

Team Tip

Can't Handle the Pressure? Try Redistributing the Load

by MATT BOYD

Extra pressure in the workplace is generally not high on the list of things people love about their job, but in skiing it is key to our success. In both settings, however, success depends upon the ability to handle pressure *well*.

When the office workload gets to be too much, people begin to look for support—ways to spread out the stress. If that support does not exist, tension may build to a breaking point. Likewise, pressure management on skis requires support, but it must come from within.

As a turn develops, pressure builds. External forces do their best to pull a skier out of the arc, and these forces increase with speed, pitch, or both. Much like in the office, we can either spread out the workload or let pressure build to a breaking point. On skis, signs of this breaking point are chatter, tails washing out, skidding, breaking at the waist, or settling in the hips. Skiers can't rely on others to help with the pressure . . . but we do have two legs. Redistributing the load between legs as pressure builds helps smooth out the ride by keeping pressure at manageable levels.

Because alpine skiing relies more heavily on the outside ski than the inside ski, we're used to feeling the majority of our weight supported on the outside

leg. Many skiers make the mistake of applying abrupt changes in weight distribution as they move from one turn to the next. Good pressure management requires a subtle blend of weight distribution from outside ski to outside ski through turn transition and needs to start early—while the skier is still engaged in the old turn.

To get a feel for these subtleties, I recommend that you start indoors with an exercise called "Squash the Pad." You'll need a rolled up yoga mat, folded towel, piece of carpet foam, or similar item to use as a pad. Stand with one foot on the floor and the other on a raised surface—such as a stair—to simulate "short" (i.e., inside) and "long" (i.e., outside) leg lengths in a turn. Place the pad under the raised foot, and keep the majority of your weight supported on the foot on the floor (which represents the outside leg). Take a small amount of weight off the foot on the floor by squashing the pad with the other (photo 1). This is a very slight move and should be done with no noticeable change in leg lengths. This produces a feeling for the subtleties of the movement, and out on the hill it's this sensation that provides the cue to start the blending process for redistributing weight from one turn to the next.

With this exercise and its sensations



Photo 1

Kathy Brennan

fresh in your mind, apply the "squash the pad" exercise out on the hill—at first just practicing the subtle blend of movements while standing still on a gentle pitch, facing across the hill. Lean uphill, against your poles with your weight primarily on your downhill leg (photo 2a). Then pretend that you're squashing the pad to produce those same sensations. Then continue redistributing weight to the inside leg throughout the end of the simulated turn (photo 2b–d). That leg gains dominance as the new turn begins and the old inside leg becomes the new outside leg. Gradually continue the weight redistribution as you move across your skis (photo 2 d–g).

Okay, now it's time to put this in motion. In the previous two static exercises, the only factor influencing movement was a shift of body weight. In a turn, we have other forces acting against us that increase the amount of pressure under-




Photo 2

Red leg color indicates that the majority of weight is carried on that leg. As the leg color blends from red to green, weight carried on that leg decreases and is redistributed to the other leg. Yellow indicates equal weight distribution on both legs.

Photos by Kathy Brennan

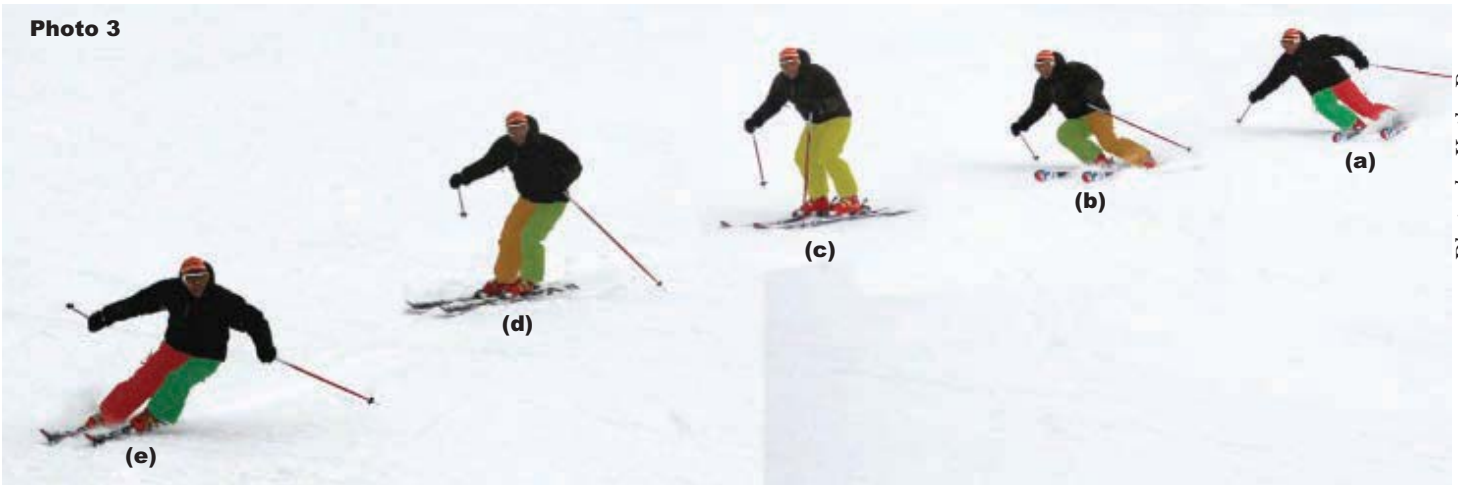
foot as the turn develops. You can deal with these forces far more effectively if you apply to skiing the same movements you practiced statically. I recommend starting out slow with long-radius turns. This pace will allow greater time to adjust, feel the weight-distribution shift, and fine tune, so spend time here mastering the new movements. Run by run, increase speed in the same radius (photo 3a-e), and when you have the feel for it,

begin exploring the timing in shorter-radius turns and steeper terrain.

Whether in the office or on skis, people who can get the job done, despite high pressure, are those who succeed. Managing pressure through effective weight distribution on skis probably won't earn you any more money, but it will help you handle the steeps better and ski faster—and more smoothly and powerfully—than ever before. 

Matt Boyd is a member of the PSIA Alpine Team along with his brother, Jeb—they are the first brothers to ever be on the team. Matt lives with his wife and two girls in Thornton, New Hampshire.

Photo 3



Photos by Kathy Brennan

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