



The pursuit of learning

The Value of Our Banff Centre Experience

By Superintendent Mike O'Neil
and Inspector Barry Urquhart

The value of acquiring new skills cannot be overstated. Employees involved in continuous learning add a unique capacity and value to their company. Our company recognizes the potential of this benefit. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), as a learning organization, is committed to principle-based leadership based on an agreed vision, mission, and values system. The RCMP provided us with the opportunity to train at The Banff Centre and supports our continuous learning effort. This win-win scenario ensures a high rate of return on our mutual investment. The Banff Centre for Management also made a commitment - to partner with us on our journey. The curriculum is professionally done, emphasizing communication, creativity, and partnering. It is the experiential learning that ensures success.

"...business education belongs to a new breed of corporate learning centers...; where how you learn is part of what you learn..."

(*"Working Smarter Is a Full-time Job"*, Christina Novicki, Fast Company, Issue 5, page 27)

The following is an outline of the courses we have taken at The Banff Centre over the last five years leading to the completion of The Certificate of Excellence in Leadership and Management Development. We hope this synopsis captures the value of our Banff experience.

Our first session was in November 1995, when the Edmonton Police Service and the Banff Centre for Management co-authored **Creating Change in Police Organizations**. The Edmonton Police Service, a recognized leader in the practical application of Community Policing, provided insight into the effective delivery of the philosophy in a municipal setting. In this police forum, the exchange of different perspectives from around the world demonstrated the similarities in the real world of policing. Globally, police services are seeking new and improved change strategies to meet the ever-increasing demands on them. For the RCMP, that means moving away from a command and control management style to one of shared leadership to advance a community policing model. The Banff Centre for Management provided an excellent introduction to leadership and management strategies from a business perspective. Besides being



able to network with and celebrate the "world police brotherhood," we celebrated our cultural differences and exchanged ideas leading to new change processes.

Having had our first encounter with The Banff Centre, we returned for the **Effective Facilitation and Team Leadership** (November 1997) program. We found this session to be a tremendous building block. The session's focus allowed us to key on the strategies needed for effective team development. We have been to many training sessions that touch on team development, leadership styles, etc., but this course provided an opportunity to refresh and bring together many skills. We gained an appreciation of leadership styles. It comes as no surprise that a good majority of police persons are typically type "A" personalities. We had the opportunity to work with type "B" personalities and learn how to work more effectively with one another. For us, the course promoted the development of strong listening skills and underscored the fact that communication skills are essential for the development of a highly effective team.

Effective Facilitation and Team Leadership taught us that it is important to set ground rules, such as having mutual respect for persons speaking; sharing leadership responsibilities dependent upon the situation; clearly defining assigned tasks and responsibility for accepting the task; building consensus; and never letting a teammate fail. Throughout this course, we found it essential to build trust – in ourselves, in each other, and in the actual process – because at times we were unsure where we were going. The opportunity for transference from theory to practical application made what we learned most valuable. Experiential

learning, involving your intelligence, your senses, and your emotions – in a wonderful setting – provides a great return on your investment.

This course was followed by the **Leadership Challenge** (May 1999). It was not just about learning to lead; it was also about understanding what makes a good leader. It provided a safe environment to step up to a personal challenge, to learn about ourselves as individuals – our limitations and our fears, how to face them and become a better person for that experience. Understanding strategic systems and the "big picture" was beneficial in the real life case studies presented to the Executives-in-Residence. This session was definitely fun. We found that through personal stretching, maximum growth occurred at our personal limits. Team building exercises allowed us to transfer the bookwork and theory into real life situations. Again, trust was a major focus: trust in the system; trust in the process; and trust in others. Failure usually accompanied a lack of trust. Most important, we learned that sharing of acquired skills is one of the greatest gifts one can give. This course also taught us that it is crucial to appreciate the individual differences of teammates. You can accomplish this by listening to what people have to say and what they mean. We know that highly effective teams will accomplish more than a group of individuals and that synergy is a powerful tool. This course helped remind us of that. Even a great leader will fail without a team.

In **Management Excellence** (March 2000), our focus turned to the professional challenge. Much of the information we had already gleaned, but this was now complemented with the realization of the need for balance of "hard and soft" skills. We enjoyed exploring our somewhat buried creativity and innovation. We were able to specifically identify and articulate our personal values and we explored the relationship between our personal and professional visions and saw how they reflected each other.

Our last course, **Enhancing Personal and Professional Effectiveness** (September 2000), provided an opportunity to "sharpen the saw," especially when it pertained to the "soft" skills. This session provided us with an alternative view of the world around us, to explain why we are the way we are. It was a tremendous model for introspection. Besides offering a new way of looking at things, we affirmed a previous conclusion that professional change requires deep personal change – a personal vision of who we are. Once again, we learned that it is important to trust the process; enjoy the differences; and to celebrate others.

Throughout the certificate program, a stream of commonalities follows one another. Our learning success comes from appreciating individual differences and dealing with them. By working through each of the sessions, we learned about differing personalities and how this diversity enriches our team. We became aware of the importance of a systems thinking – understanding the nuances and interactions of everything around us. Understanding the differences

of others regarding their learning styles allows us to appreciate and work better with others.

We found that each of the courses within the program were building blocks to our learning. Our new tools were reinforced through practical application. One of the greatest skills we were able to bundle into our "toolkits" were the communications skills – sending and receiving with clarity.

We must tell you – or remind the alumni – of the tremendous value of our learning partners. Initially a group of two, a change to a triad demonstrated The Banff Centre's flexibility in program planning. Not only did these sessions help to confirm our learning, but affirmed our resolution to make positive changes throughout the course and later when we had returned home. Tremendous bonds were created during these sessions and aided in our learning experience.

The success we have enjoyed is due to our commitment, our employer's commitment, and the commitment of The Banff Centre for Management. The Banff experience will live with us as one of the most enjoyable times in our lives. The surroundings, the esthetics, nature, the vast range and variety of information, and the opportunity for personal introspection will be difficult, if not impossible, to surpass. The unique opportunity to explore ourselves is something each and every one of us will take away from The Banff experience. The opportunity to examine, analyze, and comprehend ourselves in the objective terms of quotients (intelligence) and cultural inventories against the backdrop of emotions and spirituality will forever make the experience part of each of us. We will remember the tremendous feelings at our closing ceremonies accenting the essence of team and the spirit of "one."

Our Banff experience has been a fantastic voyage. We want to extend our thanks to the RCMP for their support and contribution to our learning. A special thanks needs to be extended to all of the people at The Banff Centre for Management who made our journey most interesting and a fabulous experience. But most important we want to thank all of the new friends, from facilitators to learning partners, to classmates who supported us on a learning quest. The learning experiences have provided us with an opportunity to gather new tools and to sharpen some of the old ones. We couldn't have taken them with us if it had not been for the help of so many. The Certificate of Excellence in Leadership and Management Development has given us new perspectives, confidence in our abilities to use them, and the foresight to know when they are needed.

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