

Understanding Senior Skiers – Part Two of Four by Peggy Connor

Effectively Reaching and Teaching the Senior Skier ("The Reach and Teach Method")

So you've got your senior certification pin. What do you do now? Here are three principles to follow that will get you started, which will give you a guideline to go by if you want to really make a positive impact on your students, as well as set a good example for your colleagues.

One. Define. Find out what your student really wants out of the lesson. Although this might sound easy, it can be quite a challenge. Frequently, even the student doesn't know what he/she wants or needs, so you are left with the responsibility.

Two. Evaluate. Compare what your student wants out of the lesson to what you think your student is capable of. In other words, you define the real need. This requires experience and skill. You literally have to watch the skier move, while he/she is sitting down, moves to a standing from a seated position. Watch him/her walk, ski and carry equipment. Then, after evaluating the skier physically, emotionally and mentally, it is your charge to determine if the goal is reasonable.

Three. Work on making sure your senior students understand contemporary movement mechanics. You can easily spend an entire day doing this ... for some ... an entire week of privates may be necessary. I personally have been working on this for most of my life, and still haven't quite mastered it. ☺

Here are some ideas on how to break these three objectives down into a step by step process.

Define the true need set of your skier.

Find out what your skier really wants out of the lesson, and then, give him/her what he/she needs. I am constantly amazed by the answers I get from folks after spending a few minutes interviewing them. Many times, they don't come to ski, they came for other reasons ... social outlet being the main one. But you really need to know why the skier is here before you move forward.

I will never forget one female student, over 65 years of age, who presented one day to "learn how to ski." She had never been on a mountain and had come from a background did not permit spending hard earned money on "engaging in frivolous activities." A widow, she just wanted to have some fun and conquer her fear of sliding down a hill made out of snow and ice. For her, it was a self esteem exercise. And you know what they say about women ... "Girls just want to have fun." It doesn't matter if she is 6 or 60 ... she just wanted to have some fun.

We spent the entire day doing just that. And she did a lot more than just "slide down an icy hill". She told me later that it was one of the best days of her life. And that is why I do what I do.

Evaluate

Before you do anything, check the equipment. Then, check the equipment. And then of course be sure to check the equipment. Get my point. Moreover, be sure to check the clothing and the "accessories" that your skier is wearing. If you have to, go rent some good equipment. And if you need to, leave behind some of those "lovely" accessories that will only cause problems. Do what it takes. It all adds up. Just make sure your skier is on the right equipment and in the right garb before you even begin movements. Sunscreen needs to be a part of that check list too.

"Equipment designed to improve stability is also shown to facilitate a decrease in the integral of drag." Sports Engineering, **Volume 4 Issue 2 Page 103-112, May 2001**, *To cite this article: B. E. Thompson, W. A. Friess, K. N. Knapp II (2001) Aerodynamics of speed skiers Sports Engineering 4 (2) , 103–112 doi:10.1046/j.1460-2687.2001.00072.x.*

Now that you have the right equipment and have SLATHERED sunscreen all over your face as well as the face of your student, educate your senior skier. Yes, skiing has changed over the years, and yes, you are going to be up against a lot of resistance if your student has any kind of a history using old styles. Patience is the key word here. And tenacity. Was it Churchill who said "Never, ever, ever give up."

There are some excellent fundamental concepts found in "Handbook for Teaching Seniors" found at the [psia-w.org](http://www.psia-w.org/pdf/HANDBOOK_FOR_TEACHING_SENIORS.pdf) web site. You can build on those. (http://www.psia-w.org/pdf/HANDBOOK_FOR_TEACHING_SENIORS.pdf)

"Furthermore, contemporary skiing tends to include rounder turns because the contemporary equipment is designed to carve rather than skid." (Handbook for Teaching Seniors, p.23)

Examine your student's expectations. Are they realistic? "The decisions people make as they age are influenced not only by past and current circumstances, but also by what they expect to happen in the future," according to Growing Older in America: The Health & Retirement Study. Sponsored by the National Institute on Aging.

And look for signs of potential problems. Look for things that are obvious. Obesity appears to have an independent effect on the onset of impairment in strength, lower body mobility, and activities of daily living (Jenkins 2004).

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/ResearchInformation/ExtramuralPrograms/BehavioralAndSocialResearch/HRSfull.htm>

Explore your student's future expectations. Initial analysis of this will determine your strategy for communicating effectively with your special student. Simply put, it is up to you to determine if the student in front of you can actually achieve the goals you set for yourselves when the lesson begins. Make them realistic.

Simply put ... you have to "reach 'em to teach 'em." And be sure to seal each lesson with a KISS. That's right ... remember to always "keep it simple "