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SHAZAM!

INSPIRING INSTRUCTORS | MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL
ADVENTURES IN EDUCATION | CENTRAL CROSS-COUNTRY | CONTINUING EDUCATION TRICKLES DOWN

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Inspiring Instructors Toward Professional Development

By Jeff Lewin

High-quality instruction is a

hallmark of Blizzard

Ski & Snowboard School,

an independent member school based in Minnesota since 1958. A few seasons ago, we were challenged by dwindling attendance at in-house clinics, increased staff turnover, an aging instructor base and fewer instructors pursuing certification. Sound familiar? We knew this would eventually impact the product we put on the hill, our reputation and our business. So we sat down with our core staff and brainstormed ideas to turn things around.

If engagement and PSIA-AASI certification are good metrics — and we think they are! — we have been hugely successful over three seasons. Total training days have tripled and instructors averaged nearly ten clinics per season. More than 25% of instructors earned their Level I certification over the last two seasons. Several instructors earned or partially passed their Level II or Level III across disciplines. We are on the right track and we have momentum!

Much of our effort fits nicely with characteristics of inspirational Snowsports instruction presented at the 2024 National Academy/Rider Rally, by Ph.D. candidate Josh Pighetti of The Pennsylvania State University. During his presentation, “Becoming Inspirational in Your Teaching,” Pighetti shared that “inspiration is someone or something that triggers us to strive for and achieve a new potential.” Our task was to inspire an awareness of the massive potential for professional development through PSIA-AASI, and trigger a personal investment to achieve that potential.

Pighetti’s research suggests that The Learning Connection framework of People Skills, Teaching Skills, and Technical Skills can inspire passion through genuine engagement and connection, purposeful teaching, and technical mastery, respectively. Let’s explore our efforts through that lens!

People Skills: Genuine Engagement and Connection

We watched our staff during clinics and lessons, and met one-on-one and in small après ski groups. We surveyed baseline skills and knowledge. We ran dryland clinics called “Sharing time: What worked? What didn’t? What was awesome! How can we help?” to understand teaching challenges. Instructors realized they weren’t in it alone, and we crowd-sourced solutions on the spot. This safe space to engage and connect was unexpectedly powerful for building community!

To help people think about their own potential, we invited inspiring figures to our instructor kickoff event each season. Past National CEOs Nick Herrin and Peggy Hiller, National Team member Jonathan Ballou, and Central Region Executive Director Ron Shepard, graciously made Zoom appearances. Instructors shared testimonials from National Academy, Rider Rally and Interski. We took every opportunity to connect over our shared passion for Snowsports, the excitement of training together, and becoming better instructors.

Teaching & Technical Skills: Purposeful Teaching & Technical Mastery

Once we lit the fire, we asked what barriers prevented instructors from going after their full potential. Not surprisingly, top answers included cost and finding time to attend training. (Most Central Region instructors teach part time and need to balance other careers and family.) We listened, and we took steps to overcome those barriers:

- We doubled bonuses for attending clinics.
- We awarded free event registrations (earned through a Central Region social media co-promotion campaign) to committed instructors.
- We awarded newly-available gift cards from the PSIA-AASI Shop, good for events and merch at thesnowpros.org.

- We recognized quality training available outside our own member school. (That's right. We put our staff before our ego!) That created opportunities for instructors to train with regional education staff, other member schools, and national organizations.

We energized content. We added exciting new topics. We literally doubled training opportunities. We brought in Central Education Staff and National Team alumni to train committed Level II and Level III candidates. We pushed hard on every front!

We are especially proud of a twist we put on a Member School opportunity to reserve spots at the sold-out 2024 National Academy/Rider Rally. We offered them exclusively to first-time attendees, and were rewarded with a dozen totally inspired instructors in our 30-strong delegation. When nearly 20% of your instructors spend a week with the National Team, it's transformative! And they did it at their own expense. They invested in their own development. Talk about passion!

Let's not discount the many resources we have close to home, though! One first-time attendee commented that "I've been reflecting on Academy and doing some soul searching on my 'aha' moment. The real 'aha' is that Blizzard has amazing clinicians and an amazing instructor program ... and is doing a pretty damn good job!" Everything we do to inspire our instructors inspires our trainers, too. It's an inspiration feedback loop that keeps building on itself. Awesome!

Leadership

None of this was possible without dedicated leaders. Our Director of Training and Education Committee tirelessly drove the process. We added a new Training Coordinator just to help instructors navigate the certification process — not an easy task! — keeping them on track with required activities. Management more than doubled investments in trainer pay and instructor certification/training bonuses.

Results

The huge win for our member school has been increased ownership, self-confidence, and on-hill performance by our instructors. There is a tangible change in how our staff see their own potential for professional development. We feel it on the hill every day, the palpable enthusiasm and increased sense of community around our shared passion: creating lifelong skiers and snowboarders! Challenge yourself and your own member school to do the same. We'll see you on the slopes!

Jeff and Jennifer Lewin own and operate Blizzard Ski & Snowboard School in Minnesota. Jeff is Alpine and Snowboard Level III certified and a former member of Central Region's Education Staff and Board of Directors. He has taught in Intermountain, Rocky Mountain, and internationally.



The following is a link to Josh Pighetti's article.

<https://www.thesnowpros.org/2024/04/17/national-academy-2024-becoming-inspirational-in-snowsports-teaching/>



U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum

Located in Ishpeming, Michigan the Hall of Fame an Museum was created "to Honor and Celebrate the athletes, pioneers and visionaries of the United States who have significantly enriched the global sport of Skiing & Snowboarding and to showcase their stories and historic memorabilia.