



# How to Light that Fire

## of Drive and Motivation In Students and Yourself

BY KARIN KIRK

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It's a busy Saturday – your first weekend back in the saddle this winter and you've got a fun group of kids for a full-day lesson. You get them sorted out by age and ability and have the blessing from your supervisor to head off for a day of fun.

On the first chairlift ride you start to form a plan, but it's hard to get the group on the same page. Two want to go straight to the top and tackle the hardest runs possible. One wants to stay on groomed runs, one is already pining for a cocoa break, and the last one doesn't even want to participate in the conversation. Phew! And you haven't even gotten going yet.

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Sound familiar? Sure it does. Students come to class with certain skills and athletic ability, but the attitudes and motivation they bring to the table are also a big part of their overall makeup. Within one lesson you get to help develop their skiing or riding skills *and* shape the motivational outcome. The structure of the lesson, as well as your behavior and teaching style; interaction with students; selection of runs, tasks and activities; and interaction with the class all influence student motivation.

Few things make for a more satisfying day than a group of engaged and motivated students... so what can you do to build that happy, productive vibe in your lessons?

## MOTIVATION COMES FROM SEVERAL SOURCES

First, wrap your brain around what motivation is. You know it when you see it, right? It's the eager student who's right there swinging her pole along with you as you describe a pole touch, or the rider who just can't leave the park until that switch landing is perfected.

Motivation is the driving force behind a person's actions. It can come from several sources and take many forms. Through the years, psychologists have described different sources of motivation – such as the need for self-expression, service to others, social relations, salary and security, growth, or achievement. Intrinsic motivation arises from an inherent desire to learn; for self-fulfillment, enjoyment, and to achieve mastery.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is the determination to perform and succeed for the sake of accomplishing a specific result or outcome. As an instructor, you're familiar with this scenario in the context of certification. Do you have colleagues who chased their certification purely for the pin? Compare that to those who are driven to truly raise their game, just for the sake of being a more capable pro. These are classic examples of intrinsic versus extrinsic drive.

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We all love intrinsically motivated students. They're the ones who strive to learn new skills, practice attentively, and, not surprisingly, improve by leaps and bounds. Extrinsically motivated skiers and riders are also highly motivated, but in a different way. One sure-fire trait of the extrinsically motivated is their unbridled concern with each run they take and its level of difficulty. Ever had students ruthlessly hound you to take them to a particular (and usually over-challenging) run? Yep, that is a shining example of extrinsic motivation at work.

Educators seek to cultivate intrinsic motivation in their students, but sometimes we fall prey to motivation tactics that actually bring out the extrinsic factors. Research has shown that using extrinsic rewards to motivate people can actually lower their intrinsic drive. So be judicious in your use of incentives as a means to encourage good behavior.

The accompanying table shows some examples of intrinsically and extrinsically motivated behaviors in both students and instructors. Do you recognize some of these scenarios?

Some amount of extrinsic motivation is a good thing. Do we all want to slay our area's most challenging terrain? You bet we do. Similarly, a healthy dose of extrinsic drive can help propel students to aim high and push past obstacles. But intrinsic interest is the thing that sustains a long-term learning process.

INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED		EXTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED	
<b>Student Behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wants to learn how to make a parallel turn, even though a wedge turn is working just fine.</li> <li>■ Aspires to learn to ski or ride in difficult snow even though it would be easier to stay on the groomers.</li> <li>■ Wants to understand how to control speed in a variety of situations.</li> <li>■ Is still determined after falls or setbacks.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wants to ski or ride difficult runs.</li> <li>■ Presses you to take them into terrain they are not ready for.</li> <li>■ Not willing to take a step back in order to build a more solid foundation.</li> <li>■ Equates high speed with high skill.</li> <li>■ Is discouraged if it appears that extrinsic goals will not be met.</li> </ul>
<b>Instructor Behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Relates lesson content to overall goals so that students can understand how skills lead to outcomes.</li> <li>■ Can pinpoint and describe how successful movements are being made, even when the overall result is not ideal.</li> <li>■ Selects terrain that allows genuine skill-building.</li> <li>■ Can take a number of different paths to build toward a goal.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Offers incentives such as candy, snack breaks, or other rewards for cooperative behavior.</li> <li>■ Teaches in a very linear manner that proceeds from one step to the next even if mastery is not achieved.</li> <li>■ Equates the difficulty of the runs skied or ridden with skills learned.</li> <li>■ Equates not falling with skill development.</li> </ul>

