

Workshop: Going Downhill Successfully— Ski Resort Ministry for Dummies by Skip Schwarz

What an astonishment it will be to see, once the veil is finally lifted, all the souls that have been reaped by you, simply because you have been in the habit of taking your orders from Jesus Christ. (Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, October 17)

I. Two critical components of an effective ski resort ministry: cultivating relationships and meeting needs.

II. Two types of resorts: Destination and Commuter

A. Destination Resort Characteristics

1. Geographically—Destination resorts are geographically isolated. They are far enough away from major population centers that people look to the resort itself to provide the amenities needed for an enjoyable visit. From restaurants to Laundromats to gas stations to grocery stores to some form of medical care to church services—the goal of the management of a destination resort is to provide all of the amenities their guests need to have a comfortable and enjoyable visit. They don't have to own every business, but it's to their benefit to make sure those businesses are available. They will therefore go out of their way to encourage the presence of any undertaking that will increase the attractiveness of the resort in the eyes of its guests
2. Socially—The geographical isolation creates an island mentality that fosters close relationships among those at the resort.
3. Length of Visit—During the ski season, most of those at a destination resort are there for the whole weekend as opposed to a commuter resort where day-trippers are in the majority.
4. Implications for ministry—
 - a. The people responding to services of worship at a destination resort are more likely to be permanent residents and second home owners who visit the resort frequently—as such they are in a position to help start or join a church —something you won't find at a commuter resort.
 - b. Because of their relative permanence, you will be able to build deeper and more significant relationships with people at a destination resort than those frequenting commuter resorts. The only exception at a commuter resort would be employees, whose job will insure their continuing presence—at least for the season.

B. Commuter Resort Characteristics

1. Community-based vs. Isolated
 - a. Community-based commuter resorts are in the midst of residential communities. Such communities provide the amenities needed by residents, employees and guests alike. As such, the resort doesn't need to concern itself with making sure these amenities are available. The surrounding communities will have their own grocery stores, churches, medical facilities, theaters and the like to support the community as well as cater to the guests from the resort.
 - b. Isolated commuter resorts have little or no bed base and are frequented exclusively by commuters.

2. Geographically—Commuter resorts are within convenient commuting distance from major population centers that supply the majority of visitors.
3. Socially—The proximity of the commuter resort to one’s home lends itself to guests bringing their friends and family with them. Some friends or family may even buy their own second homes at the resort, effectively transplanting a social circle from their permanent homes to the resort itself. The need for building new relationships at the resort is therefore minimized by the presence of these friends.
4. Length of visit-- Because of the convenience of a major population center close by, there are a larger percentage of “day-trippers” than those who stay for the entire weekend.
5. Implications for ministry.
 - a. A guest’s need for worship is met by the churches already present in a community-based resort or the need is subrogated to a skiers desire to get the most out of the cost of their lift ticket.
 - b. Ski services are a possibility for some—combining people’s desire to ski with the service itself makes it more attractive.
 - c. Relationships can be built with employees during work hours.
 - d. Developing a sense of community is much more challenging when dealing with commuting guests.

III. Four people groups

- A. Permanent Residents (at a destination resort or community-based commuter resort)—Introverts?
- B. Employees
 1. Management
 2. Line
 3. Employee Groups
 - a. Ski School (Regular and Adaptive)
 - b. Ski Patrol/First Aid (Even if you don’t join them, cultivate a relationship with them-- they’re the first to respond to people you may be visiting in the hospital)
 - c. Ski Ambassadors/Volunteers
 - d. Food and Beverage
 - e. Lift Operations
- C. Second Home owners
- D. Guests

IV. Two sources of outreach

- A. Church-sponsored outreach
- B. Individual Missionary

V. Funding Sources

- A. Denominational Support
- B. Mission support from other churches
- C. Individual donations.
- D. Tentmaker—A 2-sided coin (Adam Tucker’s experience—Brad Lartigue)
- E. Thrift Store—meets four needs

1. Need of resort guests to find a use for their used clothing/furniture
 2. Need of residents for affordable clothing/furniture
 3. Need of people in crisis for these items free of charge.
 4. Need of ministry for funding
 5. Examples: Tom Moore—Boone, NC, Yours truly—Lincoln, NH
- F. “Acts of God” (Just whose ministry is it, anyway)

