolber has witnessed success stories – and the riders are younger and smaller than ever before. What changed?

“The equipment changed,” says Boliba, who attributes the key modifications to Burton founder Jake Carpenter’s commitment to teaching. Here’s a list of what’s new in equipment:

- **Boards.** Traditionally, snowboards were simply too big for young riders. The would-be riders that Kolber saw struggling to manipulate their boards were standing in boots that were two sizes too big and boards that were longer than the students were tall.

Not new: Burton’s Learn To Ride (LTR) technology. These beginner-friendly boards have convex bases – that is, their edges are beveled ever-so-slightly upward to avoid “catching” the snow and causing hard falls. What *is* new is that a manufacturer is finally making LTR boards in small sizes. For winter 2014 Burton offers boards that are 70 and 80 centimeters long.

- **Boots.** Like boards, Burton is making smaller boots. This is just half the battle: kids need to be able to put on their own boots. I don’t have to tell snowboard instructors that kids want to move, not sit around while their instructor ties laces. “We are making an easy, foldout Velcro boot,” says Boliba.

Boliba adds that there were doubts as to whether a Velcro strap would provide enough stability in snowboard boots, but he believes it does. Even if the Velcro strap slips and comes loose, the fix (insert “Velcro sound” here) is much quicker than retying a bootlace.

- **Bindings.** Okay, boards are smaller, and the Velcro boots fit. What about strapping in? “I’ve watched kids struggle with bindings,” Boliba says. Burton’s Grom binding, he points out, has a creased strap and an oversized buckle – making it possible for kids to work with them when wearing gloves or mittens.
- **Burton Riglet Reel.** It’s so simple I’m amazed someone didn’t think of it sooner. The Riglet is a retractable leash that mounts on the front of a youth snowboard. The benefits are obvious: Because instructors can give them a tow, small riders don’t waste energy unstrapping bindings and staggering awkwardly with a board strapped to one foot. Recommended for ages 3 to 6, suddenly we can focus on snowboarding movements in young beginner groups instead of exhaustion and survival. Youngsters (and instructors) can really feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

You can’t teach students when their equipment doesn’t fit. “We’re trying to make gear that’s accessible for kids,” Boliba says. “Then, snowboarding becomes like any other youth sport.”

THE ONE-FOOTED APPROACH

Traditionally, beginner slopes have been flat slopes with no run-out. The traditional progression, therefore, has included one-foot activities. Why? Learning with one foot strapped in provides security, says Kolber. “If all else fails,” she says, “they can use their free foot as a kickstand or to slow themselves down.” The free foot ensures that students won’t go cascading down the slope to smash into downhill obstructions (other people, snow fences, lodge buildings, etc.)

Joe Hession served as vice president of mountain operations at New Jersey’s Mountain Creek during a resort renovation that

JEFF BOLIBA USES TERRAIN TO SET THE SCENE FOR EARLY SUCCESS.

included the implementation of beginner parks and terrain gardens. Hession doesn't argue with the logic behind learning with one foot in – or with the fact that good instructors can teach on traditional terrain. He comes at teaching from another perspective; the perspective that asks why the national new-rider retention rate is just 17 percent. Now a resort consultant, Hession conducted a survey in New York's Central Park. Using only respondents who had never skied or snowboarded, Hession asked what they thought skiing or snowboarding would be like.

"They described an intermediate or advanced experience," he says.

His findings, in other words – and for whatever reasons (Social media? The popularity of the X Games? Images on video games?) – showed that newcomers to our sport arrive expecting experiences that are beyond their skill sets. And when they find themselves on our beginner slopes making one-footed J-turns, we've already failed to live up to their (reasonable or unreasonable) expectations. "We're doomed from the start," says Hession.

HELPFUL DEVELOPMENTS IN TERRAIN

In his *32 Degrees* article on terrain-based teaching ("Pitch Perfect Park for New Skiers," Fall 2013), PSIA-AASI Alpine Team member Kelly Coffey writes, "The rollers, banks, and spines of TBT are designed to slow, turn, and stop students." The terrain features above all have 1) a place for beginners to start, 2) non-threatening pitches, and 3) a place where the terrain stops them – whether they can manipulate the board or not.

Take, for example, a mini-pipe, which – make no mistake – is no halfpipe. Constructed perpendicular to the fall line rather than down, it is the most mellow of pipes with just a few feet of elevation change. "There's no fear of what lies below," explains Hession. "So there's no standing in the back seat. After all, you can't learn to stop until you learn to stand in balance."

So, what does sculpted terrain do for young beginners? As with older counterparts, it takes away the fear by giving them a runout. It enables them to enjoy the fun-factor, the high-level sensations that Hession's survey respondents were looking for, even when their skill sets are under-developed.

Does this mean that parents can automatically count on a "family run" up the chairlift at the end of their 3-year-old's first lesson? Not necessarily, and that's why managing expectations is still important. Will a 3-year-old want to come back and do it again? That seems like a reasonable goal... every time.

Burton Riglet parks generally include flat areas and indoor areas. "There's music playing and videos," says Boliba. (So beginners are rock stars, before even strapping in!) Meanwhile, pioneers of terrain-based teaching operate under the assumption that beginners should start by learning movement patterns that interest them. What interests them? "Tricks, of course," says Hession.

Really? Tricks for beginners? Ted Fleischer, AASI examiner, Eastern Division educational staff advisor, and training director at Vermont's Jay Peak, believes that the indoor components and the flats play into the experience we need to deliver. "The goal is to infuse the stoke on a new group of folks," Fleischer says. At Jay's Riglet Park, beginners play on balance boards indoors before



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BURTON SNOWBOARDS

moving to an outdoor flat area where they learn – not basic skills, not how to stop – to ollie.

Fleischer's progression is suitably easy. Start, he tells beginners, by standing, both feet strapped in, over the center of your board. Then bend your front leg, moving your center of mass over your front foot. Do the same with your back leg. Move back and forth. Now flex and extend both legs simultaneously. Now



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hop, landing by flexing both legs to soften the impact. Practice. Now, hop, and then flex one leg then the other in the air. Again, practice... and before long students have done an ollie, their first trick. Meanwhile, they have begun to master lateral movements, balancing movements, and flexion and extension movements. They're ready for the mini-pipe!

Fleischer finds it interesting that terrain-based teaching is creating such a stir now. "This is nothing new," he says. "Good coaches have been doing this for years. They put on their terrain goggles and find natural features – and believe me, they can be found at most every mountain – and bring their groups there."

Okay, using terrain isn't necessarily new. So why the buzz? Here's what's new: resorts nationwide are embracing the idea that when manufacturers, resort management, mountain ops, and rental shops support good instructors, rider retention increases. While instructors of yesterday had to find a nook off the beaten path to find a roller or a mound of snow to serve as a runout, now resort management teams are sculpting terrain features to help us do our jobs, right behind our learning centers. *That's exciting.*

SO, WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO START?

We have appropriately sized equipment. We have, more and more, terrain that will help us do our jobs. When, therefore, is the best time for a young rider to take a lesson? There isn't widespread agreement as to the best age for kids to start taking group lessons; resorts across the country vary. Some begin group lessons at age 7; increasingly, however, the starting age gets younger. Vail, Copper Mountain, Stowe, Smugglers' Notch, and many others offer lesson programs for tykes as young as 3.

Burton's Boliba believes the answer is related to equipment: "If they can fit in boots, they can snowboard," he says.

Fleischer is more zealous: he says if they can stand and walk, they can ride. "My daughter will be one this winter," he says. "She'll be up there."

Although opinions vary, here's the bottom line: younger riders have more options than before. "It really depends on the individual," says Kolber. Are they active? Motivated? Eager to ride? Couch potatoes? Scared? Suffering from separation anxiety from mom and dad?

Fleischer's daughter, whose dad lives and breathes snowboarding, probably thinks everyone slides downhill sideways. Most likely, having a dad who works at a mountain, she'll get follow-up opportunities to practice and her dad will choose the best weather and condition days for a 1-year-old.

This may be different for some of our guests who fit a different rider profile – and who don't have the luxury of choosing the perfect day. Some children are less developed socially, and this could be the deciding factor for starting at 4 or 5 years-old instead of 3.

Smaller gear, the Riglet Reel, and terrain features give us the ability to reach a younger demographic. The ultimate decision probably rests with parents. With all of these changes, however, Burton's Boliba is sure of one thing: "All the technology and innovation makes no difference at all without great coaching," he says. "A good coach remains the most important component."

Fortunately, our students know where to find us. ☺

Mark Aiken's growing resume includes Level III alpine, Level I snowboard, and Level I telemark certifications, as well as roles on Eastern Division's accredited children's educator and division clinic leader teams. He serves as a supervisor for the Stowe Ski and Snowboard School, when he isn't writing for The New York Times, Trial Runner magazine, or 32 Degrees, among others.

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The Future of Instruction: What PSIA-AASI Fall Workshop 2013 Means to You

BY PETER KRAY

PSIA-AASI Fall Workshop 2013 may have been the most heavily covered event PSIA-AASI has ever held. On the TheSnowPros.org website, the PSIA-AASI Facebook page, and the association's Twitter account, you and your teaching colleagues were treated to daily stories, tons of photos, and plenty of quick-hitting insight shared from Copper Mountain, Colorado. The result? An expansive conversation between the PSIA-AASI Teams on the snow and the greater community of professional instructors around the world.

Now it's time to get personal, as the teams are ready to lead clinics across the country. Here are some of the instructional highlights from the Workshop, with an eye toward what you can expect to be discussing when team members come to ski or ride with YOU.

Adaptive

"With the diversity of equipment on the hill today, the ability to take technology and concepts from each other is pushing the way our students are instructed," said PSIA-AASI Adaptive Team member Geoff Krill. "The reality is that today's instructors have to be versatile and open to the multitude of shapes, sizes, and concepts that exist on the slopes across the country."

Krill said he was especially inspired by all the interaction between the teams, and that everyone left Copper "inspired to write articles and develop progressions to bring about the very best in our members. The light bulbs are constantly going off around here, and it's that light that's passed on to our membership to carry to the industry of sliding on snow."

Alpine

Clarity and consistency was also the focus of the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team. Coach Rob Sogard said, "We have to come together in our message, our methodology, and our skiing. This means a lot of late nights working to connect what we do on the hill with the message in our manuals and other educational materials."

Modern equipment continues to create a wide variety of desired ski performances, shaping the way people want to ski. "With so much change in skiing, we need to focus on the things that don't change – the essential actions of the skis, physics, biomechanics, and fundamental movements that must happen to ski well, no matter the gear, the terrain, or the snow conditions," said Sogard. "Rather than confusing students with a menu of fancy movements, our goal is to link lesson content to a few simple fundamentals that need to be done really, really, well."

Nordic

The PSIA-AASI Nordic Team spent the week exploring a new cross country technical model that combines the United States Ski and Snowboard Association (USSA) model of fundamental athletic body position, fundamental movement, rhythm and timing, and power with PSIA-AASI teaching models. "In particular, we're exploring nordic-specific skills like push-off, weight transfer, and glide," said Nordic Team member David Lawrence. "This work is influencing and steering cross country national standards and a new movement analysis model."

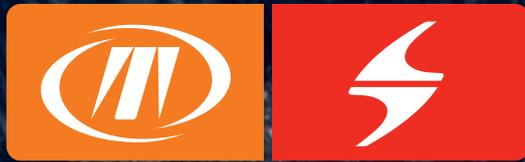
Snowboard

The PSIA-AASI Snowboard Team may have had the most ambitious task at



DANN DOFFEY

The PSIA-AASI Teams put their time at Fall Workshop 2013 to good use, honing their focus on the skills and tactics they'll share with members throughout the country.



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Copper; examining ways in which professional instruction can help revive the sport's spiraling participation numbers. Snowboard Team Coach Lane Clegg said, "We believe that by keeping good instructors in the industry we can affect change with students, including better conversion rates for new students and more excitement for current riders to grow the overall snowboard participation numbers."