## TEACHER BEHAVIORS CAN IMPROVE STUDENT MOTIVATION

While a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is well and good, what about those poor students who appear to have no motivation at all? The ones who drag their feet to the lesson meeting area, who sulk behind their neck gaiter for the entire lesson, or who are only there because their parent or spouse made them take a lesson? How can you build a fire in the absence of even a spark?

Well, your first step is to remember that you *can* shape your students' motivation, a lot. Then dive in and see what you can do to build some enthusiasm. The following list are tips from various educational researchers. How many of these behaviors are already part of your lesson-building process? Which ones are new strategies for you to try this year?

- **Be encouraging; set a positive tone** that makes student needs and interests central to the lesson. Give students plenty of opportunities to talk, and if they are shy, keep looking for ways to tease conversation out of them.
- **Right off the bat, give frequent, early, positive feedback** that supports students' beliefs that they can do well.
- **Ensure opportunities for student success by using tasks and terrain that are neither too easy nor too difficult.** An overly easy task is not only boring, it also sends the message that you believe the students are not capable of further challenge. A task that is too difficult may be seen as unattainable, and can undermine confidence and create anxiety. Aim for that "sweet spot" of challenge that is just above the students' current abilities.
- **Let students contribute to decision-making.** Motivation declines when students have no voice in the class structure. (Not to mention when they have no voice about whether or not to take a lesson in the first place, hence the parent dragging them along dejectedly.) The good news is that you can build motivation by offering students autonomy in their learning process. Giving your students options can be as simple as letting them pick their chairlift partners, vote for the next run, or take turns leading the group.
- **Strategize with struggling students.** When students are grappling with poor performance or low motivation, resist the temptation to repeatedly try the same approach. Those shaky moments are a prime opportunity to call a time-out, strategize with the student, and adopt a whole new strategy. That is, to outline a new plan along with specific tactics for success and a pep talk that expresses your confidence in their abilities.
- **Adopt a supportive style.** You've seen that parent (or heaven forbid, an instructor) who feels that barking out stern commands is a sure-fire way to teach. You cringe from the chairlift as you watch that, right? That's because a supportive teaching style – which can foster increased student interest, enjoyment, engagement, and performance – is the way to go. Supportive teacher behaviors include listening, giving hints and encouragement, being responsive to student questions, and showing empathy.



K. RIN KIRK



CHRIS KERR

Having fun with your peers and friends can help boost your motivation to keep playing and raising your own bar.



CHRIS KERR



CHRIS KERR

Reaching a high level in our sport can be its own motivation, but everyone will take a different motivational path to get there.

With luck, this article has given you a lot to think about, offering insight into common behaviors in students and instructors that can either support or subdue motivation. And maybe it's prompted you to develop the tools you need to create learning experiences that engage your students throughout the lesson – making them more motivated than you ever thought possible. That, of course, will fuel your own satisfaction with the outcome. A win-win if ever there was one. ☺

**Karin Kirk** is a Level III alpine instructor, staff trainer, and Ridge guide at Montana's Bridger Bowl. She is also an educational consultant and freelance writer.

## SUPPORTIVE-STYLE TEACHER BEHAVIORS

- **Listening** by carefully and attentively tuning in to both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication.
- **Asking** what does the student want to do next? How do they feel about the snow, the day, and how the lesson is progressing?
- **Allowing the students to talk**, interact with each other, and work in their own ways.
- **Responding** to student input. Even if you don't comply with the input ("Can we jump off cliffs?"), you can still respond to it in a genuine manner. "No way dudes, But how about we catch some sweet air in the terrain park?"
- **Coaching** by giving hints and directed feedback, like "How about we try again with shorter turns?"
- **Offering encouragements** to boost or sustain the student's engagement, such as "Almost," "You're close," and "I know you can do it."
- **Empathizing** with the student's perspective with comments like "Yes, I know this is hard" "Ouch, that must have hurt."
- **Offering praise** and information at the same time, such as "Yes, see how your edge releases when you stand up tall? Nice job!"

