



# *PSIA - Rocky Mountain Division – AASI*



## **Teach from the Heart** **“How” to Communicate with Success”**

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As we look at the overall field of ski teaching, one thing seems to come to the forefront: we know *what* to teach but not HOW to teach. The “what” is really quite simple as compared to the HOW. Compare the HOW to a perfect turn. What is the most difficult part of the turn for most skier to execute? It is probably the transition zone, that portion of the turn where the skier must go from one set of edges to the other set of edges. Once on the new set of edges, with a little more skill and know how, the rest of the turn happens. Relate this transition to communicating with the student, which is the most difficult part of teaching. It is HOW you communicate that takes the most skill!

The instructor may have the right idea in his mind as to what we wants the student to do, but the difficulty comes in getting it across to the student. Having the idea in your mind as an instructor is easy; getting it into the mind of the student is difficult. But that is not all; once the student gets the idea, he/she must execute this idea. In other words, going from an idea to an improved performance is the key to success!

Once the student gets the idea, this idea must include everything. The student must get HOW to use the muscle, HOW to use various tendons and ligaments, HOW to move various body parts and so on. Getting the idea across takes a skill called communication, or the “HOW”. The way an instructor communicates with the student is the key to the HOW. Just like the transition from edge to edge is critical in the turn, communication is critical to teaching. What then, is communication?

**Meeting the Needs and Wants of the Student:** Meeting the NEEDS and/or WANTS of the student is the most critical aspect of teaching skiing (or anything else for that matter). The wants and needs of a student may not be the same. What he/she wants is not necessarily what he/she needs. AN instructor must assess student needs (what is truly essential to improve his/her skiing). Instructors must also assess student wants. They may want to ski the “steep, deep and ugly”, but the realistic need may be to learn a better short-radius turn. Never have a set method of approach to a lesson; every lesson is different; every person’s NEEDS and WANTS are different!

**Communication:** The process of transmitting and receiving ideas, information and messages. Communication between two people is an outgrowth of methods developed over centuries of expression. Gestures, the development of language and the necessity to engage in joint action all play a part.\* What are some of the many aspects of communication that might play an important part in teaching people to ski?

**Vocabulary:** What words are going to be used? Do they really mean what the instructor is thinking? Does the student understand the meaning of these words? Are there many different words to express the same idea? After using these words will the student have the same idea in his/her head as the instructor does? The correct words are important, as well as the variety of words. Look at the concept of getting the student to obtain the correct relationship between skis, snow and the mountain. What word to use: stance, athletic stance, sweet spot, position, relationship fore, aft, backward, forward, left, right, up, down? Which word will help the student grasp what you want him/her to grasp?

**Inflection:** The voice, HOW it is used. Is it a monotone? Does it rise and fall? Is it soft or loud? Inflection helps get the idea over to the student. Does the voice have personality, pizzazz? Does it vary according to the situation? Does it help the student have the same idea as the instructor? When the word “carve” is used, is it used as carve or ccaarrrrrvveee? Which way would help the student grasp the concept?

**Body Language:** Various parts of the body can help or hinder the choice of words. Many different aspects of body language may be used with one or two simple words. Many words may be used with one or two simple body movements. Body language and words: These complement one another. When the instructor wants the student to learn the correct position in relationship to the skis, does the instructor assume this position to show the correct relationship between the various parts of the body and the skis? Do well-chosen words and expressions accompany the good demonstration in a meaningful manner?

**Eye Contact:** The eyes tell us more than anything else. Looking at the eyes of a student can tell the instructor a great deal. Does the student understand what the instructor is trying to communicate? Do the student and the instructor have the same idea in mind? IS there confusion in the student’s mind? Does he/she look plain baffled? The eyes tell as well as the voice. Many students are reluctant to tell a instructor they are confused. The eyes show fear, pain, understanding, happiness, sadness, etc. The eyes of the instructor must reflect sincerity. An instructor’s eyes will communicate whether he/she really enjoys teaching. The eyes of the student tell the instructor if the student is enjoying learning.

**Appearance:** When an instructor looks professional, acts professional and sincerely feels professional, this will be communicated to the student. Overall appearance and attitude will communicate many impressions to the student, good and bad. It will help develop a student’s faith in the instructor. Faith is critical, “trust me”.

**Knowledge:** The instructor must have a complete and thorough knowledge and understanding of the science of physics and how it relates to the science of skiing. This thorough understanding must exist in order to conjure up the correct idea to transmit (communicate) to the students.

**Observation:** Watch the body language of the student. When the instructor demonstrates a movement, body language is critical to implementing an idea in the student's mind. Conversely, body language is critical to implementing an idea in the student's mind. Conversely, body language of the student is critical in telling the instructor what is going on in the student's mind; what idea or image does the student have?

**Listening:** Communication is a two-way street. The instructor must be able to talk to the student, but most definitely must be able to listen to what the student has to say. What the student has to say is far more important than what the instructor has to say. Should the student talk as much as the instructor? When the student tells the instructor something, the instructor should try to tell the student what he/she just heard. Feedback.

**Compliment:** It makes an instructor feel terrific when the student says, "What a great lesson!" Go the other way; students need to be told that their progress and performance is "Great!" Always find something good to say, even if it is the smallest of accomplishments. Compliment first, then correct, then compliment again. End on a positive note. Remember that a skill may be broken down into small parts. Compliments may be made on small parts of the performance. Compliments should be used to enhance the performance as well as the student's self image. When making corrections always do so in a positive manner. Present the negative in a positive way. Remember, compliments lead to confidence. Confidence leads to comfort, and thus a good lesson!

**Other Things You Can Do to Improve Communication:**

1. Pause before responding to a question. Take a brief moment to be sure the question is understood; use this moment to formulate the answer, being sure that it is the most correct and best answer for the situation. Then give the answer.
2. Vary the teaching approach. Ideally the teaching approach and learning method match. An instructor can readily vary the approach, even though his/her strongest teaching style will probably dominate. Try to discover the student's learning style as soon as possible. Ask, observe, look at results of the student's efforts, trial and error.
3. Ask sensible questions: ones that pertain to the task at hand. Asking is an efficient way to obtain feedback. Constant feedback between instructor and student is essential.
4. Don't ignore fear. The best method to pursue dealing with student fear is to assume that it is always there, even if it doesn't show. Fear, apprehension, whatever it is called, is always present to some degree. Present the lesson so that it will handle, if not eliminate, fear. Fear will block learning and must be dealt with, reduced or eliminated at the very onset of the lesson.

5. Skiing is a science; teaching is an art. The science part is fairly objective and can be mastered, the knowledge learned and applied to performance. The art of teaching is much more difficult; it involves the complex personalities of both student and instructor and the orchestration of effective communication.
6. Communication is essential, but how much? When filling a glass of water and the top is reached and full, if you continue pouring, everything that spills over is wasted and lost. Don't overload. Communicate only what is essential to get the idea across and the performance correct. Cut the fat out of communication; keep it lean!
7. It isn't always necessary to present a whole idea. Perhaps the instructor needs to break up the idea to be communicated into small segments. Present one segment at a time in logical sequence. Sometimes the whole idea may be presented at one time and maybe the student will grasp it, but be prepared to break it down. Give time for the idea to assimilate. Keep it simple!

### **Show Them you CARE!**

*Students do not know how much you know until they know how much you care. Good teaching comes from a fire in the belly that indicates that you care. **TEACH FROM THE HEART. The anatomy of good teaching is in the heart and the belly!***

\* "Communication," Microsoft ® Encarta. Copyright © 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright © Funk & Wagnall's Corporation.