



Chairman of the Boards

Stephan Drake, 40
Founder and president, DPS Skis
AS TOLD TO MEGAN MICHELSON

IF YOU BUILD IT...

We determine what a ski can do based on its shape and materials. We haven't been restricted by cost. Our mission is to build the ultimate ski. Price points are an afterthought.

COPY WHAT WORKS

About seven years ago, I was skiing low-angle powder on a cat-ski trip outside Aspen. We wanted a ski that could generate more speed across the fall line. Powder shares more similarities with water than it does with packed snow, so we looked at boats, water skis, and surfboards, thinking about how crafts float while moving at an angle. That's how we came up with the Spoon.

EMBRACE MISTAKES

You make a lot of crappy stuff on your way to something good. I almost killed myself testing that first Spoon, because there was zero edge grip. It's a long, arduous, frustrating process coming up with a solid ski design. Occasionally, you get those fleeting moments of complete satisfaction. Then you go back to the drawing board to try to make the product even better.

PICK YOUR HEROES

I work with Patagonia [as a ski ambassador], and I'm inspired by what Yvon Chouinard has done with that company. I also look to Elon Musk, who's changing the world with design.

Second Skinner

Greg Grenzke, 38
Design manager, Arc'teryx
AS TOLD TO MEGAN MICHELSON

PAIN IS THE BEST MOTIVATION

What drives me?
Wanting to suffer less
in the mountains.

WASTE NOT

German designer Dieter Rams has ten rules of good design. One of them is "Good design is as little design as possible." That's something we incorporate in everything we do. If you look at our products that have lasted through the decades, they're simple and elegant. The less junk there is, the less there is to go wrong.

YOU CAN'T WIN 'EM ALL

There's this pressure to continually make a new and better product. But constant innovation is challenging. Sometimes the creativity is there, sometimes it isn't.

THIN TO WIN

The more construction a piece has, the heavier it is. So how do you make a jacket that's functional, durable, and breathable while using as little material as possible? That's our challenge. We have to find the perfect balance of minimalism and the necessary features.

BORN TO RUN

The process of creating something, testing it, and getting it into the hands of athletes—that's what I really enjoy. I couldn't work at a company where I wasn't passionate about the products. The lines between work and play tend to blur.



Straight Shooter

Lindsay Smith, 33
Director of optical systems,
GoPro

AS TOLD TO
MEGAN MICHELSON

LOVE THE PUZZLE

With engineering and design, there are no textbooks. You take your experience, work with other people, and solve something that's unknown and esoteric. That's fun.

CUSTOMER KNOWS BEST

We start by figuring out what the problem is we're trying to solve. You could come up with some crazy, amazing thing, but if nobody wants to use it, it's not going to sell. That customer need is the driving force.

BE REAL

At the end of the day, we're limited by reality. Cost, available resources, timeline—you have to consider those things. Then there's simple physics. Everyone wants better performance in a smaller, cheaper, faster package. At some point, you have to make trade-offs and sacrifices.

LET IT GO

There comes a time when you need to take a step back and look at the whole picture. When you're deep in a project, it can be difficult to recognize that it's time to let a year's worth of work go and start over from scratch.

FIND THE FINISH LINE

The hardest part is knowing when a design is good enough. We want everything to be perfect. By the nature of design, you can always make improvements. It's really tough to say, "I'm done."



MEET YOUR MAKER



Mr. Big Foot

Chris Hillyer, 43
Director of innovation,
Hoka One One
AS TOLD TO
MEGAN MICHELSON

GET DIRTY

Before Hoka, I designed shoes for Teva. I had no experience making sandals for kayaking, so I went to raft-guide school to learn the nuances. I hauled rafts, I rowed. I couldn't legitimately approach a water shoe without attempting to paddle a kayak. I had to experience it.

TRICKLE DOWN

Just like a race car doesn't work for a family going on holiday, you can't build products for professional athletes and expect everyone to enjoy them. Often you take inspiration from these individuals and create stuff the rest of us can use. If you're not aware of general market needs, you're just building something pretty. It's what we call dying in beauty.

YOU ARE YOUR BEST CUSTOMER

I've always been passionate about making gear I want to use. That fuels my curiosity. Especially in a performance environment, it becomes very personal.

NATURE CALLS

I just made a shoe for an aging elephant. Someone from a zoo in Washington, D.C., phoned and said they had this elephant with a foot problem, and they needed my help.

IF YOU ONLY KNEW...

Success doesn't always mean sales volume. It often means solving a problem in a unique way. Sometimes we take it too seriously, but the spirit for me is to make things better than they used to be. We constantly have things that we're excited about that the world never sees.