

Keys To Keeping A Tight Rope

Written by Chris Rossi

Photography by Marie Bolusset at Swiss Ski School

Slack line is the culprit of nearly every error in skiing. All skiers experience it to some extent, but far too many think it is an inherent part of each set. The hits we take as a result of it not only take a big toll on the body, but they also leave us down course with less chance to complete our run. The bottom line, slack is a skier's worst enemy.

In skiing, swinging higher up on the boat equates to skiing shorter line lengths. At 15 feet off (18.25 meters), there is more than 20 feet of extra rope to get around each buoy. This allows for less experienced

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skiers to ski on a lower arc and complete the course. As we develop our skill set and learn to run shorter line lengths, we must ski higher up on the boat in order to get around each buoy. The higher we must ski up on the boat, the more likelihood we have of incurring loose rope. Here are some common reasons for slack.

If you get slack coming into a buoy, you either took too much angle (ski direction vs. boat direction) and were not able to hold the set direction, or you used too much upper body through the edge change, which pulled your ski off its intended arc.

These are the most common mistakes and send the skier into the buoy on a loose rope. If the rope is loose, you have no support. Due to physics in this phase of the turn, you can get away with having a loose rope and not falling, but it does not lead to predictable turns. You are left to guess when the rope is going to come tight. Guess too early and turn into loose rope or guess late and get your shoulder ripped out while doing a body slide. Slack into the buoy is the worst kind of slack. In the past skiers have been told to counter rotate in the preturn to compensate. While this will help to bring the line tight, it does not fix the problem of entering the preturn on an incorrect arc. It is a quick fix that should not be part of your base technique but rather in your back pocket for when you need it.

If the rope is tight coming into the buoy, but slack at the finish, then one of a couple things is happening. The skier is on a great line and does not see the line he or she is supposed to finish on; meaning the skier has overturned by choice (easily corrected by vision and understanding). This is a great problem to have, as a little bit of confidence should pay big dividends here. Another reason for slack at the finish of the turn is not enough space before the buoy to set up a good turn. If you are too narrow coming into the buoy, you must delay the preturn phase until you are sure you will clear the buoy. It is very difficult to make consistent turns when you are distracted by the thought of hitting the buoy.

Here are some solutions that will help you keep a tight rope everywhere:

1. The pylon, the handle, your shoulders, hips, and ski/feet should all be stacked in a line at all moments. When passing directly behind the boat, we want the pylon, the ski, the handle, the hips, and the shoulders to be perfectly lined up. At the apex of the turn we want the pylon, handle, shoulders, hips, and ski lined up. If one gets out of line, you will have slack. For example, a skier is coming into the wakes and engages his or her arms, the upper body goes forward while the hips go back. This move takes the skier out of the stacked position and the ski off its intended or optimal direction out, setting it on a straighter line toward the buoy with loose rope. There will be slack in this instance every time. Take video of yourself from directly over the pylon. It is easy to identify where you are not lined up.

2. It takes power to swing higher. This is something that I understated earlier in my teaching career. For long line lengths I have most students relax so that they start to feel the swing. If you are all flexed out, you will not be able to feel the swing. It takes technique to swing. It takes a combination of strength and technique to swing up on high arcs. Focus on setting good direction at the completion of the turn, building power into the

wakes, and maintaining that power and direction through the edge change. You will know if you take too much direction or power as you will get slack in the preturn. Find the optimal amount and learn to trust that when you are in trouble, this is where the game is won and lost.

3. Stop using your biceps through the edge change. This only pulls your upper body to the inside and will create slack. Leave your arms straight, focus on building power through your lean, and feel your lower body pass underneath you in the edge change.

4. Work on vision. The better you see what is out in front of you, the less likely you will panic and lose your line. How good are you at driving your car when you don't have a plan of where you look? I wrote an article on *Slalom Vision* in the March/April 2010 issue that gives my thoughts on the subject.

5. Practice. Learning to ski with a tight rope takes time and patience. Work on this at your easier passes. You have more room for error and will be less likely to abandon these new thoughts. It takes somewhere near three weeks to develop a habit. Stay the course and you will be rewarded with the confidence a tight line inspires.

Chris Rossi is a professional slalom skier and coach who is sponsored by Radar Skis, Tige Boats, Performance Ski & Surf, Billabong and pumpRocker.

