



# JUST FOR PROGRAMMERS

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## Three Things Radio Can Learn From Avalanche Awareness

Whether you are standing at the top of an icy, wind-swept cornice about to drop in, or scanning the latest Nielsen market ranker for your station and the competition, dealing with the changing day-to-day environments of backcountry skiing and programming radio can be both daunting and perilous. Granted, there usually isn't the risk of serious injury present in radio, but it sure feels that way after a bad book, doesn't it?

To give you some perspective, today we will travel out of bounds with the ratings the same way that skiers and riders duck under the ropes at mountain resorts all over the world in search of untouched lines. Here are three things radio can learn from avalanche training that will make your journey through the peaks and valleys of the ratings as safe as possible:

1. **Pay attention to all the inputs:** Most people who spend time on snow in the winter don't give avalanches even a passing thought. Truth is, avalanches happen in every mountain range during the winter. Study this phenomenon and the first things you'll learn is to appreciate the myriad of inputs that go into an unstable snowpack: wind, temperature, angle of the sun, orientation of the slope, and on and on. No two situations are ever the same so it's important to know what is most likely to affect your day on the slopes.

The same holds true when your radio station. Every situation is unique and, beyond the fundamental practices for healthy ratings, there are a million other factors that contribute to your success. To effectively assess your performance decide which factors are most likely to affect your station (or bury you in snow) and track them over time. That information will help you understand what's going on with your numbers book-to-book.

2. **Have a preparedness plan & communicate:** A large part of all wilderness education is knowing what to do with things go wrong. Many people are good at assembling a trip plan, few excel at kicking into response mode when something bad happens in the mountains and even less communicate about contingency plans with their partners ahead of time. This is one of the most underrated aspects of being in the backcountry.

At the station everyone on your staff is your partner; working towards the same common goals, they should be prepared to handle the unexpected.

It's easy to plan interviews and live remotes during an annual music festival, but can the person in the studio handle a technical issue or know what to do when a band doesn't show for their interview? Having a contingency plan and communicating it to your staff ahead of time will help make the entire team stronger.

- 3. Celebrate each success, none are too minor:** Getting back to the trailhead in one piece, with everybody safe and sound in your party, is the ultimate success all backcountry explorers strive for. Sure, descending thousands of feet of virgin snow on a bluebird day is one of the ultimate highs of skiing or riding, but in the end making it out safe is the most satisfying. Seasoned vets know even when the snow and weather make for a crappy day, getting home safe is something to celebrate.

Radio should take a cue from this. As much pressure as there is to perform in every ratings period it's easy to lose sight of how far you've come when growth is slow but consistent. Set and manage your expectations accordingly. Celebrate the great ratings days that feel like blower powder and don't get too upset when bad ratings weather rolls in. Gather up your team, make sure everyone gets out safely and live on for the next adventure.

Unpredictability is part of going backcountry skiing and working in radio. It's why we love, and sometimes hate, our adventures and our jobs. But taking an analytical approach to being aware of your surroundings and the best ways to navigate them will always help make your experience – at work or on the trails – a better one.

