

Lesson 4 - Challenge Yourself

Skiing, and snowsports in general, provide an excellent environment for 'challenge' and is one of the reasons why so many people fall in love with the sport. But, finding the right level and kind of challenge is important i.e., a challenge that balances with your skills. So, how do you go about matching your level of skill with an appropriate challenge? And why is this important not only for the sport of skiing but for other areas of your life as well? In this lesson I will look at how you can challenge yourself at an appropriate level and how this can, in turn, create purpose as you strive towards personal goals ultimately leading to more meaning in your life.



Skiing steep terrain at
Les Grands Montets, Chamonix

What is the CS Balance?

The Challenge-skills balance or CS Balance is one of the nine Fundamentals of Flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and arguably one of the most critical. Too much of a challenge relative to your skill level and you risk anxiety which could result in something going wrong, injury, or denting your confidence levels. However, too little challenge and the likely outcome is boredom which, if continued, could lead to disinterest and giving up the sport!

The important point is that the *challenge* is relative to your skill level and this is very 'individual'. A high challenge to an extreme skier is likely to induce terror for a recreational skier, while an intermediate skier's goals might be too much for a novice. Ideally, the level of challenge should stretch your skills so that effort and concentration are required. This is emphasised by Csikszentmihalyi, Larter and Duranso (2017) who say, "you need to find a challenge that is within reach but still requires effort to achieve" (p.21).

High levels of challenge and skill help to stretch your performance and assist with learning new skills. In skiing these challenges can be mental, physical, technical and tactical or any combination of the aforementioned. So both the level of challenge and skill need to be extending and stretching the person to new levels (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). In fact the challenge should just slightly outweigh the level of skill in order to stretch the performance (see figure 1).

How do you find the appropriate level of challenge to match your skills?

It would be wrong to conclude from the discussion so far that you must always be stretching your performance to it's limits. Enjoyment also comes from being in ones '**comfort zone**' where your skill exceeds the level of challenge. As an instructor my goal is to help students experience periods of skiing (during the lesson) where they are in their comfort zone so that they can practice and consolidate what has already been learned, relax, pace themselves and build confidence. However, lessons should also include periods where the learner is pushed into the '**stretch zone**' as this makes the practice more purposeful (see lesson 2, Purposeful Practice) but what should always be avoided is the '**panic zone**' as this can quickly undo all the good work and progress made. Using this concept of 'zones' is a good way to approach your own skiing whether you are taking lessons, practicing by yourself or skiing with friends or family.

Once final point to consider when looking to find the right level of challenge is the environment. Skiing is different to many other sports in that the environment is 'open' and constantly changing; snow, gradient, weather etc. So an appropriate challenge may just be skiing the same slope in more difficult snow conditions or more adverse weather conditions!

“Families who ski together remain holidaying together for longer.”



Family fun



Pushing the limits



You're never too old



Engagement

Challenge for the whole family

In my experience families who ski together remain holidaying together for longer. As children reach their teenage years, often the thought of going on holiday with Mum and Dad is not very appealing. But skiing and snowsports are different as this unique type of holiday allows everyone in the family a certain amount of freedom and the opportunity for each member of the family to be challenged at their own level. The result is that skiing helps to bond and unite the family and this can go way beyond just the holiday itself.

Age is no barrier

The CS Balance also applies no matter what age you are. Skiing, like other sports, can continue to provide excellent levels of challenge until late in life. George Jedenoff, now 100

years old and still skiing, beautifully illustrates this point through several videos on YouTube. He has an amazing attitude and philosophy for life, '[The Powder Philosophy](#)'.

Engagement, purpose and meaning

So matching challenges with skills not only helps you to learn new skills but it helps you to engage fully with the task in hand (see Lesson 1, [Focus Your Attention](#)). **Engagement** is one of the elements of Martin Seligman's (2011) construct PERMA (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments). This theory suggests that having all of these elements in your life leads to greater and deeper happiness (*eudaimonia*). This also fits very well with the first stage of my own personal philosophy of **Learn it**, Love it, Live it (Tate, 2016).

Engagement helps to create **purpose** which on a personal level helps drive you towards your goals. As Emily Esfahani Smith (2017) puts it, "It is the forward pointing arrow that motivates our behavior and serves as the organizing principle of our lives" (p.78). Purpose is also one of the four psychological assets that Angela Duckworth (2016) refers to in her best selling book *Grit* and there is a real link between purpose and falling in love with what you do.