IV. Building Community

- A. In a Church-based outreach this is accomplished by the fellowship and myriad amount of connections offered through an established body of believers.
- B. In an Individual Missionary outreach
 1. Prayer Requests—solicit requests from folks and then follow up on them. Our ministry does so and has developed continuing ministries with folks based on their prayer needs. The key here is follow-up. We put out a quarterly printed prayer letter and host an email prayer network. Every quarter we list the answered prayers from the previous prayer letter and are quick to notify folks on the email network of answered prayers when they occur.
 2. Preacher’s prayer list. I keep a computerized record of everyone I meet at the resort. When visiting with employees or after encountering guests, I’ll update their record to reflect personal information and prayer needs I’ve discovered. I’ve got several hundred names on my “prayer card” as I’ve labeled it on my computer and go through several every day during my prayer time. Prayers for them have often led to emails asking what’s happened about this or that concern or need, a contact which I’ve been told has been encouraging.
 3. Post-service lunches and skiing. On occasion I’ve invited others to join me for lunch following the service. This hasn’t produced a lot of results, but among those who have taken me up on it, it’s produced some long-lasting friendships and opportunities to minister.

V. Discouragement

- A. Cause: If you have, or are starting a church, the fluid nature of resort employment translates into members leaving. One day you have a leadership team in place and are ready to launch an exciting new outreach and the next day three-quarters of them are gone.
Response: Expect and plan for it.
 1. View yourself as a training ground rather than a growing ground.
 2. One ministry trains their new members in the expectation that they will eventually be sent elsewhere and has a commissioning service for them when they leave. Such an approach helps redeem the sense of loss by viewing it in a more positive light.
- B. Cause: Isolation, especially for those who are serving a resort as an individual missionary.
Response: A missionary is responsible for keeping his own spiritual fires burning—this is a responsibility that needs to be recognized in order to respond to it.
 1. Network with others in similar ministries – This will take some doing but will pay rich dividends. This can be done by visiting those ministries/ministers or attending gatherings such as Steve Hoekstra’s Rocky Mountain Institute which was organized to meet that need, or conferences sponsored by ARLM.
 2. Solicit prayer for your own needs. Not a bad reason to establish your own email prayer network if you haven’t already got one in place.

C. Cause: Inappropriate Expectations

Response: You must be new to resort ministries. They're not like your regular churches, where success is measured in terms of increased attendance and budget figures and registered conversions. The fluid nature of resorts will sound the death-knell to your expectations of church growth and the transient nature of tourists will deprive you of knowing of many conversions. The Lord will encourage you and you'll see results from your ministry, but they will not be similar to those with "regular" churches. Essentially the answer to this cause of discouragement is the certainty of your calling. Did God call you to this ministry? If so, the results are in his hands, not yours. There is great comfort to be found in the certainty that God has called you to this ministry.

VI. Common Guest Needs

A. Worship-related Needs

1. Need for an aesthetically rewarding experience. This is a powerful need that you can plug into by providing quiet and beautiful settings for worship.
2. Need for relationships can be addressed by helping participants connect with each other and with you.
3. Need for worship
 - a. Christmas/Easter—mass appeal
 - b. Weekly worship—not quite a mass appeal (putting it mildly)
4. Ski Services
 - a. Stationary and Skiing
 1. Two types of Stationary: On Slope Outside and On Slope Inside. Most are the former, but at Sunday River in Maine they're held in an on-mountain lodge because the chaplain finds that it enables him to have a full-fledged service and the opportunity for fellowship afterwards over a cup of coffee or hot chocolate.
 2. Two starting points for Skiing Services: Top and Bottom. This will be dictated by the configuration of the mountain. At Sugarloaf we started at the bottom; at Loon Mountain we start at the top. The advantage of a skiing service is that you can have the people for a longer period of time, which increases the opportunity for connections and ministry. By incorporating the reason for which people have come to the mountain, it also makes it more exciting. Not all resorts are configured to allow this however. You'll need a long beginner's trail that includes beautiful views, and not all resorts can provide this. My ministry at Loon and at Sugarloaf were both skiing services, but at Waterville Valley was a stationary service.
 - b. Considerations for Ski Services
 1. Location is everything
 - a) Aesthetically rewarding: quiet, secluded--beautiful vistas a real plus
 - b) One-lift access if at all possible. The easier it is to get there, the greater the response.
 2. Advertising is critical
 - a) In static communities, word gets around.
 - b) In resort areas, advertising gets around
 - c) Possibilities: Resort TV station, Resort Publications such as Table signs, Posters (put up and take down if necessary), Sandwich Board signs (compatible with mountain signage and made by mountain if possible), chalk boards at lifts, Banners in the snow, Cross in snow (Brad Lartigue at Big Sky), get location put on

