

SKI
TIPSBy
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GETTING BETTER THIS YEAR

The entire ski season lies before us. From your current position on the sofa, anything is possible. Flawless bump lines down North Bowl. Effortless Ridge hikes. Lindsay Vonn-like arcs down the groomers. The possibilities are tantalizing.

There's probably not a single skier or rider who aspires to phone it in and have an average season. What the heck, maybe you'll even get a little worse? Nope, instead you are already envisioning the impressive new things you'll accomplish.

Despite what your kids or spouse may think of your skiing potential, I'm on your side. I think you really can have a breakout year. But only if you make a concrete plan for how to go about it. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said it best: "A goal without a plan is just a wish."

So how do you get better? By trying harder? By spending a lot of money on gear? By speeding up your GoPro footage so it looks like you're going faster? While you are welcome to try all of those, here's a more realistic list.

ENVISION WHAT YOU'D LIKE TO CHANGE.

We all want to get better, but what does that actually mean? The answer is different for everyone. Maybe you want to ski tougher runs. Maybe you want to just feel more on top of things and less at the whim of snow and gravity. Maybe you want to ski longer and not get tired by lunchtime. Maybe you just want to keep doing what you're doing, but look cooler while doing so. Setting a goal is a natural first step in this process.

FIGURE OUT WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK.

It is technique? Knowledge? Fitness? Gear? If you're not sure, compare yourself to your peers and see where you could improve your game. Think about the parts of your day where you seem to have a harder time than everyone else. That might reveal an aspect of your skiing that is ready for improvement.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS.

It's hard to figure out how to step it up if you don't know where to start. Have someone film you and see what you like and don't like about your moves. Or take a lesson and ask for feedback. Or do both!

FIGURE OUT HOW TO CHANGE.

This may not be easy to determine on your own. Taking a lesson is the surest path to answering this question, but you could also take a video and compare it to a skier who embodies the style you would like to have. Can you put your finger on one or two concrete things you can change? For example, maybe you could use your poles to create better rhythm in your turns. Or, if you see a lag between each turn, you could work on not skiing so far across the fall line and getting into the next turn quicker. Those are concrete things you can practice. Don't pick an improbable thing to fix, "I've never hiked the Ridge, but



CHRIS KERR

I'm pretty sure I'll win King of the Ridge this year." If you have a lofty goal, break it down into concrete, doable steps.

DON'T TRY HARDER. TRY DIFFERENTLY.

In my years of teaching skiing, never have I told someone, "Keep doing what you're doing, but just do it harder." To get better we almost always need to stop doing something the way we're doing it and seek a better, more efficient path. If you're generating your turn by swinging your shoulders around, dialing up the intensity on that move is going to make things worse. Seek to improve your movements rather than reinforcing old habits.

BE A LITTLE DISCIPLINED.

Creating better technique takes some time. Try to stay the course, particularly when you are working on a brand new move. The newer it is, the easier it can revert to your old way, so set up some solid practice time to reinforce new habits. This may involve taking the terrain down a notch. Conversely, if your goal involves getting mileage and improving confidence, then you may need to spend more time in challenging terrain to gain experience.

REASSESS.

Go back to that run that was giving you trouble last year. Take another crack at keeping up with your kids. Shoot more video. Take a follow-up lesson. Keep check-

ing in with your original goal and see how you're coming along. If you're not getting anywhere, then go ahead and buy a new jacket so at least you look better.

GO WITH A PRO.

As a ski instructor, I am leery of sounding like an advertisement for my profession. But it really does make a difference. Before your lesson, think about how to articulate your goals so that the instructor can help you figure out a path to get there. During your lesson, you'll get specific feedback on your strengths and weaknesses, and you'll get practice learning and refining new movements. Try to remember specific sensations and movements so you can keep practicing them afterwards. You should leave the lesson with a clear plan for what you need to do to continue improving — and if you don't get this, just ask.

HAVE FUN!

Skiing is fun, regardless of how good we are. Above all, the journey to improve should be a quest to have the most fun possible. Don't get so hung up on your skills that you forget to let out a whoop, laugh at yourself, and occasionally act like a goofball. ♦

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