



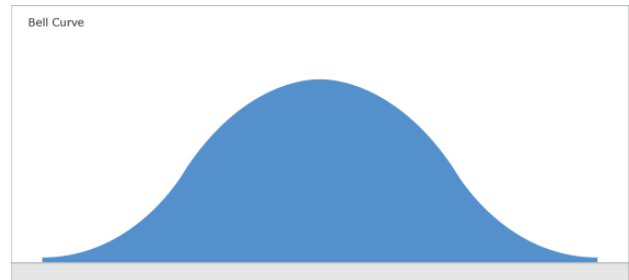
By Dr. Lance H. K. Secretan

# Skiing as a Metaphor for Leadership

First-time skiers fall into two categories. One group never skis again after their first skiing experience—estimates for this group range as high as 75%.

Those in the second group become passionate fans of the sport. Typically, they are introduced to the sport at an early age, and they learn very quickly—they are inspired. Some go on to race or even become professional skiers. The rest become recreational skiers.

Recreational skiers continue to learn into their 20s and then they embark on careers, get married, take on mortgages and financial responsibilities, have children and have less time. Also, their bodies become a little creakier. Their skiing skills plateau, and their skiing becomes more conservative as they age. They become content with their existing skill levels, less interested in learning, and settle into modest aspirations for their skiing activities. As they move into middle-age they become less adventurous and the caliber of their skiing declines. Eventually, they give up skiing altogether. There are many exceptions to this trajectory but it is the general pattern, and the chart of their skiing life follows the typical bell curve.



Skiing is a metaphor for life. As it is with skiing, so it is with many other aspects of our lives—how we are as skiers parallels how we are as leaders, friends, spouses, parents and citizens—we start off with great passion and enthusiasm, but this energy tapers off as our lives unfold.

When we bring leaders to the mountain—[The Leadership Summit](#)— and tell them that we can re-energize their passion for skiing, many express disbelief. But when they are on the snow and experience the inspiration that comes from a breakthrough, discovering they are able to ski at levels they never dreamed they would achieve in their lives, they are converted. They become so reenergized and exhilarated that, metaphorically speaking, they feel they don't even need an airplane to fly home!

Then a higher level conversation begins: Why do we need to go to the top of a mountain to make a breakthrough like this? Why can't we make breakthroughs like this in every other aspect of our lives? Why do we accept the myth that breakthroughs cannot be achieved quickly? Or, that we can't change?





I am often asked, “What’s the secret sauce?” What is the technique you use to transform intermediate skiers into experts in one day? The “secret” is getting people to let go of what they think they know. The technique necessary to ski double-black diamonds is relatively straightforward—the really hard part is giving up the habits and techniques you have become used to over many years. Pablo Picasso said, “Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.” This is the secret.

No classroom, no seminar, no retreat, no MBA program, no theory, can match the visceral experience of making a physical breakthrough in one of the most beautiful, magical environments on the planet. Participants go home with memories and friendships that last a lifetime, a commitment to personal growth and change, and a new lease on life.

*This leadership summit was a fabulous experience. It was exciting to learn in such a beautiful environment. Lance provided all the foundational elements, and more, to demonstrate leadership: he helped me develop as a skier and as a person with respect and skill, his expectations for me were high and he provided a supportive and safe atmosphere as I stumbled and fell and got back up and learned. Through all the falling down and getting back up I also developed my approach to big issues, exciting and inspiring issues—destiny, character and legacy. I learned about the importance of leadership and spent this time immersed in a way of providing excellent leadership, demonstrated by Lance. What a lesson in leadership! The [Leadership Summit](#) was an inspiring leap forward for me and has made a big impact in my business and personal life; I am grateful.*

**Gerard Lahey, P. Eng. CEO, Parallel Corp.**