The resort ski map, Web pages, both your own and the resort's.

c. Creating Community at Ski Services.

1. Invite participants to lunch or a run after the service. They'll not always take you up on it, but you'll build close relationships with those who do.
2. Prayer ministry—solicit prayer requests on response forms and follow-up on them. Email prayer chains are good for this, too.
3. Take a group picture at the end and make it available to participants either by email or hard copy.—something to remember you by and share with their friends.

d. Invite people to indicate their desire to commit their lives to Christ, the fact that they're doing some spiritual searching and any prayer needs they might have on a response form with self-addressed envelope included.

B. Entertainment—(Clip from Angel Fire Pageant)

1. Entertainment as a conduit for the gospel. When Dann Masters was at Angel Fire, NM, he developed a series of Christmas pageants that saw hundreds attending and became the thing to see at the resort. People have a need at resorts for entertainment, and when responded to by a ministry, it can become a conduit for the gospel.

2. Music Power—both through the above concerts and secular Broadway shows that he and church put on during the summer months, people who attended them were likely to show up at his church through this connection, or come to a Christian musical because they had seen them put on a good Broadway show.

II. Common Resort-related needs

A. Employee Concerns

1. Housing
2. Meals (especially at the beginning of the season when they arrive with little money and may face a delayed opening of the mountain). Angel Fire used to sponsor free weekly meals at the church followed by a service. I've had experience at Loon with an employee Bible study of South African workers preceded by a pot luck supper one of the employee housing apartments.
3. Personal Issues—Opportunities to provide counseling to resort employees (Dann Masters, Russ Venker)
4. Child care—Parent's night out—Debbie Wohler

B. Management Concerns

1. Providing amenities to guests that will encourage them to return.
 - a. Christmas Eve and Easter Sunrise Services
 - b. Weekly worship
2. Helping to keep the employees happy and productive (informal counseling and availability of resort chaplain to help address other personal needs of employees).
3. Accidents as opportunities
 - a. Management and staff are not skilled or trained in dealing with the emotional fallout from serious injuries—an opportunity for ministry that they will appreciate greatly.

- b. Ministry to accident victims also translates into good PR for Mt.
- c. Need of Patrol and First Aid personnel to know what happened to guests they've cared for and an opportunity to encourage those personnel by reporting back to them a patient's appreciation.
- d. Death happens
 - 1) CISD (Critical Incident Stress Debriefing) helpful in ministering to resort personnel
 - 2) Ministering to those who have lost loved ones
 - 3) Ministry to the dying (destination resort)

APPENDIX

QUESTION: If you were to pass on some advice from your own experiences to someone who has just started a ski resort ministry, what would you tell them?

CHARLIE ELISOR (Steamboat Springs)

1. I believe one of the most important steps in beginning and maintaining an effective ski ministry is to **earn the trust of management** (upper) if possible. **A professional written proposal** outlining the scope of the ministry and making an appointment to present it to management is important.
2. **I volunteered** with guest services to give back and earn trust. **I was a part of each years orientation** and asked to address the employees so they could get to know me and learn what was available through our ministry. I made sure that as I molded and shaped the strategy of the ski ministry, it was in line and **supported the mission statement of the resort.**
3. It is important to **be seen as a team player** and brings trust. **Be dependable**—be there when you say you will be there. The world is full of people with good intentions but never show up in time to prove it.
Charlie Elisor—Steamboat

FRED WEATHERLY (Mammoth)