More reports from Copper Mountain are available at TheSnowPros.org, so be sure to check out the coverage and add your own insights and perspective in the linked Facebook posts. The Spring 2014 issue of *32 Degrees* will feature more in-depth reports from the event, with a special focus on how Fall Workshop 2013 impacts and enhances the work that you do. ☒

Peter Kray is the lead content officer for PSIA-AASI, focusing on emerging ski and snowboarding trends and on-snow innovations. He skis, telemarks, and snowboards out of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is co-founder of the Gear Institute (gearinstitute.com), a website founded to professionalize the testing of outdoor equipment.



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Ace the Greeting With Your Charisma

BY ERIC LIPTON

Everything you've ever wanted to know about setting the stage for world-class lessons, and creating raving fans is in the following paragraphs. I'm going to teach you how to use charisma to supercharge your lessons.

First, we need to realize no one is born with charisma; we learn it. If you can understand and master a few simple concepts, you'll be able to instantly connect with your students, provide better experiences for your guests, get more return clients, and make more money. Your snowsports school director will love you and you'll be the coolest cat in your locker room. If you want all of these amazing results, read this article. And when you meet your next guest, you're going to be a rock star because the second thing you must realize is this: it's all in the greeting!

The concepts I'll discuss are not complicated and many of these seem obvious, but *what* you say and do is not nearly as important as *how* you say and do it. Charismatic people say and do much of the same things as everyone else, but *how* they say and do things is quite different. Read this article several times and carefully plan how you will use each tool to your advantage the next time you're on snow.

The Emotional Bank Account

Every interaction you have with another person leaves an impression, whether it be positive or negative. Creating a positive impression with your guest from the moment you meet can mean the difference between a warm and receptive student, and a cool and hostile one. Think of positive impressions as deposits into each guest's emotional bank account, and negative impressions as withdrawals. As

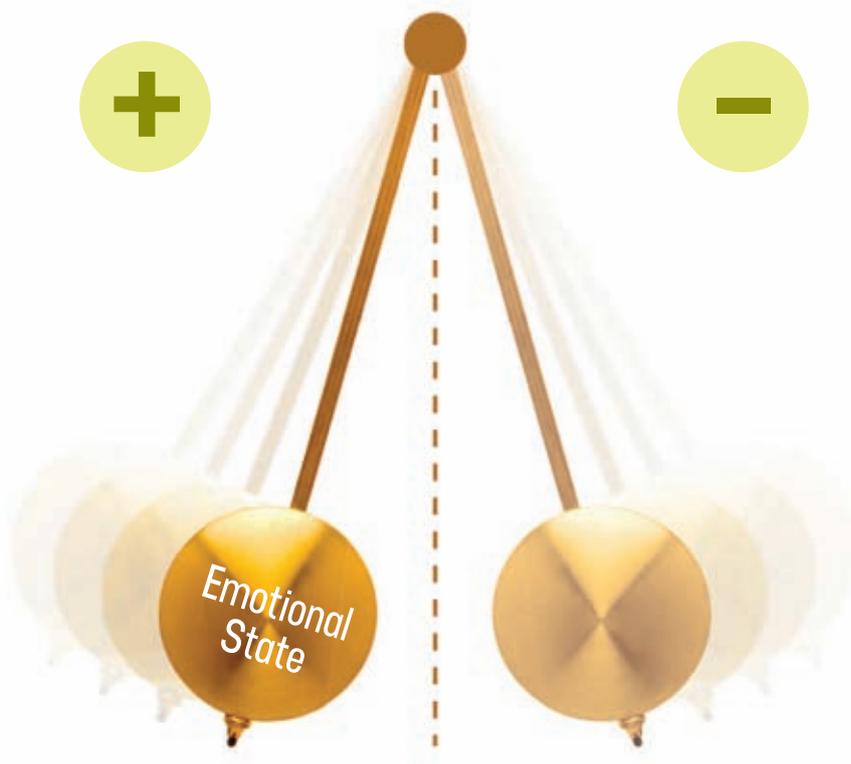
humans, our emotional state is dynamic, never static. It is constantly swinging through positive and negative emotional states, like a pendulum. So, one negative impression doesn't bankrupt the account any more than one positive impression makes a mint. Build the bank account so there are more deposits than withdrawals, and you'll strengthen the relationship with your client.

Be Approachable

Humans are often visual creatures. We rely on sight as our predominant sense and use it to observe and judge the world around us. As you walk toward your guest

to meet him or her for the first time, even in those few seconds, they are observing and judging you. If handled properly, you can use this to your advantage; stand up straight, make eye contact, and smile. Look approachable and friendly. These few moments will be their first impression of you. This is not the time to swagger or strut. Show your guest that you're human and you're just like them.

First impressions are lasting, so manage this opportunity carefully. As you make your initial approach, carefully consider your opening remarks, based on *your* observations of the student. Your greeting and opening dialogue will differ



depending on the guest. How you act will be different with a young athletic-looking male who's sporting brand new equipment than with an elderly woman who's holding straight skis.

Say hello and, if possible, introduce yourself first so you can then completely focus on your guest and be less likely to forget their name. The sweetest sound in the world is hearing one's own name, so use your student's names immediately and frequently in conversation.

In your initial communication keep the conversation at a basic level instead of diving right into ski/snowboard talk. We are people first, skiers/boarders second, so speak to your new friend as if you were meeting him or her for the first time at a cocktail party. Display energy and interest. Find something you genuinely like about your student, so your warmth and charm are sincere.

Compliment and Comfort with Humor

It's easy to create a positive rapport with your student. For starters, compliment something he or she is wearing, or a piece of their equipment. Perhaps their goggles are a funky design, or they simply look very happy to be on snow! Or you can compliment your guest on their good decision to come to the mountain today because of the stellar snow conditions. Everyone loves positive feedback. Compliments work – period.

You can choose to open up with any topic that is light and agreeable, like the weather. If it's a beautiful day, you're home free. However, even if it's unfavorable, find something positive about it. For instance, the fact that there are no crowds or that the damp weather makes the snow terrific for carving.

Use humor, too. If there is something funny you've mutually observed nearby (that is moral and hasn't caused harm to anyone), humor can work. If the basis of your humor is self-deprecating, you're usually safe there too. But be careful, humor can be a slippery slope – no pun intended.

Connect with Questions

After your initial remarks and introduction, start learning about your students. Here are some questions that will encourage conversation and help you

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get to know your guest – remember most people generally like to talk about themselves.

- Where are you from? (Or some version of it.)
- Where do you normally ski/snowboard?
- Is this your first time here at our mountain? If yes, then “Welcome!” If no, then, “Welcome Back!”
- What brought you to our mountain?

- Who do you normally ski/snowboard with?
- What other activities do you enjoy?
- What industry do you work in?

These basic questions are designed to create a dialogue – a give-and-take of information. It's not an interrogation, so allow the conversation to develop. With each of your client's answers, ask a follow-up question or comment on their answer in

a positive way. For example, if you ask the guest, “What brought you to our mountain?” And they answer, “We’ve always wanted to come here,” then you might respond with, “Well, you chose a great week!” In this example you are not only responding positively, but you are also complimenting their decision to come that week.

It won’t be long before the conversation naturally leads to ski/snowboard-specific talk. You might use a few of these questions to gather the relevant information you need to plan your lesson.

- What types of trails do you like to ski/ride?
- What inspired you to take a lesson today?
- At the end of our day, what would you like to be able to do that you can’t do now?
- At the end of our day, where would you like to be able to go that you can’t go now?
- What’s the most important thing you’d like to learn today?
- How can I make your day?

The Echo Technique

In addition to learning about your students by listening to their responses, learn visually by watching their body language. Because people relate best to those who are most like themselves, mirroring the body language and mannerisms of your student validates them in subtle ways and enhances the connection. For example, if your student is using demonstrative body language to communicate, you should too. If your student is speaking slowly, softly, and appears to be apprehensive, you should respond by speaking slowly and softly and attempt to comfort. However, remember to remain professional.

Tone of voice and word choice is important here too. Again, it’s not just what you say, it’s how you say it. Use the words that your students use. If she says she wants to learn to “zig zag better,” use the term zig zag. This is all part of *echoing* your

GUEST'S EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT			
Deposits	(+)	Withdrawals	(-)
<i>very considerate</i>			
<i>understands me</i>			
<i>patient</i>		<i>sometimes skis a</i>	
<i>offers great direction</i>		<i>little too fast for me</i>	
<i>professional</i>			
<i>makes learning fun</i>			
<i>knowledgeable</i>			
Account Balance		(+)	

As an instructor, you'll want to boost the balance of your student's emotional bank account.

guests and connecting to them on the most basic level.

Feel-Felt-Found

Use the “Feel-Felt-Found” method to overcome a difficult situation or to steer the conversation to a better place. Example; “I understand how you **feel**. I’ve had a lot of clients who have **felt** the same way. But what I’ve **found** is that if we take it slow and review often, snowboarding can be learned with minimal falling.” This method is useful if your guest is overly anxious, nervous, has unreasonable expectations, or is reluctant to commit to something new.

Chairlift time equals face time and you have tremendous opportunity there to enhance the relationship and make deposits into the guest’s emotional bank account. Show your student you are just like them. Be sincere and show genuine caring. The criteria your student establishes for a great lesson experience is oftentimes emotional; it’s about what they feel they’ve accomplished and how they felt doing it. It’s not about what they think; it’s about how they feel.

Instructor Success Starts with the Guest

As instructors, we walk a delicate line between the role of coach and salesperson. We are there to encourage and challenge our students, but also to promote ourselves, our resort, and the products our school offers. We need to create more than just satisfied customers. We need raving fans who will come back to ski and ride with us again and again. First impressions are lasting, and you only get one shot, so make every moment count. If you ace the greeting, you’ve created a climate for success, and, in the right climate, any of us can be successful. **32°**

Eric Lipton is a member of the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team. He spends his winters traveling the country infusing the stoke for skiing, and helping snowsports pros learn to better connect with their guests. In the off-season he trains retail sales consultants in the art of selling. If you'd like Eric to visit your snowsports school, email him at ericlipton@hotmail.com or contact PSIA-AASI at (303) 987-9390.

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Shut Up and Teach!

When Silence Really IS Golden

BY PETER HOPPOCK

The writer Joan Didion once remarked: “I write to find out what I am thinking.” Isn’t this true for most of us? We have the urge to connect, to enlighten, to understand.

What are *you* thinking when you’re in front of a class? Are you choosing words that help or hinder learning? Do your words enliven the atmosphere or put a damper on it? Does what you say engage and provide clarity, or get in the way?

In ski and snowboard lessons, we speak to explain something (a concept or movement), to show we care (vocal enthusiasm, soothing words after a fall), and to move things along (after all, time is an issue). It all matters. How can we *not* talk?

Frankly, I’m asking you to do just that – be silent for an entire lesson (almost) – and discover just how much you can communicate without opening your mouth. Granted, you might want to reserve this approach for an early season training opportunity with colleagues or regular clients who are up for a bit of experimentation, and you’ll likely need to get permission from your ski school director or supervisor. But, trust me, conducting a clinic or lesson largely without words will do wonders for your focus, give greater weight to your demonstrations, and permit a heck of a lot of practice time and guided discovery.

Just To Be Clear

Even though no words will be coming from your lips, a word-war will be raging inside your brain while your body does the communicating. This isn’t going to be easy! Also, you may think of something absolutely brilliant to convey while pantomiming a movement sequence. Resist. The power

of this approach includes surprise associations that come up – not unlike the way the sense of small often triggers memories.

You’re going to go places (psychologically) you’ve never gone before. Drop your ego off at the ski rack; you won’t need it. You’re going to struggle, that’s a given... but your students will be eager to help you! You’ll establish a partnership with everyone almost instantly.

I give one or two of these lessons a year, usually at the beginning of a season. I also run a wordless clinic for the instructors at my ski school, and in both cases there is always a lot of laughter and learning.

So get ready to *shut up and teach*. Here’s how.

Set the Scene

First off, begin the lesson normally. Introduce yourself. Learn names. Agree on goals. Give your class the set-up, explaining that once you are all on the hill and have started the lesson in earnest, *you* will not be speaking, but *they* certainly can, and should – by asking questions of you, chatting with one another, etc. You will be using hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to convey both what you *see* in their performances and what you *want* to see next time.

