



# How Inclusion Helps Us BUILD STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

By Nicholas Herrin, PSIA-AASI Chief Executive Officer

**S**ki and snowboard instructors play a unique role in our industry. Along with patrollers and lift operators, we are the most visible employees on the hill – and for those guests who take lessons, we are their main connection to the

snowsports experience. With so much uncertainty and anxiety these days – due to a global pandemic, climate change, social unrest, or political divisiveness (alone or in combination) – I appreciate the perspective that one of our association’s leaders recently shared with me: “PSIA-AASI should be a safe haven for people to turn to and focus on something they love – snowsports education.” I wholeheartedly agree.

We are educators but also ambassadors, inspiring people to give snowsports a try and come back year after year to enjoy all that skiing and riding offers. A perfect example is the opportunity to embrace and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in education. Equal inclusion for all must be a priority in how we interact with one another and with students. Inclusion is what an organization does – the action it takes – to ensure that individuals feel welcomed, supported, and valued as a member of the community, and PSIA-AASI plays a critical role in that experience.

## NEW DEI TASK FORCE WILL SUPPORT, EDUCATE MEMBERS

People choose to participate in activities in which they feel comfortable and gravitate to communities where they feel welcome.

Through industry and community outreach and connections forged with instructors, let’s work to make sure students of every race, religion, nationality, age, ability, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class feel comfortable and welcome in the snow-sports environment. Good instructors master the technical side of our profession but also understand – and strive to learn more about – how relating to a diverse group of people makes them better educators and more well-rounded individuals. In recent years, PSIA-AASI’s operational and governance leaders have been addressing the need for greater diversity within the industry and association itself. We’ve made positive strides, but it’s clear we can and should do more.

In June, PSIA-AASI created the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force (see [tiny.cc/DEITaskForce](https://www.psi-aasi.org/DEITaskForce)) to support and educate our members – who are more diverse than we might realize. The work of our new task force will help open our eyes to opportunities for establishing more equitable relationships and strengthening our skillsets as educators. It will also give voice and visibility to a broader culture of snowsports. Questioning the status quo leads to positive and informed changes, and we should

be part of a societal transition to greater awareness of everyone’s experiences and need for equal footing and respect. Doing so will only strengthen the connections we create with our students, colleagues, and peers in the industry.

We are the gateway for people to engage in our sports, giving them a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar environment. Think of the lessons we could teach and the community we could build. Think about how many more people would be inspired to become instructors themselves.

## COMMON LOVE OF SNOWSPORTS CREATES INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

In implementing action plans developed with the input of the DEI Task Force we can take cues from PSIA-AASI’s Women’s Initiative Task Force, which has played an invaluable role in challenging our association to promote inclusion to counter implicit bias and create a more equitable snowsports community. I frequently ask myself, “*Have I done everything I can to welcome everyone to our snowsports community and the mountain culture? If not, what more can I do? What can I learn?*”

The fundamentals of PSIA-AASI’s Learning Connection model encompass people skills, teaching skills, and technical skills, encouraging instructors to understand and manage students’ “emotional risk” and “recognize and influence the behaviors, motivations, and emotions of others.” Embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges us to reassess our people and teaching skills and strengthen our understanding of others. Learning how to be more inclusive not only promotes strong people skills, it supports the growth of the sports we love.

Thank you for keeping this in mind when you meet (or recruit!) a new member or welcome someone to our sports. I am hopeful and optimistic about the future. Maybe a common love of snowsports can be the lens through which we view our options for building the relationships that make the world a little better. I know 2020 has been a difficult year, but communities like PSIA-AASI will continue to work to support everyone who wants to enjoy the outdoors. Thank you for being part of the PSIA-AASI community. **32**



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