

Reducing Barriers and Building Skills to Increase Women's Leadership in the XC Ski Community

What would it take to have more women as cross country ski coaches and wax technicians? This is a question the racing committee at Nakkertok Nordic Ski Club wanted to address. Why? Nakkertok has a successful program, but women are significantly underrepresented in key areas of program delivery. Currently women represent only 5% of the waxing team and 16% of the coaching team. This is likely similar at other Canadian ski clubs. Of course, women are active volunteers in other areas, but we know they have many qualities that would make them terrific coaches. What is keeping them away?



In 2014, we held a women's only workshop to build skills in waxing and ski technique. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with many requests to conduct another workshop. This year, we decided to do something bigger and better.

With support from the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), we planned another workshop, featuring a larger leadership team, better food, and pre and post workshop surveys to gather data that

would help shed light on how we could increase participation among women.

As one of the largest XC Ski clubs in Canada, Nakkertok was in a unique position to run this grassroots project, with a large number of potential participants and skilled instructors. Although a main goal was to increase women's participation in non-traditional leadership roles, an additional goal was to provide a workshop model that other clubs could follow. Finally, through questionnaires and discussion, our project attempted to uncover the reasons influencing women's participation in these male-dominated areas.

WORKSHOP PROMOTION

We promoted the workshop through a flyer and in Nakkertok e-mail newsletters using catchy language like *"Become a Ski Goddess"* to attract women, with a clickable link to sign up for more information. To attract more women, we purposefully didn't include a date; in response, 67 women expressed interest.



Nakkertok Women's Waxing & Ski Technique Workshop

Learn to love klister!
Conquer kick wax!
Grasp the glide

- * Would you like to brush up on your ski technique?
- * Do you want to learn how to wax skis for great grip & glide?

Join us for a **FREE** Workshop

ALL levels are welcome!

Nakkertok coaches will lead a **2-3 hour workshop** that will involve:

- 1) waxing demo and hands-on practice
- 2) on-snow ski technique tips and instruction

When & Where?
A Saturday or Sunday in December or January at Nakkertok

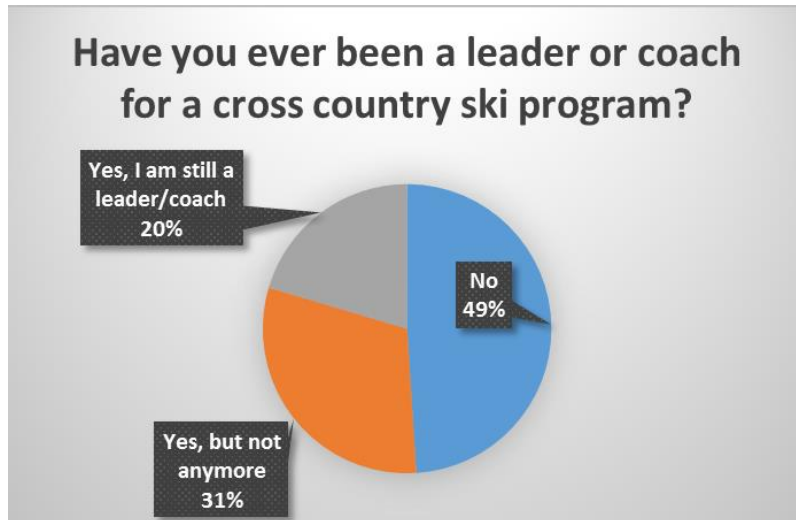
For Nakkertok members

INTERESTED?
Add your name and email at this link or add it to the sheet below and we will be in touch with details

[http://nakkertok.com](#)

SURVEY ON BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

We asked these women to fill out [an online survey](#) to identify barriers to women's participation in these traditionally male-dominated roles; 49 women (73%) completed the survey. Respondents had children in the Racing Program (49%), Learn to Ski program (53%), and Adventure Program (6%) (*%>100 since some have children in multiple programs*).