In some instances touch will replace vocal instructions, so be sure to ask your students’ permission to use physical contact to help them focus on what is working as well as what is not working and could be adjusted. At this point, someone may feel like asking you a question. If you can answer it with a gesture or facial expression (for example, by nodding yes or no, pointing, smiling, or adopting other charades-like clues), by all means give it a shot!



THINKSTOCK

What can you convey when you don’t speak?
Plenty!

You’ll get some of the anxiety out of your system – and your classmates will enjoy it.

Use this time to get buy-in and deliver directions. For example, tell your students (or clinic group) that you’ll be doing demos at the start of every phase and pointing to various parts of your body depending on where you want them to focus.

Be Aware of Space... and Faces

Be sure to effectively manage physical space on the hill. Positioning your class, i.e., your students’ location on the hill or whether they’re in a line or semi-circle, may take slightly longer than usual. That’s okay. You’re going to feel like a Border collie herding sheep at first.

ENTER THE FRAY. COME PREPARED.



#rulethemountain

Photo: Dan Millner



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RULE THE MOUNTAIN

You may also find yourself focusing on your students' movements while they're skiing to, or walking to, your chosen spot. Why? Because you're not thinking about what you are going to say next! And what else really matters besides *movement*? (Of course, you may be thinking about what you're going to *gesture* next, especially if you're trying to anticipate questions and how to answer them.)

Don't be surprised if you start paying more attention to your students' facial expressions. You'll want to know what they're thinking of this little experiment – but you can't ask them. You start thinking, *I bet they want to get moving. They're certainly not waiting for me to say anything!* And you'll be right.

Giddyup!

Okay, so get moving! Whatever your lesson plan is, get at it. For example, if you're

reviewing a wedge turn, do a demo. Then do another one. On the third one, use hand gestures to get students to focus on the part of your body you really want them to notice. In this case, if you were doing a right turn you might point to your right leg and show how moving the knee in the direction of the turn releases the edge and begins the turn.

If you want to focus on the ankle – say, by having students lift the arch of the foot – you can cup your hand and point to your arch to mimic that movement, indicating the exact part of the body you want them to move. Exploring movement further, you could illustrate functional tension by representing the ankle and arch as clenched fists while pointing to the rest of your body and letting your arms fall limp at your sides. Ankle and arch = fists; rest of body = limp arms at your side.

Get the idea? In this lesson, *there is no tell, there is only show*. You move, then they move. It's that simple.

On the next run you might want to show students how little it takes to release the edge and allow steering to become effective. You could point to your boot, and – using your right hand as a “stand in” – lift

your thumb a little and lower your pinky the same amount. Now point to the tip of your inside (right) ski and show them how it moves. Then do another right turn demo. Then a left. Watch their reactions.

Time to get moving again. Begin the process of “demo, watch, learn, adjust, repeat.”

Rapt Attention

As you proceed, your class will be riveted to your movements. You may be dying to add phrases like “watch how my right knee moves” or “lift the big toe.” Again, resist! The point here is that what feels right for you to say may not be what's needed. Be patient. In their performance, your students will be telling you what each of them needs.

Here's where you get to spend a lot of time doing what you really get paid for: to watch and learn. Learn where your students' heads are, each one's body awareness, physical limitations, etc. How did each student interpret your visual cues? Your movement analyses will become sharper during the course of this type of lesson. Why? Because you're totally immersed in your students physical world. All that matters is movement.



As you proceed, your class will be riveted to your movements.



When you don't use words, you're less likely to interject negative spin.

Amazing Insight #1

Because you're not using words, there's no possibility of any negative spin on anything you do. You can be as enthusiastic about a poor performance as a great one. High fives, fist bumps, and big smiles will be interspersed with your physical mimicking of what you saw that needed adjustment (i.e., stance issues, cuff pressure, over-steering) and a quick demo of your correction. I keep things playful, even when offering suggestions for modification.

Amazing Insight #2

About half-way through you'll realize that even though you encouraged your students to speak, some most likely won't (except among themselves a little). That's because the transfer effect is powerful. Taking their cues from you, your students are focused on the movements necessary to succeed.

If someone does ask you a question, it might come in the form of a statement, like: "I can't seem to steer my inside ski" (which you most likely noticed already).

THINKSTOCK

The real question here is, "Why can't I steer my inside ski?" Your response will be the same: To physically demonstrate what you saw that skier do (point to that student and do the incorrect movement) and what you are looking for that will be more functional (point to yourself and show the correction). It's swift, to the point (pun intended), and involves no judgments.

Amazing Insight #3

As you're going through the cycle of demo, watch, learn, adjust, and repeat with each run, with lots of individual non-verbal feedback, you will realize at some point that you forgot about your lesson plan. Don't get nervous. Don't go back to the plan. Let the performances of your students guide you to what should come next.

If they are linking turns, effectively using turn shape, and controlling speed, what's next? What feels right? A steeper slope? Narrowing the wedge or eliminating it? Mime the choices. Do I have to tell you how? I bet you've figured that out already.

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Okay, say as your next step you do choose; your class has shown you they want a steeper slope. Can you anticipate the new challenge and mime the movement focus? As the slope drops away from the student, his or her balance will be challenged, a loss of cuff pressure may ensue, and/or the urge to “get the turn over with” will result in loss of turn shape. The fear factor may creep in.

Me? I have lot of fun mimicking fright in front of my students. I demo a sitting-back, fearful turn a few ways

(over-turning and under-turning) and shake my head no. Then I mime “courage” by puffing my chest out and taking the proverbial three deep breaths, focusing my students’ attention on my movements forward in my boot cuffs (tib/fib), my center of mass (butt up and over boots), and my hands (reaching out).

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

What will *you* do? That’s your choice, but there’s one thing of which I’m sure. If you resist the urge to speak, you’ll be focused and sharp in your demos. You will watch your students (or guinea-pig colleagues) with a more discerning eye than ever before. You will learn about each person – and yourself.

Plus, your adjustments to their performances will feel more like tightening a lug nut and less like replacing a defective part.

Your students will be actively integrating skiing into their lives and not just reacting to a teacher’s directions.

Demo. Watch. Learn. Adjust. Repeat. Thoroughly engaged, your students will get in lots of practice time, and your body language will speak more than words ever could. Imagine that; the silent treatment might just make you a better instructor. ☺

Peter Hoppock is a Level III instructor/trainer at the Wilmot Mountain Ski and Snowboard School in Wilmot, Wisconsin, and a member of the Central Division education staff. He runs an advertising/design business and works in the non-winter months as a professional soccer coach, having worked at the club, high school, and collegiate levels. He has published articles for both ski and soccer journals.

WHOSE JOURNEY IS IT?

The first time I tried this I learned that I spoke to “self-soothe.” I wanted to feel as comforted by my words as my students did. I used – and still use – speaking as a tool for the kind of “self-discovery” that Joan Didion spoke of. I discovered how I felt about my students’ performances *while* I was telling them how it went and what to do next. I learned, however, that the less I spoke, the more the lesson became about *my students’ journey*, and less about my comfort. And, when I *did* talk my words connected better with the visual cues I was delivering.

So, sometime this winter try giving a lesson without speaking. Again, if you’re uncomfortable trying it out on the public or a return client, work it into a clinic or simply ask some fellow instructors to let you try it out on them. You’ll be a better instructor for it. – *Peter Hoppock*

THE LESSONS YOU’LL LEARN

When You ‘Shut Up’

- You *can communicate your feelings* without speaking.
- You *can describe movements* without using words.
- You *can guide behaviors* with simple hand gestures.
- You *can give feedback* in a similar way, and by touching (this requires getting approval in the set-up speech before the lesson begins.)
- You *can excite* your students by exuding confidence and energy.
- You *can calm* your students by exhibiting quiet determination.
- You *can get a lot more done, in less time.*
- You *can get students to laugh more easily* (perhaps because, at times, you may appear desperate and foolish – they will appreciate your effort!)
- You *will be exhausted* at the end.
- *Your students won’t be able to take their eyes off you.*
- You *will learn that your students’ words* come at you like golden nuggets, and *your words* – the ones you are thinking of saying but don’t – will seem worn and lame by comparison.
- You *will have a great time*, and so will your class.

– *Peter Hoppock*

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PSIA-AASI Enjoys Hearty Winter, Healthy Financials

BY ED YOUNGLOVE, PSIA-AASI TREASURER

As skiers and snowboarders across the country enjoyed better snowfall in 2012-13 than the previous winter, PSIA-AASI enjoyed an increase in revenue. While I am pretty sure there is no direct correlation between accumulation of snowflakes and dollars, both were welcomed with equal enthusiasm. The 2012-13 fiscal year was filled with accomplishments, and the association continues to make big strides, with a positive outlook for the coming season and year ahead.

Here are a few highlights from the past year:

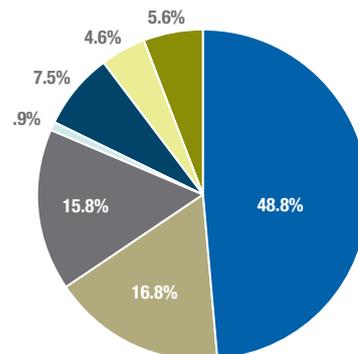
- Fundraising initiatives continued at the same pace as last year with the PSIA-AASI Education Foundation receiving another \$200,000 grant for the second year in a row.
- The grant enabled the association to continue to offer the *Movement Matrix* free to members, maintaining a healthy active user base of 4,141.
- Membership numbers remained solid, but were down slightly from last year's record of 31,716, coming in at 31,545.
- On April 5, 2013, PSIA-AASI paid off its loan with Wells Fargo Bank. The loan enabled the purchase of the CRM4M database and related computer hardware. Not having the monthly loan payments will save \$81,250 annually in cash outflows.
- TheSnowPros.org was revamped, complete with advertising, social media links, single-sign-on, and a brand new look and feel.
- The Professional Development department improved the training and morale of volunteer adaptive instructors by distributing 809

complimentary educational manuals and guides to 27 organizations in 14 states, reaching 5,716 instructors who teach adaptive skiing and snowboarding.

- This association continued its support of Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month, with organizers of the January event reporting \$4.2 million in media value and 153,000 lessons given through the program.
- PSIA-AASI continued to finance meetings of divisional representatives for another year, to develop or update certification standards for nine disciplines.
- PSIA-AASI expanded its outreach to members through social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Additionally, staff produces a bi-weekly e-newsletter and daily News & Announcements web content.

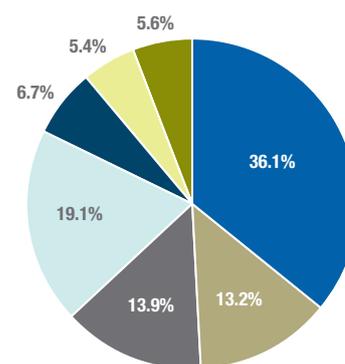
These examples are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to working on your behalf. All of these accomplishments are made possible by the hard work and dedication of volunteers, professional staff, and our remarkable members.

The primary goal of PSIA-AASI is to get people excited about skiing and snowboarding, while enabling you to develop professionally and personally so you can offer the best experience to your guests. We do this by providing you with information about snowsports, teaching, and the industry. We represent your connection and access to people, resources, and ideas that fuel your passion for teaching skiing or snowboarding.



INCOME

Dues	\$1,840,663
Catalog sales	632,908
Sponsorships	598,169
Publications	32,409
Courses/seminars	285,217
Interest/Misc.	173,314
Grant funds released from restriction	212,197
Total	\$3,774,877



EXPENSE

Personnel	\$1,368,138
Cost of goods sold	501,989
Education seminars/Projects	524,883
General/Administrative	723,352
Marketing/Meetings	251,760
Magazine	205,943
Depreciation/Misc.	212,105
Total	\$3,788,170

Financing Member Programs

PSIA-AASI exists to provide programs that support you – the member – and we need resources to do so. The following summarizes information available to me as the association's treasurer and I'd like to share it with you.

These numbers are drawn from an independent auditor's consolidated report of PSIA-AASI and the PSIA-AASI Education Foundation for the 2012-13 fiscal year that began July 1, 2012, and ended June 30, 2013. All figures show combined gross income and expenses for PSIA-AASI

and the Foundation. The accompanying financial charts help clarify how revenue is generated and distributed.