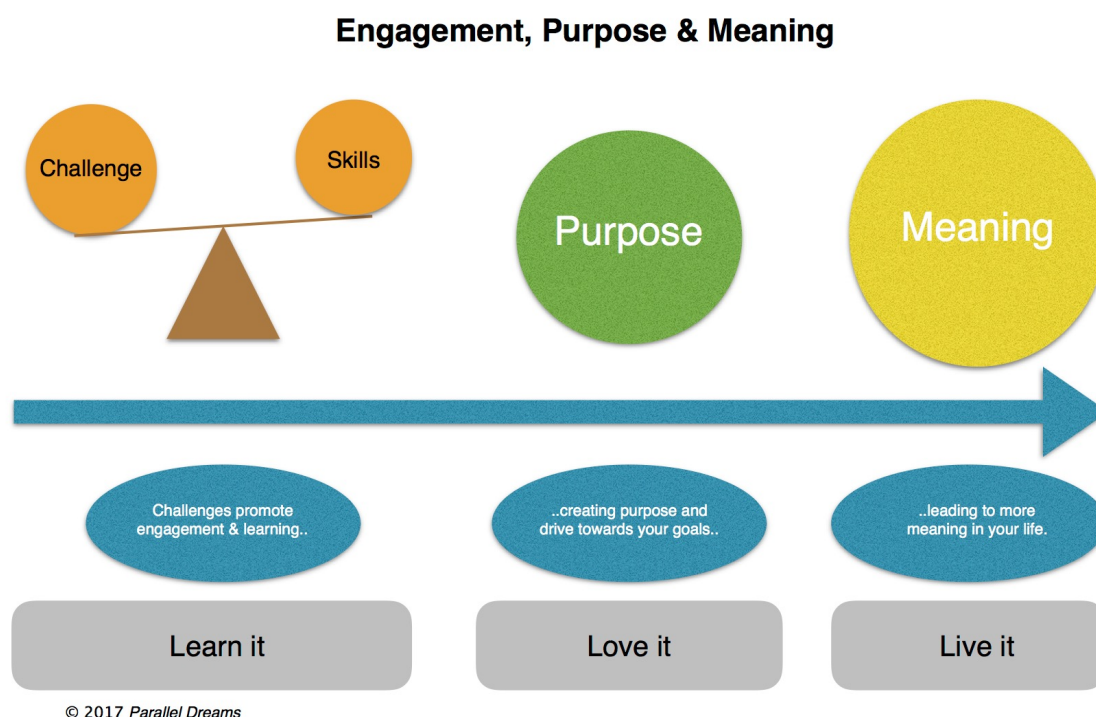


Figure 1

Emily Esfahani Smith (2017) talks about the four pillars of **meaning** (belonging, purpose, storytelling and transcendence). Each one of these pillars is accessible to everyone and can be built up over time. And while this may seem a rather 'deep' thought process and somewhat beyond the matching of challenges and skills, in a sport like skiing, I would beg to differ as I reflect on the many students I have taught who have made skiing an integral part of their lives, the families I have taught who continue to take ski holidays together and my 88

year old father in law who continues to derive enjoyment, purpose and meaning from this great sport.

Key Points

- Too much of a challenge for the level of skill can lead to anxiety.
- Too little challenge can lead to boredom and potential disinterest in the activity.
- The level of challenge should stretch your skills so that effort and concentration are required.
- High levels of challenge and skill assist with learning and the challenge should just slightly outweigh the level of skill in order to stretch the performance.
- Using the concept of 'zones' is a good way to approach your own skiing development: The Comfort Zone (to consolidate and relax), The Stretch Zone (to promote learning) and The Panic Zone (to be avoided).
- Families who ski together remain holidaying together for longer.
- You're never too old to challenge yourself. Age is no barrier.
- Challenges promote engagement and learning.
- Purpose helps drive you towards your goals.

References

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- Tate, D. (2017, June). *Lesson 1 - Focus Your Attention*. Parallel Dreams Publishing.
- Tate, D. (2017, July). *Lesson 2 - Purposeful Practice*. Parallel Dreams Publishing.

Web links

British Alpine Ski School Chamonix	www.basschamonix.com
George Jedenoff's 100 Birthday	https://youtu.be/Bb23maq0rtQ
Learn it, Love it, Live it	www.optimaexperience.co.uk
Ski Coaching & Mountain Life	www.paralleldreams.co.uk
The Powder Philosophy	https://youtu.be/FYhP0w2BXgg

About the author

Derek Tate holds a postgraduate diploma in Sports Coaching and has completed the first year of the MSc Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP). He holds the BASI International Ski Teacher Diploma and the IASI Alpine Level 4 Euro Ski Pro. He is a former trainer of ski instructors for the British Association of Snowsport Instructors (BASI) and current Head of Education for the Irish Association of Snowsports Instructors (IASI). He lives near Chamonix, in France where he is director of British Alpine Ski Schools (BASS) in Chamonix and Megeve.

Want to challenge yourself this winter and create more purpose for your skiing? Then book a lesson with Derek or Shona at BASS. To find out more go to <http://www.basschamonix.com/alacarteslessons>

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