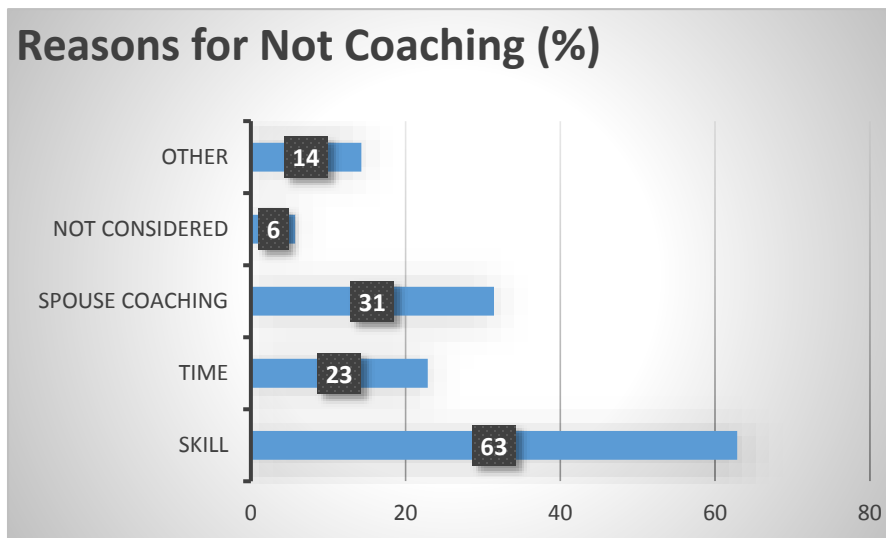


point, but not anymore.

The survey asked women about the importance of having female leaders and coaches at Nakkertok: 100% of women believed this was important (42% very important; 46% important, and 12% somewhat important).

About 20% of survey respondents were currently instructing a Nakkertok program, and one third of these women had been a leader or coach of a ski program at some

WHY DON'T WOMEN COACH, OR WHY DID THEY STOP COACHING?



We asked women who never coached (24) or weren't coaching anymore (15), why they had stopped (women could choose more than one response, and could offer additional reasons not listed). The most common reason was not enough skill (63%). Only 23% of these women stated not enough time as a reason they stopped

coaching. One third of the women stated that they were no longer coaching because their spouse/partner was coaching (this could also be interpreted as a time issue, i.e. division of responsibilities within the family), and 6% had never considered the possibility.

WHY ARE FEMALE COACHES IMPORTANT?

We asked women why they thought female coaches were important (open-ended question). An overwhelming response was to have female role models for the athletes. Another popular response was for athletes to benefit from the different approach and viewpoint that a female coach might offer. Many believed it was important to provide a balance in coaching approaches, and emphasized the importance of increasing the visibility of women in leadership positions. Some women thought female coaches allowed female athletes to share commonalities and attributes outside of sport.

HOW CAN WE INCREASE THE PROPORTION OF WOMEN INSTRUCTORS AND COACHES?

We asked women for suggestions about how Nakkertok could increase the proportion of women instructors or coaches. This was an open-ended question, and respondents had plenty of great ideas. The most popular responses can be summarized as follows:

- **Provide more clinics** geared towards women (schedule clinics with children's ski sessions to maximize participation)
- **Target current/past skiers** to become coaches, and get them involved early
- **Recognize women's time constraints:** consider job sharing for coaches and promote flexible coach schedules; consider coach training courses that do not take up a full weekend
- **Increase confidence and boost skills** of women so they know coaching is a possibility for them ("not all coaches need to be perfect skiers").

Getting women involved early, promoting existing resources, and providing opportunities and apprenticeships were also notable responses.

THE WORKSHOP

We held the Workshop at Nakkertok on January 24 (2015) from 1:00 – 4:30 pm. Twenty eight women attended the workshop (30 registered, 2 pulled out because of illness or last-minute conflicts). We included a ride-sharing board to accommodate women with transportation issues.

The format was as follows:

- 1:00 - 1:30 - Meet and Greet
- 1:30 - 3:30 - Concurrent Ski Technique Session and Waxing Session (women switched sessions at 2:30)
- 3:30 - 4:30 - Forum/Social/Refreshments