Revenue

Revenue for the 2012–13 fiscal year was up 7.8% from the previous year: \$3,774,877 in 2012-13, compared to \$3,502,960 in 2011-12. These figures reflect gross revenue.

Non-dues revenue accounted for 51 percent of PSIA-AASI's total income. This means the membership contributed only 49 cents for every dollar of the associations' income. The remaining 51 cents was generated through sales of catalog items (16.8 cents), sponsorship revenue (15.8 cents), advertising (.9 cents), and education seminars (7.5 cents). Interest and miscellaneous revenue represented 4.6 cents. Grant funds released from restriction remained unchanged at 5.6 cents.

The board of directors feels it is important that the organization's income generation reflects our values and that non-dues income remains tied to the activities of the membership. Some examples of the sources of that income include specially priced merchandise available through partnership programs and the *Accessories Catalog*, educational materials, and activities such as PSIA National Academy, and the promotion of the value of membership to area management, suppliers, and the public. Because of the value we offer, instructors continue to vote with their checkbooks in record numbers to be members. This is the greatest measure of both our success and our value.

Expenses

Out-of-pocket expenses in 2012-13 included general operating costs as well as the costs of publications, marketing, the cost of catalog goods sold, insurance, committees and education programs, training programs, teams, research and development, legal and accounting activities, and member services. Expenses increased by \$219,845 from \$3,397,551 in 2011-12 to \$3,617,396 in 2012-13, as PSIA-AASI addressed its aging IT infrastructure and began a campaign to boost membership, and increase renewal and retention rates

All of PSIA-AASI's expenditures support the association's overall educational and promotional goals – and our fundamental commitment to serve members – by care-

fully directing those expenditures to address membership needs at the divisional, national, and ski area levels. Key to this is the association staff, which enables development and delivery of educational products, events, and programs. Staff also supports the work of our committees and teams, and increase non-dues revenue, including sponsorship and the aforementioned grant.

Expenditures broken down as a percentage of each dollar spent were as follows:

- Personnel (36.1 cents)
- Cost of catalog goods sold (13.2 cents)
- Education seminars and programs (13.9 cents)
- Marketing and meetings (6.7 cents)
- General and administrative expenses (19.1 cents)
- Association magazine and editorial (5.4 cents)
- Miscellaneous (1.1 cents).

Depreciation is a *non-cash* item that is added back in to overall expenses. Adding \$170,774 in depreciation – accounting for 4.5 cents on the dollar – raises overall expenses to \$3,788,170.

The Bottom Line

PSIA-AASI operations generated positive cash flow of \$142,031 as of June 30, 2013, and ended the fiscal year with cash gains of \$25,409. The association finished the year with a net loss of \$20,490, all of which is due to depreciation (again, a non-cash item that impacts *assets* as opposed to cash out of pocket). Total assets – otherwise known as member equity – decreased from \$3,416,604 in 2011-12 to \$3,328,489 in 2012-13.

The board of directors would like to acknowledge that the association's continued stable financial health is due largely to the efforts of dedicated volunteers and the hard work of your incredible national staff, keeping PSIA-AASI moving in the right direction. As the cost of doing business continues to increase, we must remain vigilant to maintain our balance and structure in support of you, the member, and our mission as professionals to all stakeholders in the snowsports industry. ☺

If you have questions or would like a copy of the 2012–13 independent audit, please email me at treasurer@thesnowpros.org.

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PROFESSIONAL SKI INSTRUCTORS OF AMERICA

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SNOWBOARD INSTRUCTORS

How Do You Get Students To Experience an 'A-ha!' Moment?

BY STEPHANIE PRINCE

Sometimes you can almost see the metaphorical gears turning as your students are working at something new. Then there's that moment those gears "click" into place and they experience that "A-ha!" moment.

Instructors have all kinds of ways to elicit that breakthrough moment. When teaching toeside turns, for instance, some snowboard instructors promote proper edging and pressure movements by asking students to squash an imaginary tomato between their shin and the tongue of their boots. Here are additional tried and true – and maybe silly – tips for getting students to "get it."

"When introducing students to carving, I have them imagine there are tennis balls under their board, in the middle of each foot. When they are ready to change edges, I encourage them to roll from their toes (or heels) over the tennis ball onto the new edge. You could also do a static exercise with tennis balls under students' boots before the lesson."

– Brennan Cofell, *Snowboard Level II; Mount Snow, VT*

"I teach kids' lesson a majority of the time and tend to have more boys in my lessons. Sometimes I tell the boys to engage their toeside edge by pretending to pee on the snow – this way they will have their knees bent and hips out. If their hips are flexed and knees extended, I point out that they'd be more likely to pee right on their snowboard! And that gets lots of ewwwww's! So be sure to hit the snow, not your board: A-HA!"

– Jaime Schulte, *Snowboard Level II; Beaver Creek Resort, CO*



Brennan Cofell



Dalton R. Hunkins



Jaime Schulte



Jim Schaefer



Mike Cyr

“Squashing tomatoes is a good metaphor for beginner students, in the context of turning down the hill to squash that tomato in their boots. I also convey something along these lines to my students:

The ticket you have on your parka is called a ‘lift ticket,’ but you actually bought a ‘gravity ticket.’ You are out here to play with gravity and you must be friends with it. Leaning back and uphill is not in harmony with gravity since it is pulling you downhill. So, make your move down the hill (squashing the tomato if you will) and may the force (of gravity) be with you – take that leap of faith.”

– Dalton R. Hunkins, PhD, *Alpine Level II; Buffalo Ski Club Snowsports School, NY*



Patti Banks

“All of the 3- to 10-year-olds in the Children’s Program of the Schenectady Ski School learn about ‘squishing the grapes’ – or putting pressure where their shins hit the front of their boots. They laugh and talk sometimes about feeling the juice in their boots. ‘Squishing’ is way better than a technical, detailed rap for youngsters, and it works as well with our older students too.”

– Kim and Jim Schaefer, both *Alpine Level I* and co-supervisors of *Schenectady Ski School, New York*. Kim is also a *Children’s Specialist 1*.

“Telling students to ‘squash the tomato’ with their front foot as they turn down the mountain is definitely something snowboarders can use. I also get students to press against the shin of their boots by telling them to crush grapes and make grape juice throughout their turn. And one for those who ski with their chest facing the snow: If you ask them to stand tall and have their chest face forward, it doesn’t always work. But if you ask them to try to hold a quarter between their butt cheeks, they have to stand tall. (Be mindful of who you use that last one with.)”

– Mike Cyr, *Alpine Level III; Lost Valley Ski Area, ME*

“I use the term ‘shinboo’ – short for shin pressure on tongue of boots. And I use ‘calfboo’ – short for calf pressure against the back of the boot. Sometimes I put dollar bills in students’ boots between shin and tongue, so they can feel the ‘shinboo.’

These tips can be used for snowboard, alpine, telemark, and cross country students. Children and adults alike can appreciate it!”

– Patti Banks, *Alpine Level III, Snowboard I, Children’s Specialist 2, Cross Country III, Telemark III, Freestyle 1; Breckenridge, CO.* 

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OFFICIAL SUPPLIER

Minimize the Disability, Maximize the Strength

BY KIM SEEVERS

If you're an adaptive instructor, you have a very special skill set. You can look at a student with a disability and quickly figure out what needs to be done to get that person on snow. That knowledge makes you a prized instructor on your mountain's staff, especially if you teach at an area where adaptive lessons are integrated into the mainstream ski and snowboard school.

Part of the beauty of adaptive teaching is the many equipment options we, as instructors, have at our disposal. We can help students with just about any disability learn to ski or ride, with the ultimate goal of facilitating independence. In some ways it's the opposite objective from mainstream schools; while they're focused on return rates and keeping students in lessons, an adaptive instructor's proudest moment is when a student *leaves* the program because they're able to ski or ride with their families or friends without our help.

Focus on what the student can do, highlighting their strengths in order to help the student be successful.

Focus on Can, Not Can't

Given our numerous options, we sometimes tend to assess a beginning student's disability in terms of what they can't do, and immediately start thinking about what equipment we can use to overcome that. Granted, we do usually need to use equipment to minimize a disability, but let's also use teaching technique to maximize *ability*. Why not focus on what

the student *can do*, highlighting their strengths in order to help the student be successful?

If you need to use equipment to adapt the lesson, make sure it's used to accentuate the student's physical strength. While not particularly different or radical, making that mindshift for yourself and facilitating it for your student may help set you both up for success.

For example, let's say a student walks in to the ski school with the aid of crutches and your evaluation indicates weakness in his lower legs, perhaps due to Cerebral

Palsy, hemiparesis, or possibly weakness from a stroke or an injury. Visions of tip connectors, trombones, tethers, and outriggers immediately dance in your head. And you may be tempted to key in on a bigger, stronger part of his body to help him initiate a turn. You reason that his legs won't turn well, so his shoulders, arms, and head are the next strongest parts of this student's body. Instead of getting



This skier captures the strength in his legs for an effective turn.

DAN BURNS PHOTOGRAPHY

caught up in the use of equipment to minimize the weakness, look for strengths you can maximize to promote turning.

Look to Ultimate Goals

To identify your student's strengths, fall back on your American Teaching System (ATS) knowledge and ask yourself, "*What's the ultimate goal here?*" Regardless of disability, the goal is to give this beginner student a way to turn his ski or skis. Will initiating a turn with the upper body and/or riggers work? Sure it will, but not for long.

Try this. Stand on a pitch with your skis across the fall line. Begin turning your upper body down the hill in the direction of the turn. How far can you turn your shoulders? Unless you're a yogi or a contortionist, your range of motion will probably stop your torso somewhere around the fall line. So if your student is counting on that rotation to eventually turn the skis, he may be out of luck. The skis will follow the upper body into



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ATS tells us that we need to help the student learn to turn his foot/feet, as they represent the closest link to the skis and the snow. As an adaptive instructor, you of course need to recognize your student's disability and how it will impact the boot-to-ski-to-snow situation. But instead of throwing equipment at the "can't do," look first for the area of "can do" closest to the ground and emphasize that.

If your student has strength somewhere closer to the skis, teach from that strength. If you're working with a three-tracker who has a foot, ankle, knee, and hip that all work; use them! If the student has weakness below the knees, but has quad strength, even if you're using a tip connector, teach leg rotation. If your student can stand up enough to four track, he probably has enough strength for you to teach leg turning and tipping too.

The same thing goes for mono-skiers. Find the lowest point of strength and maximize your teaching by emphasizing that ability. If you give your students that gift, maybe down the road they'll

be able to ditch the equipment that's necessary today.

So, before you begin slapping adaptive equipment on your students to address what they can't do, take a "can-do" approach and work with their strengths for greater success. ☑

Kim SeEVERS is a member of both the adaptive and alpine education staffs in Eastern Division, and in 2012 was named coach of PSIA-AASI Adaptive Team. She works full-time as a grant writer for the Adaptive Sports Foundation in Windham, New York.

As an offshoot of her work with adaptive ski racers, SeEVERS was paired as a guide with Adaptive Sports Foundation Race Team member and visually impaired athlete Staci Mannella. SeEVERS and Mannella are members of the U.S. Paralympics Alpine National Team that will represent the United States at the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia. Their story is told in PSIA-AASI's upcoming documentary project "Partially Sighted, Wicked Fast." Check PSIA-AASI's YouTube channel for a preview.

No matter what the disability, find your student's strength to maximize learning.

the fall line and run out of turning impetus there.

We don't encourage use of this strategy in mainstream teaching because the upper body can only go so far before leg turning stops. Unfortunately this often happens in the fall line, right where your student is praying, "Skis, don't fail me now!" As the skier gets better and heads for steeper terrain – and you've taught him to rely on upper body rotation to initiate his turns – you've done your student an injustice. Who wants to be responsible for that?

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SAVE YOUR ENERGY FOR THE SLOPES

A Few Runs of Play Aids Pace and Guided Practice

BY MATT BOYD

Picture this: It's 10:30 a.m. and you're halfway through a three-hour group lesson. The skills you've been teaching are clicking with your guests and the instructor in you says that adding anything new would detract from the progress they have made.