## CONTROLLING-STYLE TEACHER BEHAVIORS

- **Talking.**
- **Monopolizing** the decision-making process.
- **Giving away the solutions** or answers before the students have the opportunity to discover the solution themselves.
- **Using a commanding style**, such as "Do it like this" or "Start this way."
- **Making statements that the student should, must, has to, got to, or ought to do something**, such as "You should keep doing that" and "You ought to . . ."
- **Criticizing** the student or the student's lack of compliance with your directions, such as "No, no, no, you shouldn't do that."
- **Offering praise as it relates to how the student followed your directions**, rather than how well they performed . . . as in "Yes, that is what I wanted you to do."

Source: What Teachers Say and Do Supports Students' Autonomy During a Learning Activity

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KARIN KIRK

## What About Your Own Motivation?

Don't forget just how important your own motivation is in all of this. When we're motivated we work hard at our skiing and riding, put a tremendous amount of energy and compassion into our teaching, and are (usually) reliable employees. But it's a long season, and the mountain and locker room can feel like the school of hard knocks at times. As you head into this winter, consider these tips to build and maintain your motivation.

### REFLECT ON YOUR PERSONAL GOALS AND BE SPECIFIC

For example, instead of "I want to ride more dynamically," think about exactly what elements you need in your riding. How about, "I want to be able to move directly from the end of one turn to the start of the next one, without hesitating or stopping." The clearer your goals, the better you'll be able to gauge your progress.

### CONSIDER WHAT YOUR GOALS REVEAL ABOUT YOUR UNDERLYING MOTIVATION

Are your goals intrinsic or extrinsic? Are they related to your skiing and riding, teaching, ability to earn money and retain clients, or step up another notch in the snowsports school hierarchy? The better you understand your motivation, the easier it is to stay on your path to professional happiness.

### KNOW YOURSELF

We're most happy when find our own personal recipe for intellectual, social, and athletic engagement. You can't please everyone all the time, so hone in on where you are at your best and move your career in that direction. Do park lessons feed your stoke? Then become a park specialist. Earn your Freestyle Specialist certificates, shadow better riders, and strive to develop a clientele of freestyle students. Meanwhile, communicate your plan with your trainers and supervisors so they can understand your motivation too.

### FIND LIKE-MINDED PARTNERS

Training on coral-reef bump lines or tricky wind slab might not top your list of favorite things to do on the snow. But with the right

partner, gritting your teeth and engaging in the less-fun aspects of professional development can make it a lot more appealing.

### MANAGE YOUR ENERGY EXPENDITURE

Funny, how in November we are all going crazy to get back on the snow, but by Presidents Week it seems like a long season already. Be mindful to take days off and don't succumb to pressure to work too many extra days. Replenish your reserves with rest and with quality fun. Recognize things that draw your energy down, and embrace opportunities to feed your soul.

### CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK

If you've been relentlessly training for an exam yet feel the goal slipping ever farther away, it might be time to take a deep breath. Just like with struggling students, sometimes you need to slow down and redirect yourself. Seek feedback from a new peer or trainer, take a week off from practicing tasks, and mix up your routine. When you feel your motivation building up again, revisit your seasonal goals and take honest stock of your progress before you dive headlong into your wedge christies or J-turns again.

### SEEK MOTIVATION FROM MANY SOURCES

PSIA-AASI offers tremendous resources for achieving your professional goals, but sometimes external inspiration offers an additional boost. This can come from many places: yoga class, race camp, a weekend in the backcountry, an avalanche workshop, or a visit with that high school soccer coach who always knows just how to put you at your best.

In short, the better you understand your own needs, the more likely you'll be motivated, productive, and happy. If you feel yourself coming off track, that's a signal you may have become disconnected from your true goals. It takes practice to keep nudging yourself toward the things that best motivate you, especially when that path differs from expectations set by others. But you'll know you're on the right track when you start to feel energy, optimism, and anticipation for the direction you're headed.

— Karin Kirk