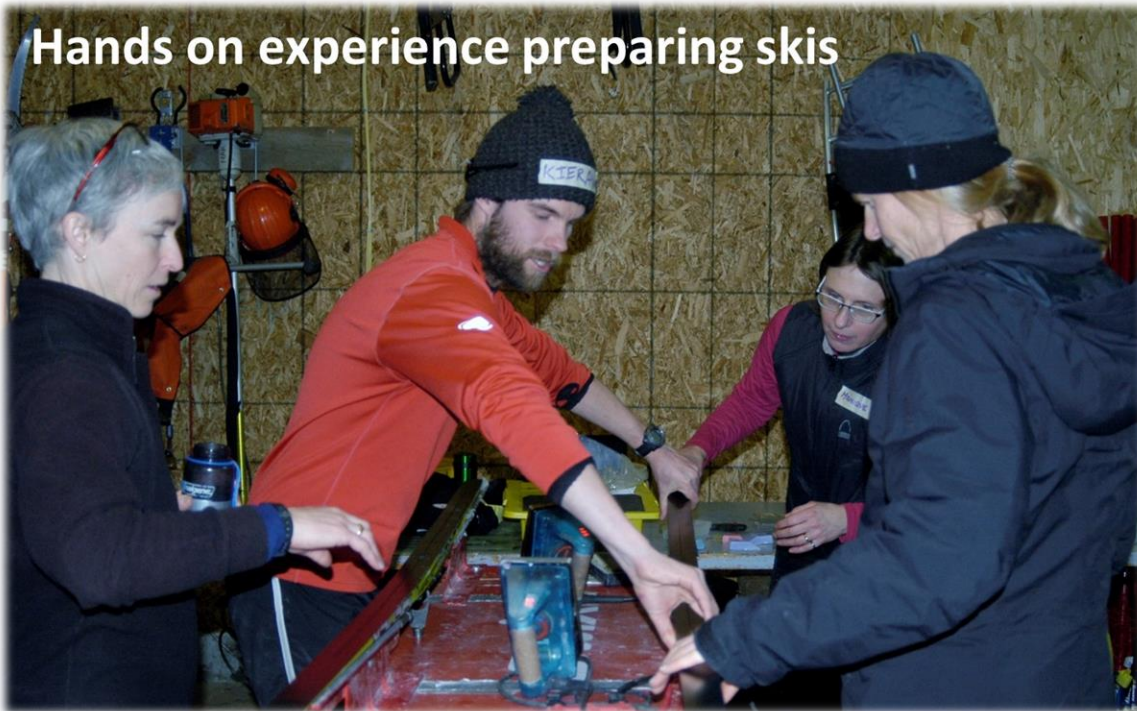
SKI PREPARATION AND WAXING

The waxing portion focused on the basics of glide and grip waxing, emphasizing that waxing **doesn't have to be complicated**. We had four facilitators (Jen Tomlinson, Kieran Jones, Geoff Tomlinson, Sue Schlatter), and encouraged hands-on experience.

Our facilitators: Jen Tomlinson,
Kieran Jones, Geoff Tomlinson, & Sue Schlatter.

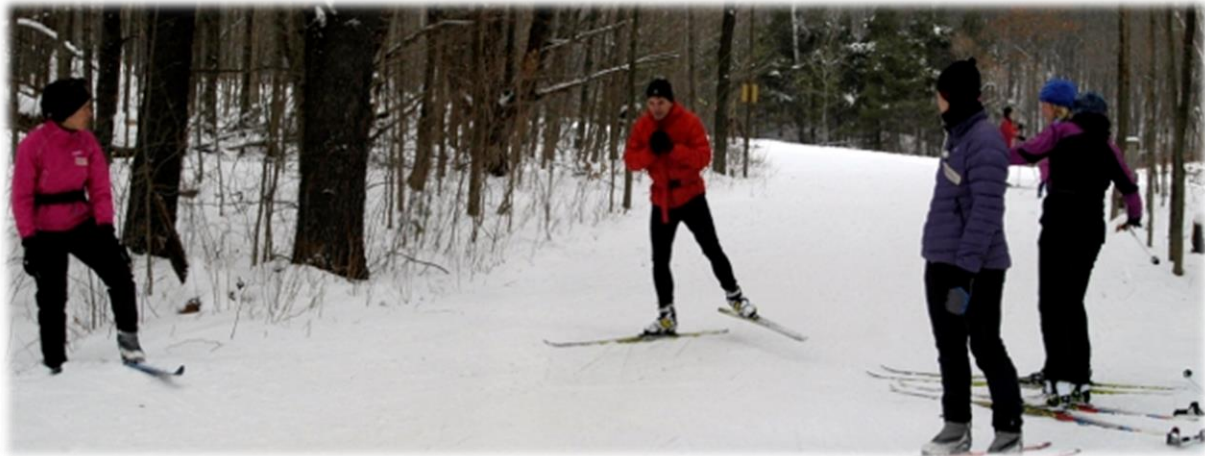


Hands on experience preparing skis



SKI TECHNIQUE

Four facilitators (Sheila Kealey, Peter Lloyd, Suzanne Reid, and Sue Holloway) helped women with their classic or skate ski technique.



SOCIAL COMPONENT AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Time before and after the ski and wax sessions was devoted to socializing with good food, tea and coffee, and short presentations and discussions, which included (i) the benefits of having more women engaged in traditional male roles within the xc ski community; (ii) the importance of having women mentors and role models, and (iii) barriers and solutions to participation. We also informed women about opportunities at Nakkertok, Cross Country Canada, and coaching courses.

Psychologist Kim Sogge joined our leadership team for the workshop discussion, and gave a short presentation on factors affecting women's participation in sport and leadership roles. The presentation was motivational and inspiring, and sparked spirited discussions.

WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

The week following the workshop, we sent women an e-mail with a list of resources, and a link to [an online survey](#) to collect workshop feedback. A second e-mail (sent the following week) included pictures of the workshop, and a reminder to fill out the survey. These strategies produced an excellent response rate: 26 out of the 28 workshop attendees filled out the survey, giving us a good representation of their thoughts on the workshop.