The trouble is, you have another hour and a half to go, and, while you know guided mileage is the best thing for them, you can tell they're expecting more great things. To make matters worse, every time the group stops for a break or gets off a lift, all of your students stand in silence, staring at you with an expectant look that seems to say, "Teach me more!"



If the early stages of the lesson include a lot of skiing, the students will expect the same later.



When students need help – or compliments – get in close and give concurrent feedback so you can keep them moving.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATT BOYD

An Eye Toward Guidance

In this kind of challenging situation, it's important to remember what goals were set in the beginning of the lesson before proceeding to teach new things. In order to create a solid learning partnership, you'll want to set mutually agreeable and attainable goals with your students. These targets are based partly on the student's desired outcomes, and partly on your assessment of their performance. As with any skier, there are usually a few different movement issues to deal with – balance, over rotation, banking, etc. – and you need to determine where to focus first in order to meet these goals.

It can be very tempting to stretch a goal and move on to the next logical skill to be learned. But in doing so, you bypass another important step in the teaching model: guided practice. Skipping this step diminishes the student's ability to gain ownership of the originally set goal, and therefore, puts that goal at risk.

So what do you do next to keep the students from losing excitement of their improved performance over the next hour and a half? Here are some tried-and-true tips for stretching the lesson without disappointing.

Set the Tone Early

Right from the get-go, it's important to spend a lot of time skiing. The best instructors realize that it's okay to allow stu-



DANN COFFEY

dents time to explore a drill, activity, or concept. They fight the temptation to stop students immediately when they struggle and give them an opportunity to make corrections on their own. This creates an environment in which the students expect a lot of skiing, without input from you every 100 yards. When they "get it," and you need time to allow for guided practice, it won't feel like a drastic change in the learning environment.

Pro Tip: Even though your students have become proficient with a skill you've taught them, they'll still benefit from feedback. Offer individual feedback while they're in motion. This can be as simple as getting close to each student and complimenting a particular movement or giving encouragement to continue. They get to practice; you get to guide.

Casual Conversation

When you *do* need to take a break but want to stretch out the intervals between your instructional tips, use the time to get to know your students better. Get a better understanding of who they are, what they do, and what interests them. This gives you an opportunity to better develop the learning partnership and may give you some more insight into their individual learning styles.

Pro Tip: Being the educator *and* the entertainer is exhausting. Creating conversation among class members can help with the group dynamic, and takes the heat off of you. Of course, you won't want to turn the lesson into a gab fest; your key role



COURTESY OF MATT BOYD

Don't let the introduction end at line up. Stretch your practice time by getting to know your students better and getting their input.

is still to impart words of wisdom and then get back into the pace of an action- and practice-filled lesson.

Ask for their Input

Encourage the group to participate in the learning environment by sharing comments about their performance changes. What

feels different? What looks different? How did they do it? Set an environment in which they feel free to comment and play an active role in the learning environment.

Pro Tip: You and your class might be humming right along, but there still might be times when a cue or message gets lost in translation. Having a participant who “gets it” paraphrase their understanding or sensations may provide just the right variation of the message to break through to those who don’t.

Change Pitch, Radius and Speed

Once you’ve made a lap or two and feel confident that your crew is gaining ownership, make some slight changes in trail choice and speed to challenge their ability to maintain their new movement patterns. Keep your feedback targeted toward their performance as it applies to your existing focus. Celebrate success and help keep them on track.

Pro Tip: Watch carefully for signs of frustration if they struggle with the challenge offered. If you find they’re not ready, it’s okay to reel it in again. Remember

the goal you set together and do what you need to do to end the lesson with success.

Although you don’t *always* succeed with guests early in the lesson, it’s best to be prepared for when you do. In the eyes of a guest, a few runs of practice can seem like a few runs of nothing, yet in reality a few runs of something new may be the worst thing for their skiing.

Setting the lesson up in a way that prepares guests for practice time, and having strategies to help get through the breaks and pauses will help you do what you know is right without losing their excitement about their achievements during guided practice. And once you *do* get to the end of a three-hour lesson filled with goals, proper pace, achievement, and guided practice, be sure to invite your students back for another round. Soon they’ll have a track record of finding concepts that click. ☑

Matt Boyd is in his second term on the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team. He is a partner, coach, and consultant for New Hampshire’s Arc2Arc Alpine Training Center and a staff trainer at Cannon Mountain.

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PHOTO / ANDREW MAGUIRE

Parallel Spine and Shin Angle

A Match Made in Ski Heaven

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DAVID COOK

Snowboarders might tweak their stance angles to be at their best, but if you want to *ski* at a higher level you too should focus a bit on angles. Specifically, work to make sure your spine angle matches your shin angle.

That was the wisdom PSIA-AASI Alpine Team member Mike Hafer passed along at a great multi-day clinic last winter at Minnesota's Afton Alps. The exercises Mike explored with me and my colleagues that day helped all of us make significant changes in our skiing and thinking.

What's Your Angle?

At the start, Mike had us jump directly into a theme that would carry through the next few days. From the side, we observed each skier doing a straight run down a gentle slope. As we looked for similarities and differences, Mike had us concentrate on evaluating the shin angle coming out of

the boot and the spine angle of the back. For solid skiers, these angles point forward and are within 5 degrees of each other as the person skis. In other words, the spine angle matches the shin angle. Photos 1-3 represent some of the variations we saw.

Our goal was to match the spine and shin angles while skiing on various terrain, modifying the intensity from easy parallel to hard-carving arcs. Most of us had to tilt the upper body more forward from the ankles, hip, or spine; round the back; or do all four. How did this affect our skis? Upon matching our angles, we experienced more carving, an increase in solid edge hold, and were able to feel the entire foot.

During a straight run from very shallow terrain to a suddenly steep pitch, we learned that it takes greater effort/discipline of the upper body to keep the spine and shin angles the same. It also helped to remember that, as the forces increase, flexing forward through the boot keeps you moving forward. Those who flexed through the waist, dropped their hips back, and lost both the forward shin and spine angles were in for a definitely wimpier run.

In another helpful exercise, we focused on maintaining the same forward flex through the ankles *before* we started the new turn. Many in the group would develop very nice and forward shin angles in the controlling phase of the turn, but have that angle straighten up just before they released their edges to start the new turn. Those who kept the same forward shin angle before they released their edges through the new edge engagement were skiing at a higher level.

Variations on the theme of spine and shin angles not being parallel



PHOTO 1

Spine angle and shin angle match and are angled forward.



PHOTO 2

Angles are not matched; the spine could be rounded and bent forward.



PHOTO 3

Angles are not matched; the shin could be pressed forward.

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Mike Hafer demonstrating spine and shin angles being the same.

Hafer's Home Base

Mike explained that there is a continuum of three degrees of being forward. Slalom racers tend to have the most forward angles, whereas giant slalom skiers have a little less forward carriage and skiers in crud and bumps have even less. He asked us to think of parallel alignment of our spine and shin angles as being “home base,” with the goal of being at home base as much as possible when we skied.

To challenge our home base of spine angle and shin angle representing the same forward lean, we made turns by picking up the inside ski and edging solely on our outside ski. This is tough if the spine is not parallel to the shin above a flexed ankle. It's even more challenging when you do this slowly on steeper terrain. Don't worry about carving; making nicely shaped, slow, deliberate, and controlled open-parallel turns is difficult enough.

The hardest part was turn transition; outside ski to outside ski, switching support legs before releasing the edges and going slow on steeper terrain. We had to work hard to keep the spine leaning forward, parallel to the shin angle. Before releasing the edges, are the spine and shin angles parallel? That was a key focus point for many!

No Parking

A few in the group began to statically park forward against the tongue of their boots. To help head this instinct off at the pass, Mike suggested that to dynamically move through our turns with appropriate cuff pressure we should imagine that the cuff of the boot resembled the arc of a rainbow. We were to press through the arc of the rainbow, going from left to right (or vice versa) to each pot of gold at the end of the rainbow as the turn developed. Another image is to envision that you've lined up grapes along the cuffs of the boots and are squeezing out fresh grape juice from one side of the cuff to the other.

To offer more challenge, we did a lot of outside-ski christies, crossing the fall line from a shallow uphill ski traverse to a



PHOTO 4

Uphill, outside ski traverse.



PHOTO 5

Tip low, but off the snow.

full stop. To try this yourself, in a shallow traverse stand on the uphill edge of the uphill ski. Feel the muscles of your upper outside thigh and butt drive your hips, upper body, and head forward just before you begin to release the uphill edge into the christy. This movement of the hips, upper body, and head – all forward and together – is a critical movement-analysis and performance point to help keep the home base of the parallel spine and shin (photos 4-9). The result is very efficient and effortless skiing.

Mike next had us merge the christies into parallel turns – with both skis on the snow – making sure we felt a slight amount of forward pressure on the little-toe edge, toward the tip of the old inside ski before releasing it to become the new outside ski. It was so cool to feel the powerful muscles of the uphill upper thigh and butt drive the hips, upper body, and head forward as a unit, starting just before the edges were released into the new turn.

We took these easy parallel turns from flatter terrain – still shaped, not arced – to steeper shaped turns, then back to intermediate terrain with lots of two-footed carved arcs. We were using the same movements, but with different intensities of turns.

Next Up, Moguls

We returned to the outside-ski-to-outside-ski linked turns, this time through moguls. Our focus was to start the turn on the uphill edge of the uphill ski and try hard to move the femur and spine forward together by firing the gluts and quads, keeping the lifted inside ski tip near the snow. This is the same one-ski task as before, but with greater difficulty in moguls. We had to be able to actively flex the ankle, hip, knees, and spine to adjust to the mogul challenge, trying hard to keep the spine and shin angles parallel.

The outside-ski task through the moguls takes an amazing amount of effort to stay driving forward, keeping the spine angles and shin angles parallel. You need a strong core and continual adjustment of the “rainbow of pressure” through the boot cuff. We blended these into medium- to long-radius parallel turns through the moguls. Our main focus was on deliberately extending the old inside leg to move our hips, spine, and head forward into the new turn. As a group, we skied better with parallel spine and shin angles, as both actively increased and decreased together to react to the changing moguls.

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Mike Hafer demonstrating spine and shin angles being the same.

Worth A Closer Look

That deliberate leg extension warrants a closer look. Near the completion of a turn, both skies tip on edge and the inside ski tip, foot, knee, and hip are ahead of the outside ski. The outside, weight-bearing leg is longer than the flexed inside leg. The hips are slightly ahead of the skier's outside foot and slightly behind the skier's inside foot due to the inside tip lead. To get to the new turn, the leg relationships have to switch, and it is the job of the old shorter inside leg to lengthen and move the center of mass with the hips, spine, and head forward of the new outside foot and into the new turn. This ideally starts just before the edges are released. Our clinic group recognized that this is best accomplished if the spine and shin angles are already parallel, at the control and finish part of the old turn before the uphill leg extension begins.

A few of us just could not get that spine angle forward enough to match the shin angle. So, it was back to skiing only on the outside ski, stepping it down before releasing the edges into the new turn. This time, Mike encouraged us to hold our poles parallel in front of us with both hands, having the angle of the poles match the pitch of the slope. This helps develop improved counter balancing, or angulation of the upper body to counter the activity of the legs and feet. Next, we held the poles so their center was directly over the tip of the outside ski. Rather than cheat by extending our arms, we were to flex the ankles, hips, and spine and try not to camp out against the cuffs of the boots by forward lunging. And, oh yeah, we still focused on developing an arc thru the rainbow along the cuff of the boot.

We discovered that when the poles are not forward enough, or they are not parallel to the slope of the hill, we couldn't edge or steer well. Often we'd be fighting for balance; remember, we were turning with only the outside ski on the snow. The lifted inside ski's tip should be close to the snow, but not touching the snow. This is not easy!



PHOTO 6

Extending the outside leg drives the hip, spine, and head forward.



PHOTO 7

Continue the forward drive to the fall line.



PHOTO 8

It's easy to relax in the fall line, but keep driving forward.



PHOTO 9

Voila! Parallel spine and shine angle is maintained.

Welcome To The Parallel Universe

Wow; two days, one goal, and one task. The goal (parallel shin and spine angles) was specific, yet each person had their own idiosyncrasies to work through. Mike gave each of us specific advice on ways to improve. We repeated the task in all sorts of terrain and turn types from slow to fast, skidded to carved.

