

This winter, in our travels, teaching lessons, and coaching clinics, one of the most common “technical” phrases that we heard spoken by both ski instructors and skiers involved something about pressuring their tips at the entry of a turn. Sometimes it was that you HAD to pressure the tips of your skis in order to enter a new turn; sometimes it was that you NEEDED to add pressure to the tips of your skis to get them to hook up and draw you into the turn; sometimes it was more that at turn entry the pressure starts at the tips of the skis and then moves back as you follow through the arc of the turn. Sound familiar?

So, how did they achieve this tip pressure to enter their turns, I’d ask? Many would look at me, and cock their head, “You need to apply pressure to the tip of the ski..” “But how?”, I would continue. “Add weight? Push forward onto the balls of your feet? Lever forward with their bodies? Fall into the turn?” Gee, what a stupid question that was... I guess I’m stupid sometimes and can’t understand simple concepts such as pressuring my tips.

Then I’d watch them ski. Most didn’t look like they were pressuring their tips more. Many who thought that they were pressuring their tips, never got very long/extended. They never seemed to be able to get an early edge, shape the top of their turns or even reach their skis out to the side. Even though they were not actually able to succeed in pressuring their tips as they entered a turn, they were trying. Could there be some correlation with the thought pattern of pressuring your tips and not getting your feet out from under your body?

I could tell those who did really pressure their tips because their tails would sometimes kick up and then they’d often wash out the bottom part of their turns, often in the back seat and even with an ab-stem. Some had to “huck” themselves into the next turn to catch up with their skis and once again “pressure” their tips....

To actually pressure the tips and also shape the top of a turn with a decent edge angle is truly a very athletic move. Not many people can do this.

I also observed that truly applying pressure to the tips of your skis is a pretty effective method of going slower, or even going over the handle bars in soft snow. I never saw anyone able to ski wind packed, crusted snow this way.

In my own skiing, I know that if I stay balanced over the “sweet spot” of my skis, it is very easy to enter a turn, making a nice round arc at the top, steering edged skis the whole way. At turn entry, my body moves forward and down the hill, foreagonally. My skis continue forward, but out and across the hill in a round arc. It’s easy to get early edge and even quite a bit of it. I get longer, my skis go out to the side more, as I, my body, go down the hill more. I keep up with myself, balanced, skiing the skis lengthwise. After the apex, I continue to steer edged skis, balanced over the sweet spot. I begin to flex to manage the pressure, maybe even retract my feet a bit to even manage the pressure more. I drive my shins, edging and steering to hold the round arc in the snow; then, I repeat, guiding my upper body forward and down the hill while my skis reach again out to the side getting further away from my body. I don’t need to try to increase the pressure on the tip of my skis to turn. Matter of fact, it’s pretty hard to edge and steer a ski that way. However, I do feel the tips of my skis come to life more and engage and pull me into the turn as I tip and steer them onto their edges. There is that feedback from the tips; they have a strength and a force, but it comes from the edge angle and the steering, not from adding weight to them. It feels like there is pressure there, but it’s the force from the tips engaging and working, it’s not from any weight or pressure that I added to them. I simply tipped and turned them and the result was that feeling of pressure on them.

Could it be that many of us have been confusing feeling the forces from the tips of the skis due to the edging and steering with adding pressure to them by weighting them?

Think about balance. Why wouldn't you want to stay balanced at all times? Why would you want to lever your body forward and then backward over the length of the skis? To ride a clean, faster ski, why not simply stay against its sweet spot. Certainly, it's much easier to control a ski when you are balanced against that sweet spot.

I know this sounds sacrilegious almost, but maybe we are not accurately describing what we are feeling and doing in a turn. Maybe by repeating the mantra about pressuring the tips of the skis at turn entry, we are not helping people learn how to carve, how to steer an edged ski, how to get an earlier, higher edge angle at all.