

# Alpine Skiing Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Isaku Begert** (April 9, 2026)

*In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email [expertanalysis@law360.com](mailto:expertanalysis@law360.com).*

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I learned to ski shortly after learning to walk, and the freedom it provides and the discipline it demands have stayed with me throughout my life.

Skiing was my earliest introduction to the idea that effort and reward are inseparable. Long before I understood what a legal career required, skiing taught me to commit fully, adapt quickly, and remain composed in moments that require both courage and judgment.

Only later did I realize that the same principles that guided me down a mountain would guide me through the practice of law.



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Although skiing initially felt separate from my professional identity, over time it became clear that it was shaping essential habits that I rely on daily as an attorney: preparation, focus, resilience and the ability to remain steady when circumstances shift rapidly. The sport has influenced the way I approach legal strategy, client counseling and teamwork. The clarity I find on the mountain — and the discipline that allows me to navigate it — have become central to how I navigate my work.

## **Preparation Is Nonnegotiable**

Skiing rewards preparation and punishes complacency. Conditions change rapidly. Weather shifts, snow quality evolves throughout the day and terrain can vary dramatically even within the same run. A successful day on the mountain begins long before the first chairlift, with attention to forecasts, equipment and physical readiness.

Legal practice operates no differently. Strong advocacy rarely begins with inspiration; it begins with preparation. Whether drafting a dispositive motion, preparing for a deposition or developing a litigation strategy, outcomes depend on groundwork that is often invisible to others. Skiing reinforces that discipline. Skipping preparation might not cause immediate failure, but it significantly increases risk. A poorly tuned edge or an overlooked weather warning can turn a manageable run into a dangerous one.

That mindset carries into my legal work. I am more deliberate about anticipating questions, weaknesses and contingencies. Skiing has taught me that confidence grounded in preparation is fundamentally different from confidence grounded in assumption. Only the former is reliable when conditions change.

## **Judgment Under Pressure**

At speed, hesitation can be costly. Skiing requires constant decision-making: when to turn, when to slow, when to commit to a line and when to back off entirely. These decisions must be made quickly, often with incomplete information, and with meaningful consequences.

The same is true in legal practice, particularly in litigation. Courtroom dynamics shift. Judges ask unexpected questions. Opposing counsel changes course. Clients face time-sensitive decisions with imperfect information. Skiing has trained me to remain calm in those moments, to trust my preparation and to make reasoned decisions without paralysis.

Importantly, skiing also teaches that not every decision must be aggressive. Sometimes the correct choice is restraint. Choosing a conservative line in poor visibility is not a failure of nerve; it is sound judgment.

In legal practice, the same principle applies. Knowing when not to press an argument, when to concede a minor point or when to pursue settlement can be just as important as knowing when to advance forcefully.

## **Risk Assessment and Strategic Thinking**

Every ski run involves risk, but experienced skiers learn to distinguish between acceptable risk and unnecessary exposure. That assessment depends on skill level, conditions, fatigue and the margin for error. Good skiers do not eliminate risk; they manage it.

This approach closely parallels legal strategy. Litigation is inherently uncertain. Even strong cases carry risk, and even weak cases may present opportunities. Skiing reinforces the importance of evaluating risk dynamically rather than categorically. What was reasonable in the morning may not be reasonable in the afternoon. What works on one slope may be inappropriate on another.

As a lawyer, this perspective encourages continuous reassessment. Strategy should not be static. Facts develop, law evolves and client objectives shift. Skiing has reinforced the value of staying alert to those changes and adjusting course accordingly rather than clinging to an outdated plan.

## **Focus and Presence**

Few activities demand presence the way skiing does. Distraction is not merely inefficient; it is dangerous. When skiing, attention narrows to the immediate environment: terrain, balance, rhythm and movement. External concerns fall away because they must.

That level of focus is increasingly rare in professional life, where interruptions are constant and attention is fragmented. Skiing has reminded me what sustained concentration feels like and why it matters. I strive to replicate that presence in my legal work, particularly during writing and oral advocacy.

When drafting a brief, clarity emerges only when attention is undivided. When arguing a motion, effective advocacy requires listening as much as speaking. Skiing reinforces that presence is not passive; it is an active skill that improves with practice and intention.

## **Resilience and Recovery**

Falls are inevitable in skiing. Even experienced skiers misjudge conditions, catch an edge or simply lose balance. What matters is not the fall itself, but the response. Effective skiers assess what went wrong, adjust and continue.

Legal practice involves similar setbacks. Motions are denied. Arguments fall flat. Outcomes disappoint clients despite best efforts. Skiing has taught me to treat these moments as data rather than as personal failures. The question is not whether something went wrong, but what can be learned and applied going forward.

That mindset fosters resilience. It allows for honest self-assessment without discouragement. Skiing reminds me that progress is rarely linear and that improvement often follows discomfort.

## **Patience and Long-Term Development**

Improvement in skiing takes time. Progress is incremental and often uneven. Plateaus are common. Breakthroughs rarely come on schedule. The process rewards consistency rather than intensity alone.

This lesson directly translates into legal development. Skill as a lawyer builds over years, not months. Mastery of writing, judgment and advocacy emerges gradually through repetition, reflection and feedback. Skiing reinforces patience with that process and respect for steady, sustained improvement.

It also reinforces humility. No matter how experienced one becomes, there is always more to learn, whether from conditions, instructors or other skiers. That humility is essential in legal practice, where overconfidence can obscure weaknesses and inhibit growth.

## **Perspective and Balance**

Finally, skiing provides perspective. Time on the mountain reminds me that professional identity is important, but it is not exhaustive. Maintaining interests outside the law supports longevity in a demanding profession. It creates space for reflection, renewal and creativity.

Far from being a distraction, skiing enhances my effectiveness as a lawyer by sharpening skills that the profession demands but does not always explicitly teach. It has made me more prepared, more decisive, more resilient and more focused. In short, it has made me a better lawyer.

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