It takes time and discipline to make changes in better skiers. This group changed

and skied a lot better; some outdated ideas grew into better understanding and efficiency crept into our style. Hopefully as we head into this season those pesky old habits will be replaced with better moves. 32°

David Cook is a Level III alpine instructor with Skijammers, a traveling skisnowboard school in Minnesota. In addition, he's been a member of Central Division's alpine education staff since 1981.

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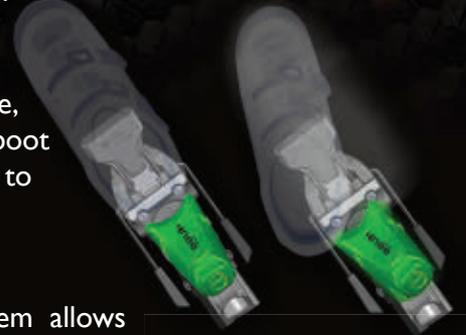


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Four Hacks to Get You Cross Country Skiing This Winter

TEXT BY DAVID LAWRENCE; PHOTOS BY DANN COFFEY

Listen up, all you alpine ski and snowboard instructors. Your beginner students naturally look up to you as an expert, the keeper of the keys to the snowsports kingdom they want to enter. But in addition to giving flawless demonstrations of the technique they'll try to imitate, it helps if you've wandered around a bit in *their* kingdom.



A good example of weight transfer over foot.

That's right, being a beginner yourself – by learning a new sport like, say, cross country skiing – gives you an appreciation for what your students are going through. That's sure to make you a better, more empathetic teacher.

Learning to cross country ski takes time and effort, but here are four hacks (or tips) to get you on the snow and gliding quickly.

Hack #1: Balance on one ski

Question: How many skis do you ski on with each stride? Answer: One. That's right, you ski on one ski at a time. As you step forward, your rear ski (or the ski you just stepped off of) lifts off the ground.

Try this simple exercise while you're reading this article. Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart and try balancing on one foot. Notice what you did with your bellybutton and nose; you shifted them toward – and almost over – your standing foot.

To help balance on one ski at a time, shift your weight from foot to foot as you ski by trying to get your bellybutton and nose almost over each ski.

Hack #2: Glide instead of shuffling

The beauty, joy, and essence of cross country skiing resides in the glide. (Doesn't that sound nice?) Start walking on cross country skis; it makes getting around easy and creates a quick learning curve. You'll master walking on skis fast; just put them on and go.

But to glide on cross country skis, try this: take two quick steps, and on your third step pause and glide. The pattern sounds and looks like this: step-step-glide. Take two quick steps and glide on the third step. This drill gets you used to walking and gliding. Next, add a glide with every step.

Hack #3: Use your poles

Question: Why do you use poles? Typical answers (but not totally right): For balance, to slow me down, to help me get up. A better answer: To enhance and complement glide.



Try this with your poles. Put your pole straps around your wrist and let your hands hang by your waist. Let go of the pole handles so the poles just dangle from your wrists. The pole baskets should be behind your boots. Now walk, letting your arms swing naturally just the way you do when you walk. Congratulations, you almost pole perfectly!

Without changing anything with how your arms swing, grab the pole grips and keep walking, letting the arms swing naturally. Your poles remain behind you; never plant the pole baskets by your feet. The pole itself should look like a javelin or spear thrown into the ground at an angle.

Think of the energy of the poles pushing you down the track. If you planted your poles straight up and down beside you, the energy would go up, not forward.

Hack #4: Get a grip

The bottom of your skis most likely resemble fish scales. These are etched or extruded patterns underneath the boot area that dig into the snow with every step. Your fish scales help prevent the ski from slipping backward. Ski manufacturers make fish scales small enough to glide, and barely big enough to get grip. Because they are so small, you must “smash” them into the snow to get traction.

Practice standing on one foot and bouncing lightly without lifting your heel off the ground. This flat footed bounce should be quick and strong. Imagine that



Try the step, step, glide drill to advance beyond just walking on skis.

every time you bounce, you smash the fish scales into the ground.

Now, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Shift your weight from foot to foot. Every time you move over each foot, bounce one time. Move over to the other foot, then bounce one time.

Try to bring it all together and shift your weight, pause, bounce, then shift your weight again. Make the weight shift and the flat-footed bounce two distinct and separate moves. Imagine the weight shift-and-pause as the glide, and the flat-footed bounce as the step in Hack #1 (glide-step, glide-step). Use this mantra: shift-smash, shift-smash, shift-smash.

Lastly, get on those skis and combine Hack #2 with Hack #4 (step-glide-smash, step-glide-smash).

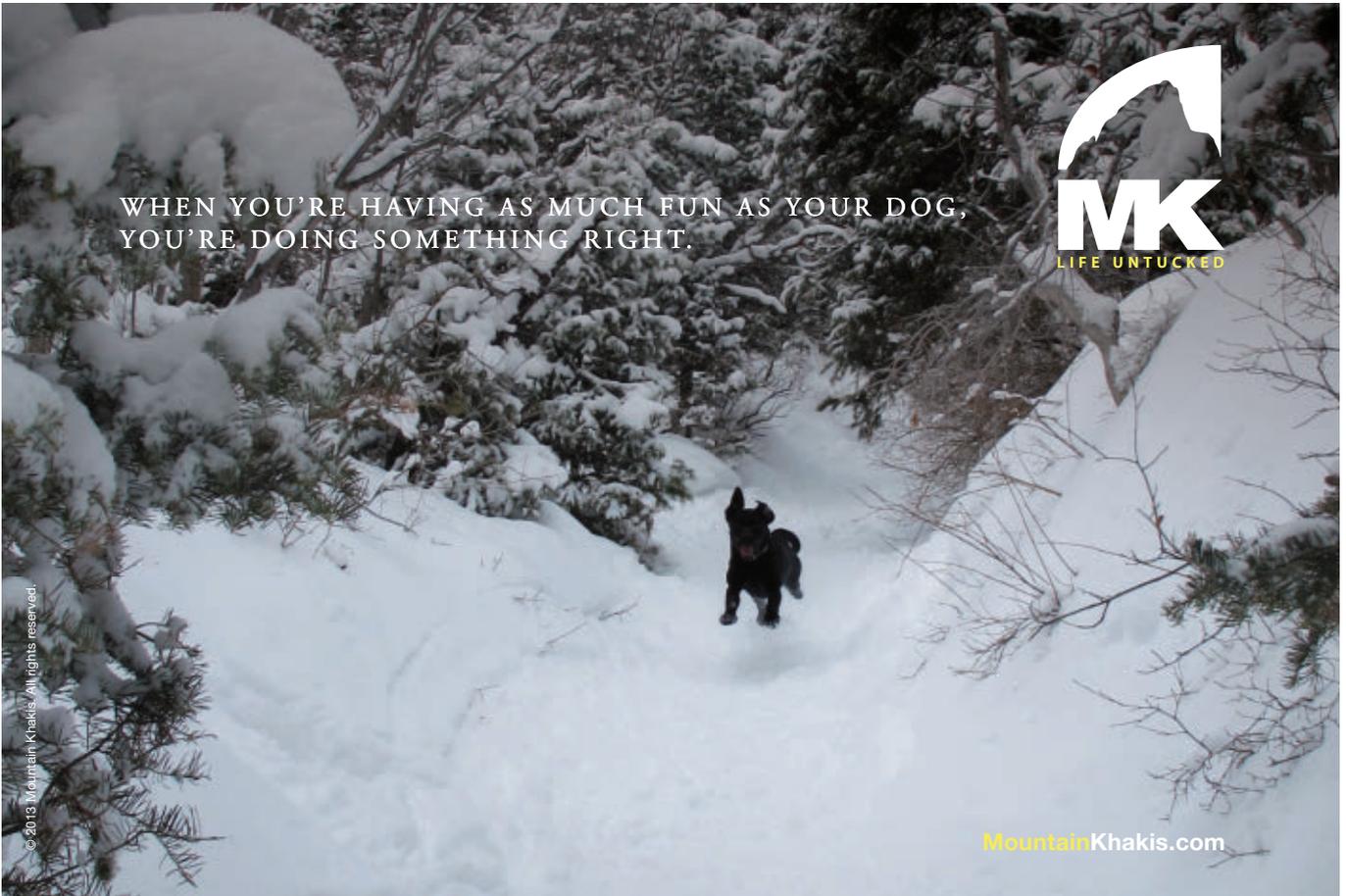
Now you have four cross country hacks to get you going this winter. Balance on one ski, glide instead of shuffle, use your poles, and get a grip. Balance sets you up for better glide and a more effective grip. Gliding and poling helps you ski longer with less energy. Who doesn't like skiing longer and having more fun? And



The pole-dangle exercise promotes proper pole position.

when you go back to your comfy world of alpine ski or snowboard instruction, your newfound insight into the eager but slightly awkward movements of a beginner will help you create lessons with energy and empathy. ☺

David Lawrence is a member of the PSIA-AASI Nordic Team and a cross country clinician and examiner for PSIA-AASI's Northwest Division. When he's not busy with those roles, he teaches alpine skiing at Lookout Pass in Idaho, and is the owner of Pangaea River Rafting that serves Montana and Idaho. He'll soon be launching a new online cross country ski academy which you can find here: www.xcskiacademy.com.



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Help Beginners Take a Stance and Subtly Succumb to Gravity

TEXT BY TONY MACRI; PHOTOS BY BARRY ROBB

To help make students' first days of snowboarding easier (for them and for you), why not focus their attention on the three things that come into play in any attempt to slide on snow – stance, gravity, and subtle control of both.



DANN COFFEY



PHOTO 1

Stance

Generally, instructors describe the basic snowboard stance as athletic, flexed, and aligned (i.e., balanced over the center of the board). We tend to introduce this concept while our students are standing flat on their board, which doesn't necessarily set them up for success. Once students start riding, their board will rarely be flat.

To me, the focus on stance should be more about showing your students the difference between *toeside* and *heelside* stance and balance. To do that, have your students practice a stationary heelside position by starting in an athletic stance and flexing down through their knees and hips – with their hips staying over the heelside edge (photo 1). Later, this



PHOTO 2

movement will help your students balance on an uphill edge while, hopefully, avoiding their downhill edge.

On the toeside, you'll want to encourage the same athletic, flexed, and aligned stance, except this time their hips and center of mass should be over the toeside edge (photo 2). Help your students understand that to flex properly into the toeside turn, they'll extend their hips and pelvis over the toeside – rather than drop their shoulders over that side.

Gravity

We constantly deal with gravity as we slide around the mountain, but beginners attempting their first turns struggle with letting gravity take the board into the fall



PHOTO 3



PHOTO 4

line. The tale-tell sign is when they lean uphill even while trying to follow your instructions to let the board go downhill.

To address this, teach them to flex their front ankle and knee and drive it toward the fall line. This movement creates torsional twist in the snowboard, which disengages the leading contact point from the snow and allows the board to drift with gravity (photos 3, 4).



PHOTO 5



PHOTO 6



PHOTO 7



PHOTO 8

Subtlety

In describing the optimum movements made on snowboards, we often talk about timing, intensity, and duration. It's important to not only teach students the appropriate movements, but also encourage them to make the appropriate *amount* of movements.

With beginners, subtlety can be their best friend! Slower movements give them time to have more obvious and predictable reactions and, in particular, help them avoid an edge catch when making rotational movements (photos 5, 6). This is especially true when

they're first allowing themselves to succumb to gravity. Small, subtle movements also help prevent the fatigue associated with large flexion and extension movements (photos 7, 8).

Final Food for Thought

A focus on stance, gravity, and subtlety will take your students far... but don't stop there. Take this opportunity to promote patience and mountain awareness. Most people want instant responses from their boards, especially when it comes to stopping. Remind your students that they're playing on a slippery

surface and they shouldn't be concerned if they don't get the hang of things instantly.

By expanding their awareness of the learning process, you enable students to make better decisions when you aren't around to help them. ❄️

PSIA-AASI Snowboard Team member Tony Macri is the development coach for snowboard examiners in PSIA-AASI's Rocky Mountain Division. He owns and operates Snow Trainers Inc., a ski and snowboard instructor training camp at Copper Mountain (Colorado), Coronet Peak (New Zealand), and Niseko (Japan).