1. Keep the Big Picture and the **Long Term View** in Mind...Huge things will happen but it might not happen the first year or third but good things will happen.
2. Maintain a sense of **enthusiasm** and communicate it contagiously to Mountain Staff
3. Network and **communicate with Staff** from the Mountain CEO to the seasonal life operator.
4. Some mountain management teams are like Cats they take a long time to warm up...they ignore you for months...but let me tell you **when there is a Crisis** on the Mountain YOU are the one they are glad to see show up.
5. Equip yourself to handle **Critical Incidents** and **memorial services** because problems happen in paradise.
6. Be **Consistent** with **pre-season check ups** and **post-season thank you's**...like flowers for office staff on Easter and cookies for Lift ops...Ski Patrol.
7. **Have Fun** and **haul friends** with you...thus building a ministry team community...which some years is the real ministry!

BENNY CLARK (Vail)

1. **Get to know** key people: i.e. Resort Leaders, All the ministers, merchants, and the young adults who in the resort and run the mountain operations. **Be attentive to the needs** of the resort workers.

2. The resort owner/leaders will help you open the mountain for worship service. The **Ski Patrol** is a valuable asset.
3. **Get involved in civic organization. Ski with guest** and not just your friends.
4. Find the local hang out and **hang out**. Get to know the merchants by dropping by their shops.
5. **Visibility is key** in the success of a resort ministry.
6. Volunteer to work as a **chaplain at the local hospital or out patient clinic**.
7. Remember **the people of the resort are your business**--your only business and **the more you get to know them the greater the opportunity to share the Gospel**.

BILL BLACK (Smokey Mountain Ministries)

1. What are the relevant **needs** of the resort that are not being met? How can you / your **ministry improve employee performance (quality of life) and enhance visitor experience?**
2. **Start at the top**. Go as high in the corporation as you can go to get attention and **build relationship**. Once you start, make sure that you work in both directions (if you and your ministry intersect the corporation in the middle ---say the marketing director or person manager). **Relate upwards to corporate and outwards to lifties** and maintenance and so on.
3. **Earn the right to be heard ---repeatedly**. Whether by volunteering in special events, teaching in snow sports school, being ski patrol, or whatever.
4. Don't ask for lots of passes! **Set your needs at the start** and stay with those limits.
5. **Look for new ideas and needs** and hopes as you get to know the place. (Actually not a bad way to start --**get to know the place** slowly ---ski there, take lessons / courses there, join special events, etc).

ADAM TUCKER—(Hawksnest)

1. what we found most helpful was to definitely either have **a good relationship with management** or have an advocate on the inside who does have a good relationship with management. Of course, both of those is certainly the best situation which is what the Lord blessed us with. **I was also on ski patrol**, so that certainly helped with getting a foot in the door and knowing a bit more about the inner workings of management, etc. At the same time, however, it was **a huge time commitment and was both limiting in some ways with ministry opportunities and paradoxically also provided additional ministry and outreach opportunities**.
2. Giving out granola bars and morning devotions each Sunday morning to the employees seemed to be successful. They didn't spark a lot of conversations themselves, but **it was an open door and the folks would gradually warm up to us**.
3. We must be able to not only **articulate what we believe, but why we believe**. And at the same time, we must be able to **understand what they believe**

DEBBIE WOHLER (Lake Tahoe)

The short answer to this question (which is all I have time to give it at the moment) is for them to talk one on one with anyone at ARLM who is there at the resort and give them the specific details about their ski area. I'd gather their e-mail addresses and ask them to send me anything and everything they have in their files about ski ministry. Even though I won't be able to attend the meeting, I'd be happy to e-mail a new person anything I have and would be more than willing to talk with them by phone as well.

STEVE HOEKSTRA (Just about everywhere)

1. The first thing I would talk to him about is **needs**—what are the needs of the ski resort—the patrollers—lift operators and any other employee groups. Spend a year asking questions about where visitors are from, what their needs might be and figure out over the next two or three years how to meet those needs. The thing I tell people is that ministry without need is just a program.
2. **You don't need to have a ski service to do ministry.** Most resorts are open to them, but if you run into one that isn't, you can concentrate on developing relationships with the employees and meeting their needs and still have a viable outreach. If you win them to Christ, they can serve as missionaries to their fellow employees.
3. The important thing is **relevancy**. Make sure you continue to assess needs so that what you're doing is relevant to the needs that people have, and those needs can change.