Comments about the workshop were extremely positive. Most participants would like to see follow-up workshops, and some thought a longer workshop might be of more value; some women suggested separating the waxing and technique component. Many commented that they would love to see clinics, workshops, or coaching courses offered at the same time that their children are in lessons/programs.



We asked workshop participants about how to structure future workshops. Specifically, would two shorter workshops (about 1.5-2 hours=1 waxing/1 technique) attract more women? Almost half (48%) either strongly agreed (8%) or agreed (40%) that two shorter workshops would be better; 28% disagreed, and 24% were neutral. It seems many would have appreciated more time to cover waxing and skiing, but balanced this desire with realities of time constraints.

CONFIDENCE AND SKILL ON SKIS AND ABILITY TO ADOPT A COACHING ROLE

Most (96%) workshop attendees agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop helped them improve their skills and confidence on skis.



We asked workshop participants if the workshop helped them understand that they have the ability to learn enough to help out in coaching roles at Nakkertok. More than half of the women agreed (6% strongly agreed; 50% agreed); 23% had no opinion, and 1 woman disagreed.



We asked women if the workshop inspired them to consider taking a coaching course (or further their coach education): almost half agreed (15% strongly agreed, 31% agreed), 50% had no opinion, and only one respondent disagreed.

Barriers to taking coaching courses. Coaching courses are typically given on weekends (2 full weekend days). We asked workshop participants if this timing would be a significant barrier to attending. About 70% responded that it would be a barrier (42%=somewhat a barrier; 27%=definitely a barrier); 15% said this would not be a barrier, and 11% had no opinion.

CONFIDENCE AND SKILL IN THE WAXROOM



All attendees agreed that the workshop improved their confidence and skill in the waxroom (38% agreed, and 62% strongly agreed).

We asked if the workshop helped them understand that they have the ability to learn enough to help out in **waxing** roles at Nakkertok. All but one respondent agreed (strongly agreed =35%; agreed=62%) **that the workshop helped in this regard.**

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THIS WORKSHOP?

All respondents said they would recommend the workshop to other women (73% strongly agreed and 27% agreed).

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitators and participants were unanimous in that this project was a huge success. The project achieved its goals of improving waxing and technique skills, informed women about the gender discrepancy in these areas, uncovered barriers to participation in traditionally male-dominated roles, and proposed ways to improve the situation.

Lack of skill was identified as a major barrier to participating in the traditionally male-dominated areas of coaching and waxing, suggesting that programs to boost skill levels should be a high priority. But we need to ask, is boosting their skill level enough for them to consider contributing to coaching or waxing? Research shows that women tend to underestimate their abilities and performance relative to men, even when their performances are similar: for example, one study showed that women would only apply for a promotion when they met 100% of the qualifications, while men would apply when they met 50% of the qualifications. This information shows that confidence boosting and leadership skills should be integrated into workshops to ensure long-term success.

Time constraints were also identified as a major barrier. Clubs should make efforts to provide flexibility and more opportunities that might accommodate women's schedules; those responsible for designing coaching courses might consider looking at the curriculum with this in mind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Seek funding for additional workshops; workshops should
 - Be timed in conjunction with child lessons if possible
 - Incorporate confidence boosting/leadership skills
- Seek funding to create workshop modules for other clubs to follow
- **Coaching Courses:** Consider a schedule that is more accessible to women (during lessons, broken up somehow so it's not an entire weekend)
- Consider coaching apprenticeships with female coaches (need not be formal, or multiple sessions)
- Consider incorporating women's only skills courses during child lessons

We have a few ideas for additional workshops or programs that are in line with our findings, and might be feasible at Nakkertok:

Nakkertok currently has a Learn to Ski Program for adults held in conjunction with the popular bunnyrabbit/jackrabbit sessions (FUNdamentals stage, involving eight 2-hours sessions either Saturday morning 9-11 AM, Saturday afternoon, or Sunday afternoon) January through March.

A different version for the Adult Learn to Ski, specifically for women, would be an ideal forum for improving women's skills and exposing them to leadership and coaching opportunities (or at least put the idea in their head). This could be an 8-week program (8 sessions, fewer if this is too ambitious). Content would include ski technique, waxing instruction, possibly coach shadowing, and presentations about women in sport/leadership/coaching courses.

A significant challenge for such a program would be integrating it with the current Learn to Ski program, and finding skilled instructors and speakers who are available during these sessions (the Learn to Ski program already needs to find a large number of instructors for many groups of children).

The idea for this Workshop was conceptualized by members of the Nakkertok Nordic Racing Committee, planned by workshop facilitators, and made possible by the support of CAAWS. Surveys design, analysis, and report were done by Sheila Kealey. Photos are by Jesse William; you can see the full photo album [here](#).