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—Mike Chait
Snowboard Manager, Smugglers' Notch Resort
Snow Sports University



Infamous Maneuver Offers Lessons in Biomechanics and Shredding

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BRENNAN METZLER

Heel-to-heel. Of all the maneuvers instructors may be required to demonstrate during examinations, this could be the most intimidating: a linked heelside-to-heelside turn with a backside 180-degree spin at edge change.

The maneuver's villainous reputation is rooted in a nasty duplicity; it's both psychologically and biomechanically challenging. Yet the very movements that make heel-to-heel turns so physically demanding offer significant lessons about the relationship between the human and snowboarding performance. By taking a closer look at some heel-to-heel turns, and trying them out on snow, instructors of all levels can improve their own riding and that of their students.

Defining the Devil

In my experience with the Rocky Mountain Division, the heel-to-heel task is

composed of medium- to large-radius heelside turns linked with a backside 180-degree rotation at edge change. The turns can be skidded or carved, as well as open or closed, depending on the level of the examination, the examiner, and the terrain. The backside rotation is performed with even fore/aft pressure (not ollied or nollied) and can be achieved on the ground with a toeside skidded 180, or in the air with a two-footed takeoff and retraction of the legs (see photo sequence 1).

In exams, heel-to-heel turns test a candidate's ability to blend and time movements. Yet their educational value extends beyond the certification setting.

Lesson #1: All about the Ankles

Among the things that makes heel-to-heel turns so demanding is that riders often get limited amplitude during the aerial rotation. This means there's less time to complete the backside rotation, making the entire spin and edge change more rapid and technical. And here lies the first lesson: the ankle joint is significant in one's ability to "pop." When you're riding your toeside edge and want to get air, you have the entire lever of the ankle and foot at your disposal to aid in the process (see photo sequence 2). By contrast, when riding the heelside edge, extending through your ankles does nothing to project your center of mass away from the board (see photo sequence 3).

To get a better sense of this, stand evenly balanced on your heels – with your toes in the air – and extend your ankle joint. What happens to the height of your core? Nothing! Now try the same exercise

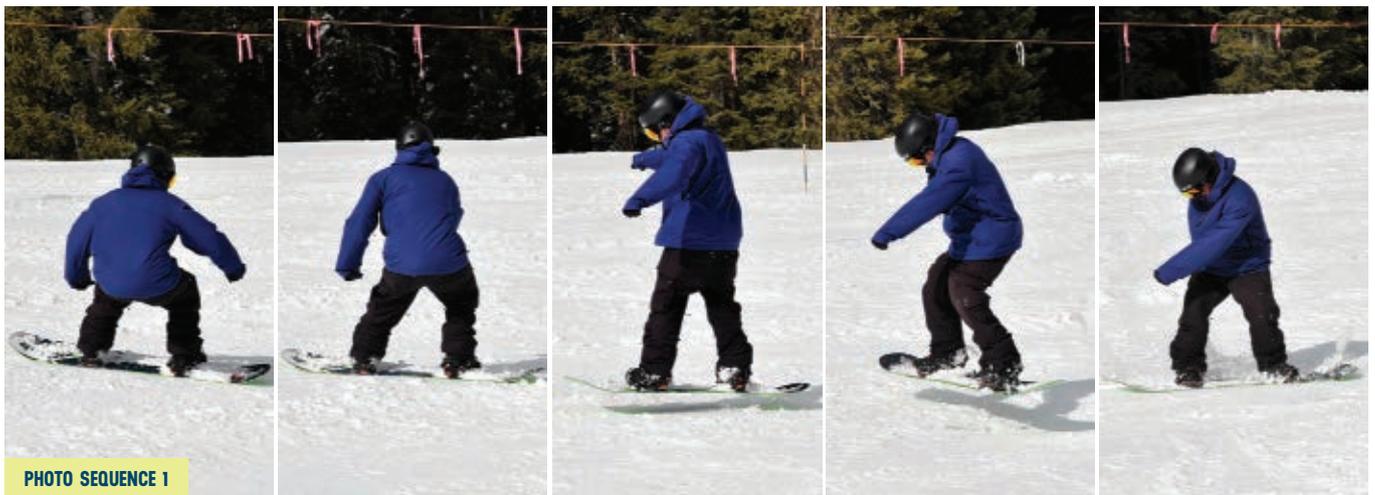


PHOTO SEQUENCE 1

Level III snowboard instructor Cameron Hunter demonstrates the aerial backside 180-degree rotation required to successfully complete the heel-to-heel task. He's finishing a forward heelside turn in the first image and lands in the initiation phase of a switch heelside turn in the last. Notice the even two-footed takeoff he uses to project his body away from the snow, as well as how he completes the entire 180 rotation in the air.



PHOTO SEQUENCE 2



Notice how Hunter's ankles, knees, and hips are flexed during the approach for this movement. Then, at the moment of takeoff, all three joints extend, generating the vertical force necessary to project him away from the snow. The result of all three joints opening together is a pop of significant amplitude.

while standing on your toes. When you extend through your ankle, your body moves away from the ground.

Applied to the heel-to-heel, it's clear that if the ankle joint does little to project a rider away from the snow, then pop must be generated from the knees, hips, and spine – as well as through the decambering and rebound of the snowboard. No wonder riders are anxious about heel-to-heel turns. They have one less joint to initiate a takeoff and gain enough amplitude to rotate a full 180 degrees safely.

Lesson #2: The Nollie Effect

But wait, there's another fiendish bio-mechanical constraint at work in heel-to-heel turns. Riders often struggle to evenly apply two-footed pressure on the snowboard at the initiation of their rotations in the heel-to-heel task. In fact, many individuals move their center of mass toward the leading part of their snowboard



PHOTO SEQUENCE 3



Notice here how Hunter's ankle joint remains extended throughout this entire sequence: from approach to takeoff into maneuver. To move his body into the air from his heelside edge, he extends through his knees, hips, and spine. The resulting air is of lower amplitude than that resulting from its corresponding toeside movement – the direct result of not being able to utilize the lever of the ankle and foot for extension while on the heelside edge.

during edge change (whether in the air or on the ground), creating an unequal foot-to-foot pressure and eventual nollie board performance at takeoff. Hence the heel-to-heel's second lesson: when you rotate your hips toward either edge, one knee and ankle will flex and the other knee and ankle will extend (see photo sequence 4). In other words, hip rotation results in lower leg flexion and extension.

To help clarify this biomechanical cause and effect, try this. Stand evenly on two feet in an athletic stance. Then, simply rotate your hips toward either foot and observe the resulting flexion and extension of your knees and ankles. Whichever leg you rotate your hips toward, flex in the knee and ankle and the opposing leg will extend.

This is why riders performing heel-to-heel turns often experience a nollie movement pattern at edge change. If a rider's hips are rotated toward the toeside edge of their snowboard prior to leaving the ground, the discrepancy in ankle and knee flexion between their leading and trailing legs will ultimately project their center of mass – nollie-like – toward the leading part of their snowboard.

Conquering the Devil

So, how do you best apply these two lessons? 1) To maximize heelside pop – and the air time you'll need to perform the backside rotation – extend through the knees, hips, and spine. 2) If you continue to use your hips to drive the backside rotation at edge change, rotation *must* occur during or just after the pop. A second change you can make is to drive the backside rotation with your shoulders. Since it eliminates hip rotation, this option minimizes the risk of a nollie because the front and trailing leg remain equally flexed throughout the edge change.

The Devil Lives On: Taking it beyond Heel-to-Heel

Heel-to-heel mastery isn't the ultimate goal in snowboarding, but we can take the lessons of heel-to-heel turns and apply them across the mountain. Namely, you'll learn to blend and time movements to

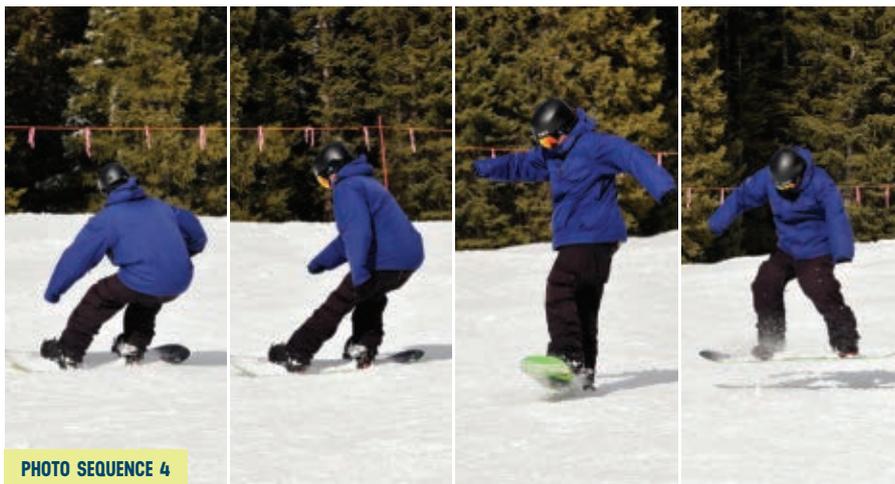


PHOTO SEQUENCE 4

Notice how the rotation of Hunter's hips toward the toeside edge of his snowboard prior to takeoff results in the flexion of his front knee and ankle and extension of his trailing knee and ankle. This position of unequal flex between leading and trailing legs moves his center of mass toward the leading part of the snowboard. As Hunter "pops" from this position, his snowboard flexes unevenly along the fore aft plane and creates a visible nollie.

achieve a desired set of board performances – including rebound at turn finish, toeside/heelside pop, and better use of the ankle joint to manage tilt, pressure control, turn shape, and speed – which can apply to all parts of snowboarding and instruction.

Despite their devilish reputation, heel-to-heel turns are more than just a high-level examination maneuver. They are an

effective educational tool that can aid each of us in our snowboarding progression. 32°

Brennan Metzler is a snowboard trainer and ski instructor at Breckenridge Resort in Colorado. He coaches freestyle for Method Snowboard Academy and directs Peaks for Peace, a non-profit blending mountain pursuits and philanthropy.

MEETING THE DEVIL

If you've never attempted a heel-to-heel turn, try the following three-step progression.

1. Work through a series of flat-ground spins on friendly terrain, mastering the timing of changing edges while rotating. If you're successfully performing these flatground spins, then you have learned how to blend rotation from your hips or spine with flexion and extension of your knees and ankles. Being able to consistently pivot your snowboard on the snow in both directions, clockwise and counterclockwise, is the first step toward heel-to-heel mastery.
2. Once you're sufficiently dizzy from playing with flatground spins, it's time to learn to ride switch. If you've never ridden switch, try following the introductory progression you provide students when they're learning to snowboard for the first time, only with your unnatural foot forward.
3. If you're now able to perform flatground rotations and basic switch riding, it's time to try your first heel-to-heel. Select a consistent, uncrowded, and comfortable pitch. Heel-to-heel turns can make it more difficult to see traffic, so check for oncoming riders. Once you've found your spot, start a forward heelside traverse. As you slowly flatten your snowboard and it begins to move into the fall line, look over your trailing shoulder and perform a flatground 180. By looking over your trailing shoulder at the beginning of the spin, you'll already have your eyes in the correct place as you finish the rotation, looking across the hill with your switch foot forward. Congratulations! At this point you'll be riding a switch heelside traverse, having met the heel-to-heel devil for the first time.

– Brennan Metzler

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Scavenger Hunt Is an On-target Way to Promote Mountain Safety

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CHARLOTTE RASMUSSEN

Have you ever tried to give a safety talk in a children's lesson, only to see the kids stare back at you with blank expressions or, worse, goof around with no interest in hearing what you have to say? Even though safety is serious business, making it fun will help make a more lasting impression.

Holding a virtual scavenger hunt – in which children look for (but don't physically collect) items that factor in your safety messages – is an engaging way to promote safety and mountain awareness for young skiers and riders. I generally choose at least 10 items in

a combination that emphasizes mountain safety and awareness, with a few fun and environmental items thrown in to keep it interesting. My item choice is based on the children's cognitive abilities and whether or not they can read yet. For instance, I

might have older students look for the patrol headquarters sign, but have younger students see if they can spot a patroller by the cross on the back of their jacket.

