



# Tom Pietrowski

## ...on how to get a job in the ski industry

From dishwasher, to boot fitter, to calling the shots on ski boots at the iconic American ski brand, Tom Pietrowski explains to **Amy Marwick** how he climbed his career ladder in the ski industry to become the Product Line Manager for ski boots and skates at K2

**Amy Marwick:** Tell us how you got started in the ski industry?

**Tom Pietrowski:** I grew up in a small village called Welburn, about 20 miles from York. I was lucky that my parents always skied and so we went on a ski holiday every year. After a summer trip to Whistler in 2002 I delayed university to take a gap year there. I applied to a ton of jobs, but got rejected from them all, so I ended up in Banff washing dishes, skiing every day and having a great time.

I came back for university at Leeds Met – we had Castleford indoor slope really close by. I was there skiing one night and saw that Ellis Brigham needed staff, so I applied and got a boot fitting position. I worked there for six

years until 2010, when I gave Whistler another try and stepped right into a boot fitting job at the Salomon shop there.

**AM:** So how did you make the leap from boot fitter to a job actually designing ski boots?

**TP:** After a few years I knew I wanted to make boots. Fitting boots is great because you can make a real difference to someone's holiday, but I was always quite cocky and thought I could make the boots better.

I started writing articles for *Newschoolers*, doing a lot of boot reviews. I knew all the reps in Whistler, so I could get hold of the kit easily. Although I got paid, it was very little, but I could see the potential it had and

**Tom climbed the career ladder (in ski boots, obv)**

so I was willing to put in the time for not much back. I got a sub rep position for K2 in British Columbia, doing demos and training in the shops, and ended up as the BC rep for K2 cross-country, although I knew nothing about cross-country skis! I actually didn't want to be a rep because I hate selling, but it was useful as I went to the K2 sales meetings and met people in the company. After three years spent repping, I landed a job as product line manager for K2 boots and skates.

**“Fitting boots is great... but I was cocky and thought I could make them better”**

**AM:** Tell us about that – how did the job come about?

**TP:** My wife spotted the position online and encouraged me to apply. You might think these jobs are hard to come by, but it was just on the K2 website – anybody could have applied.

I got a phone call straight away from our now vice president of K2, because he already knew me but didn't realise I had the relevant skills, so I had one foot in the door. Then I went through the whole interview process and managed to get the job.

**AM:** What do you owe your success in the ski industry to?

**TP:** It was the skills I learned from retail and putting boots on people's feet for all those years – I got to hear what people wanted in a ski boot, which helped get me the job. In fact, a massive part of my success was down to working at Ellis Brigham. It's an awesome company and I learnt so much from all the people I worked with there.

**AM:** Tell us about your job now. What is your role in the design of a K2 ski boot?

**TP:** I give some input at each stage; I contribute some of the ideas [to the design] and then clever people make it happen. I spend most of my time on Excel actually. I'm responsible for the line of boots we put out, how much we sell them for and how much they will cost us. As the product is being built I have to work out how we will market it and make it unique.



**AM:** What is your favourite part of the process?

**TP:** I like the fact that I help decide where ski boots are going. The stuff that I'm thinking about now could potentially change how the industry will look in three years' time.

Earlier today, for instance – I mean this blows my mind as an ex-UK ski kid – I was on the phone with Tom Wallisch about what he wants in his new boots! I've recently been working with him, Henrik and Phil Casabon, they communicate their ideas to me, I take those ideas to the engineers and designers, and we work out how to bring it to life.

Working with pro skiers, then turning their ideas into reality, is all in a day's work for Tom

**AM:** Are you inspired by other brands out there?

**TP:** I don't look so much at the ski industry, I look more at apparel, especially shoes – they can be so much more reactive to trends. I'm working on boots now for 2025, whereas outerwear are probably working on a collection for next year and sewing the stuff right now.

There's a retailer similar to JD Sports over here called Dick Sporting Goods, and I like to go down there and look at the American football boots.

There was one the other day that was gold with white leopard print. I see these out there designs and think 'we could do something like this and get away from the sea of black'.

I really love Nike. In fact, I used to always look through the forums on *Newschoolers* and once there was a picture of a Nike snowboard boot with a ski base on it. It was a bad Photoshop but people reacted. So I completely modelled a boot in 3D.

I sent it to one of the guys at *Newschoolers* and said, hey somebody sent me this and it's real! It ended up getting into articles with people saying, "we can't say where this came from but Nike is making a ski boot!" It was hilarious. It would get reposted a couple of times a season, but I didn't admit it was me for about five years.

I actually put it into my application with K2 and they were impressed.

In fact, I was recently chatting with Sean Pettit and he was like: "Hey I just saw that Nike boot you made, we should do that!" All these years later it still comes up and turned out to be useful, after me just trying to troll *Newschoolers* for a laugh.

**AM:** What advice would you give to others looking to get started in the ski industry?

**TP:** Don't be afraid to start at the bottom and work your way up. It took me 16 years to get this position. You have to love it because you don't make much money in the beginning as a boot fitter, although you might get to ski 100 days a year. I think you have to pay your dues, and the longer you do it, the more people you meet and the more you understand how it works. The good news is that the UK is an awesome place to start. *Fall Line*

