

Want Better Tips as a Ski Instructor? Start by Asking and Listening

A good ski lesson doesn't begin with a demonstration. It begins with a question:

"What would you like to get out of today?"

The answer might be something like one of these:

- "I want to feel more confident on steeper blue runs."
- "I'm tired of losing control when I pick up speed."
- "I want to keep up with my kids."
- "I'd like to learn how to ski bumps without feeling like I'm fighting the mountain."

Whatever the guest says, one of the simplest things an instructor can do is **repeat it back**:

"So, what you'd really like today is to feel more confident on steeper blues without losing control. Is that right?"

It may seem like a small gesture, but it accomplishes something important: it shows the guest that you listened.

What a Restaurant Study Can Teach Ski Instructors

In 2003, researchers from the University of Nijmegen published a restaurant field study with the memorable title "[Mimicry for Money](#)."

In the first experiment, a waitress served 60 groups of customers. With half of the groups, she repeated their orders verbatim. With the others, she acknowledged the order with a response such as "okay" or "coming up." Aside from that difference, she was instructed to keep her behavior the same.

When she repeated the customers' orders, her average tips were more than 68 percent higher.

A second experiment involving 141 groups produced a similar result. Average tips were approximately twice as large when orders were repeated back. One of the waitresses did not know the researchers' hypothesis, which helped reduce the possibility that she was unconsciously providing better service to the customers she mimicked.

The researchers could not say exactly why repeating an order affected tipping. Mimicry may create rapport, familiarity or interpersonal closeness. They also acknowledged another very practical possibility: repeating an order can make a customer feel that the server is paying attention.

That explanation should make immediate sense to a ski instructor.

A Ski Lesson Is a Personal Service

A guest is not merely buying two hours of technical instruction. **They are trusting an instructor with their time, money, safety and, occasionally, some fairly personal fears.**

A guest may say, “I want to improve my parallel turns,” when the deeper concern is that they feel embarrassed skiing with friends. Another may ask to ski black terrain when what they really want is proof that they have progressed. Parents may say they want their child to improve, but what they value most is seeing the child feel safe, independent and excited about skiing.

If we ask what guests want and then immediately launch into our own lesson plan, they may wonder whether their answer mattered.

Repeating the goal back closes that gap.

“You’d like to feel comfortable skiing this run with your friends rather than simply getting down it. Have I got that right?”

Now the guest knows three things:

- You heard the words.
- You understood the meaning behind them.
- You intend to build the lesson around their goal.

That is good customer service before the first turn has even been made.

Listening Is More Than Repeating Words

This technique should not become a psychological trick or a robotic script. Guests can sense when an instructor is mechanically parroting them.

The purpose is clarification, not manipulation.

After reflecting the guest’s goal, ask one useful follow-up question:

- “What usually happens when the slope gets steeper?”
- “Where do you feel yourself losing control?”
- “What would a successful lesson feel like by the end of today?”

Then summarize the plan in language connected to the guest’s original request:

“Great. We’ll begin on comfortable terrain and work on controlling the shape of the turn. Then, if you’re ready, we’ll take that onto a steeper blue and see whether you feel more in control.”

The instructor has now converted a vague desire into a shared objective.

Keep Returning to the Guest's Goal

Reflective listening is not limited to the beginning of a lesson. It can guide the entire experience.

During the lesson, connect feedback to the stated goal:

- “That more rounded turn is giving you the speed control you were looking for.”
- At an appropriate stopping point, check progress:
- “How does that compare with what you were feeling on steeper terrain earlier?”

At the end, return to the original request:

“You wanted to feel more confident on steeper blues without picking up too much speed. How do you feel about that now?”

This helps the guest recognize their progress. It also gives them an opportunity to say what worked, what remains difficult and what they would like to tackle next time.

Where Tips Fit In

It is tempting to look at the restaurant research and conclude that repeating a guest's words is a technique for earning bigger tips. That misses the more valuable lesson.

The tip is not the objective.

Our objective is to understand what the guest wants and provide a lesson that feels personal, useful and worth remembering. Reflecting a guest's words is valuable because it reduces misunderstandings and shows genuine attention. It helps the instructor and guest agree on what success looks like.

If the guest finishes the lesson feeling heard, supported and more capable, a tip may follow. So might a request to ski together again, a recommendation to a friend or a positive review.

Those are all natural results of good service—not something we need to chase directly.

A Simple Habit for Your Next Lesson

At the beginning of your next lesson, try this short sequence:

1. Ask: “What would you like to get out of our time together?”
2. Listen without interrupting.
3. Reflect the answer: “So you'd like to...”
4. Confirm: “Is that right?”

5. Explain how you will work toward that goal.
6. Revisit the goal during and at the end of the lesson.

The words do not need to be perfect. Your interest does need to be genuine.

Guests may not remember every exercise, technical explanation or run you chose. They will remember how the lesson made them feel. When people hear their own goals reflected back to them, they know the lesson is truly about them.

And that is where excellent service begins.

Original article: <https://www.skiwithtony.com/ski-instructor-listening-better-service-tips/>