At the beginning of the lesson, I read the list of items and ask the children to point them out when they find them. Usually one of the items can be easily seen from our starting point, which gives the children a chance to successfully find an item quickly and allows me to discuss the information I wish to convey about that particular item. It also establishes a routine we follow when we search for and identify the remaining items. For example, when students locate a sign with a blue square we discuss the differences between blue, black, and green trails, talk about the correct terrain for the class, and explain why that terrain is appropriate.

As shown by the list on page 88, I classify the items into four general categories (safety, mountain awareness, mountain environment, and fun), although there is a lot of overlap between categories. Some elements call for children to offer up ideas, rather than locate a specific thing.

In staging your own scavenger hunts, you can modify or add items specific to *your* ski area and mountain environment. Properly selected, these items give you the opportunity to discuss such safety issues as how to avoid creating dangerous situations, collision prevention, and who to ask for help.

Building mountain awareness and orienting your students to their environment sets the stage for greater independence so that they can avoid getting lost, find a toilet quickly, and learn more about their beautiful winter surroundings. Adding a fun or goofy item promotes smiles and often interesting conversations.



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Safety

- A safety rule, e.g., let each child tell a safety rule so you can discuss Your Responsibility Code
- Something dangerous, e.g., ask children to point out something dangerous, like a tree well
- Mountain employees, including ski patrollers, instructors, and lifties
- Rope lines and different types of warning signs
- Safety equipment, such as whistles, shovels, and ski patrol toboggans
- Snowboarders or skiers wearing different colors of clothing or helmets
- Ski area equipment, such as snowmobiles or snowcats
- Trash in the snow

Mountain Awareness

- Information signs, such as mountain maps or trail markers
- Green circles/blue squares/black diamonds
- Locators for services such lifts, lodges, toilets, and garbage cans

Mountain Environment

- Ski area features to the north, south, east, or west
- Mountain weather phenomena, such as icy steps or blowing snow
- Geologic features, including nearby mountain peaks and glaciers
- Snow features, such as cornices, avalanches, slides, and blast marks in the snow
- Animals or animal tracks in the snow

Fun

- Evidence of a snow snake, e.g., someone who has fallen or is covered in snow after falling down
- A member of the student's family
- Location of kid's trails or mini terrain features
- Animal shapes found in tree branches, snow features, or clouds in the sky
- Different types of ski or snowboarding equipment, including rocker skis, twin tips, sit-skis, split boards, and telemark, cross-country, and randonee gear



■ A scavenger hunt is a great way to familiarize children with their mountain environment.

I enjoy using a cooperative approach with young children, in which they work as a team to try to find all the items. However, the hunt can be executed in many different ways depending on the ages of the children involved, your teaching philosophy, your ski area, and the items chosen. For example, you can make the hunt more elaborate by adding items that you actually need to collect, not just identify. (Perhaps your class can be on litter patrol and help you collect random trail maps that fall out of people's pockets.) You could even turn the scavenger hunt into an adventure by adding items that require the children to explore a new trail or perform a new skill like skating on a cat track in order to find the next item.

Be prepared to be surprised when your young clients find some of these items in the most unexpected places, which serves to help *you* learn more about your

mountain environment! In my experience, children enjoy this engaging activity as they continue to point out already found items throughout the current lesson and the next. Most important, they are learning and reinforcing important safety and environmental messages without you being in charge of delivering all the information.

Proof that this approach is a success comes when the lessons end with the question, "Can we do another scavenger hunt next week?" ❄️

Dr. Charlotte Rasmussen, a Level I alpine instructor with a Children's Specialist 1 credential, teaches at Washington's Mt. Baker Ski Area. She enjoys working with young children and their parents to build fun lifelong family skiing adventures, and is very happy that her two children still want to ski with her.



DAN TREADWAY



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Freestyle for First-Timers Injects Jibbery Elements Into Basic Skills

BY KELLY COFFEY

The 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, will host the first-ever ski slopestyle and ski halfpipe events, which will be viewed by a worldwide audience beyond skiing's core participants. As a result, I predict that more new skiers will visit the mountains with visions of halfpipes and rails in their heads. Even a first-day skier may aspire to hit the terrain park.



PSIA-AASI Freestyle Specialist David Oliver demonstrates a switch wedge on gentle terrain.

EARL SALINE

On a new skier's first day, you have an opportunity to introduce freestyle elements that both connect with your students' motivations and develop general skiing skills – after first doing some boot work and making sure your student understands a functional skiing stance, as well as how to make the desired movements for flexing/extending (pressure control), tipping (edge control), and leg steering (rotational control). Switch skiing and jumping are two maneuvers you can introduce in the beginner zone to get your students in the jibber mindset.

Switch Wedge Turns

A beginner's initial introduction to switch skiing should be on a slow straight run that gently slopes to a flat run-out. At first, it's more about getting comfortable with moving backwards than actively steering the skis.

From there, you can go with a falling-leaf drill, which introduces slight steering while sliding backward. Picture a maple leaf falling from a tree – the back-and-forth path it makes in the air as it glides to the ground. Encourage your student to make that same back-and-forth track in the snow, always staying on the uphill edges of the skis while sliding a few feet forward, then a few feet backward. This drill requires your student to make subtle



DANN COFFEY

fore/aft adjustments (pressure control), stay on the uphill edges of both skis (edge control), and subtly steer the ski tips or tails back up the hill (rotational control).

Once your student is comfortable with the falling-leaf drill, you can introduce back-up turns, which will amp up their switch steering. This drill takes the student across the hill, resulting in a track that looks like a curvy "W." The student begins with one forward turn, over-steering it straight up the hill until stalling out (the middle of the "W"). At that point, the student changes edges and makes a switch turn, steering across and up the hill to a stop. The crucial moment in this drill is that stall point in the middle of the "W." This is where you can highlight one specific movement at the point your student is sliding at zero mph.

After you've built up a solid foundation of switch skills and comfort, you can put it all together by getting your student to link a few switch wedge turns. You'll want him or her to understand and demonstrate speed control from the turn shape, not just from the wedge.

Switch skiing is great for learning how to flex the ankles to maintain fore/aft pressure control. When you see your student in the correct body position, give instant positive feedback. Ask your student to focus on those current sensations, reminding him or her to try to get those sensations when skiing forward, too. That will help translate to faster improvements in your student's overall ability.

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Jumping

Jumping is a universal part of freestyle, and another task you can introduce on day one. Most students you encounter will be able to jump from a stationary position no coaching on your part. Get your student to do a few quick stationary jumps without skis on, then with them on. The goal is to get the tips and tails of the skis to leave the snow at the same time and land at the same time.

The next step involves jumping while sliding forward. You'll want your student to focus on not just jumping up, but jumping up and forward in the direction of travel. This outcome allows the skier to take off and land balanced over the center of the sliding skis.

Jazz up this maneuver by drawing lines in the snow to have your student jump over. Get even more creative by building mini snowmen to jump over (or smash, depending on your student's motivation). These visual targets help him or her learn the timing of the approach and takeoff.

Jumping develops overall balance and a more functional stance by improving the skier's pressure-control skill. The increased range of motion, ability to stay centered over the skis, and increased comfort while sliding translates well to forward turns. As the instructor, it's your role to make the connection in your student's mind between the movements and sensations of jumping and the desired sensations in a well-executed turn. What does a functional stance feel like? What body parts do you move when you make fore/aft corrections to stay centered over your

QUICK TIP: SWITCH TURNS

Is your student able to link switch wedge turns? Add a degree of difficulty to this task by planting a course of obstacles to turn through: plastic cones, snowballs, or pinecones. Along with a need for a higher level of movement ownership, this variation adds the visual element, forcing your student to look where he or she is going instead of back up the hill.

— Kelly Coffey



SHERRI HARKIN

Jumping helps skiers develop overall balance and improve pressure-control skill. Here, PSIA-AASI Alpine Team member Robin Barnes jumps up and in the direction of travel.

skis? How do you absorb the forces you generate in skiing?

Final Thoughts

Your goal while teaching any beginner lesson should be to take students who are dabbling in the sport and convert them into lifelong skiers. Freestyle can be a great tool to help achieve that goal. These drills develop the same skills students use in all of their turns: rotational control, edge control, and pressure control. It's just that freestyle builds these skills in unique ways.

Incorporating freestyle elements into any lesson will help your students become more skillful skiers. By becoming adept at injecting freestyle into beginner lessons, you'll have more great tools to both improve turns and build your lesson into a memorable experience. 

Kelly Coffey is a freestyle specialist for the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team and the training manager for Colorado's Breckenridge Ski and Ride School. Follow his PSIA-AASI Alpine Team adventures on Twitter @KellyRCoffey.

QUICK TIP: JUMPING

Stage a "jump sesh" in the beginner area with your students. Draw a jump or funbox in the snow and have your students work on their airborne skills with these visual targets. After jumping over your line, have your students ski off to the side and sidestep or herringbone back up to the top of the approach, ready to hit the jump again. This is a great way to motivate your students to practice those drills that develop the edge control skill.

— Kelly Coffey

YIN OF FUN, YANG OF SAFETY



Freestyle maneuvers can inject fun into lessons for students of any age. However, with the yin of fun, there is also the necessary yang of safety. Be sure to set up your freestyle tasks in the safest way possible by following these tips, inspired by the Smart Style Terrain Park Safety Initiative:

- **Easy Style It.** Stick with easy terrain that's well within your student's comfort zone: the flattest and least-congested parts of the beginner area. The mantra "challenge with the task, not the terrain" should always be in your head.
- **Clear the Landing Zone.** Set up your tasks so your students have lots of elbowroom in the beginner area, free from other traffic, trees, or buildings they might run into. You want them focusing on the new movements of the task instead of worrying about the other people or obstacles getting into their personal bubble.
- **Look Before You Leap.** Keep an eye on your student's body language, looking out for fatigue or fear. Make sure your student is warmed-up and excited for playing with freestyle. Never jump right into freestyle maneuvers first thing or at the end of a tiring day.

— Kelly Coffey



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K2 25	Tecnica/Blizzard 49
Killington 94	Todi 94
Knee Binding 75	Toko 65
Lange 7	Transpack 67
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Through the Lens

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POWDER! Paul Berntsen, a Level III alpine instructor at New Hampshire's Crotched Mountain, plies the fluffy stuff in the woods off of the 7th Heaven Express at Blackcomb, British Columbia. Photo by fellow Crotched Mountain instructor Jack Wentz.



THINKSTOCK

@n one of the first powder days of the year, I took my youth ski class (Scooters) up the hill to let them play with some different turn techniques. On our way down the Bittersweet run, I noticed that 9-year-old Rachel had a rather perplexed look on her face, so I asked her if anything was wrong. She replied, "I'm having a really difficult time skiing in all of this angel poop!"

On the *next* powder day of the season, new terrain had just opened and, using a guided-discovery approach, I encouraged my Scooters class to practice round turn shapes and meet at the next visible "Trails Merge" sign. I noticed that 11-year-old Tanner was heading off on his own to explore some untracked snow on a run called Oh No. Knowing how much snow had fallen overnight, I thought, "*This little guy is probably going to require some help digging out,*" so I followed just a few turns behind without him knowing.

Upon reaching a seemingly endless pillow of white, velvety snow, Tanner entered the fluffy abyss and came to a

shockingly abrupt stop in what could easily be described as a massive blizzard of white crystals exploding across the endless expanses of time. This led him to exclaim at the top of his lungs, "Holy crap!" – at which point I appeared beside him and asked, "Is that kind of like angel poop?"

Fast forward a few weeks later in the season. I had friends visiting from Louisiana, and Mother Nature again blessed us with heaps of fresh powder. For visitors to our glorious Rocky Mountains who rarely get to experience snow back home – let alone ski in several inches of freshies at any one time – they simply stated, "This is BS."

So to summarize the lessons that will be frozen in time for the rest of my career, it slides down to this: When it really, really dumps, little girls call it angel poop, little boys call it holy crap, and adults call it BS (Blessed Snow)!

John Marta

*Alpine III, Children's Specialist 1,
Freestyle Specialist 1
Copper Mountain, CO*



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