

The Tipping Point

Or

You Can't Get There From Here

There's a folk tale attributed to native Vermonters that begins with a lost tourist asking for directions and ends with the curt advice, "You can't get there from here." Expert skiers who have mastered a measure of technique yet still haven't grasped how to truly ski the mountain find themselves at the same sort of juncture: they've heard about their destination but they don't know how to get there and the best local knowledge isn't much help.

The ability to dance in the gravity stream begins with a change in attitude, the adoption of a mindset that seeks to harmonize with the mountain. If you approach a big mountain with a me-against-you point of view, just who do you expect is going to win? You can't harmonize with a voice you can't hear, so you first have to filter out all the babble and buzz that disturbs your ability to listen. You're included among the babble-makers; you, too, must quiet down and turn off your instinct to yak-yak-yak whether internally or out loud.

It is one of the plagues of consciousness is that loves its own voice. If it isn't easy to find the off switch to your inner critic's microphone, it's because first you have to invent one. It can be a single word or a brief gesture, like putting your goggles on or clicking your pole shafts together, but it has to be quick, easy and an unalterable part of your routine. It's your signal to yourself to shut the hell up, focus your energy downhill and go! The trigger is your tipping point, the no-going-back moment when you throw your body on autopilot and your chattering brain on pause. Once you hit your trigger there can be no hesitation and no deliberation because either requires an internal Other that you just fired. When the plan is to disappear in the doing, you go because that's all that's left for you to do: you are now a skier skiing or a skiing skier and nothing else.

To commit to this type of trigger mechanism, you have to possess some confidence in your abilities. Plenty of skiers have the skills but lack the commitment and courage to put them in play when conditions get dicey.

Somewhere between quieting down and psyching up, they make a hash of their mind-body connection and so reduce the effectiveness of both.

The path that gets one from paralysis to push-off is defined by immersion in the details. Focus on the little things: the texture of the snow, the direction of the wind, the rhythm of your breathing. Now comes the next trick: try a bit of time travel. Don't just *visualize* the run you are about to experience; try to *sense* it with all you've got. Feel the snow against your shins, the movement of your skis across the face of a mogul, the extension of your legs to meet a fall-away trough. Run the movie of your run all the way forward then rewind to the start. See-feel-hear the first turn in sharp, high-definition, sense-O-rama detail, hit your trigger, tip in and go, baby, go.

Notice that fear didn't enter the equation because focus on future details won't allow fear an entrée into the moment. You're already busy skiing the run you're about to ski, and doing so successfully. As soon as your mind's image of the run is complete, it's trigger time. Fear is left outside the party, its ugly face pressed against the glass, powerless.

Obviously, it's easier to write all this than do it, but not by much. One of the secrets of great skiing is that it's not really that hard unless you go out of your way to make it so. When you become quiet enough to hear the cadence of the slope beneath, you move in concert with the energy that propels you. What energy you invest to generate the necessary resistance to ski under control and maintain proper slope etiquette is repaid in the currency of ecstasy.

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