



## CUSTOMIZE YOUR LEARNING

“Extremely easy, flexible, and very collaborative.”

BY **KATIE DANIEL**

Leadership Development has an enduring record of design and delivery of customized leadership development solutions for a number of companies across Canada, and in Europe. Through careful consultation, each program has been created to meet the specific needs, mission, values, and culture of each organization. Custom program clients benefit from our on-going research, talented faculty with real-life business experience, and innovative methodologies that create organizational capacity in a variety of areas.

One of our oldest continuous custom program relationships is with ATB Financial. Leadership Development began work with the organization in 1997, an association facilitated by Customized

Leadership program director Laurie Hillis. Thousands of ATB's administration, branch management, and executive office staff have benefited from The Banff Centre program.

ATB learning facilitator Gaynor Levisky says the decision to work with Leadership Development was based on a number of factors. “Credible institution, reputable leadership programming, location, and experiential learning opportunities” were among the initial reasons, and the relationship continues to evolve in a positive way. “It's a pleasure to work with The Banff Centre team. They are committed, and excited to be a partner with ATB Financial. The process is extremely easy, flexible, and very collaborative.”

Levisky can attest to the impact of the learning programs for her colleagues. An alumni herself, she relates what happens when people come back into the workplace after a program at Banff. "I often hear that participants feel the experience was 'life-changing' – and it doesn't just impact their relationships at work, but also their relationships at home. Participants are energized, re-focused, and ready to LEAD! Participants bond with colleagues, and that creates a strong support network once they are back on the job. Participants also tell me their staff notice a change!"

She recommends this way of developing leaders to human resource personnel at other companies. "This program is a common thread that bonds all leaders in ATB, and their common experience is undeniably one of the main reasons it is beneficial to have a customized program, versus participants attending the public programs. The bonds made in Banff are still with participants years after they attend. We see those bonds resurface at our annual Leaders' Conference – people hug, laugh, and even cry remembering their experiences and reconnecting."

This assessment is echoed by one of our newest custom program partners, the CUSOURCE Credit Union Knowledge Network. The national learning organization for the Canadian credit union system, CUSOURCE provides classroom, correspondence, and e-learning options for their clients.

Executive director Cheryl Byrne explains how Banff and CUSOURCE first began work together, and the value of a shared connection. "We were hearing a demand for leadership development from across the country, and we started to look for a program that would meet that need. Kevin Yousie [one of Leadership Development's key faculty members] was consulting with us, and we became aware of The Banff Centre through him."

CUSOURCE tested a pilot program at Banff in the Spring of 2004, and Byrne indicates that "the evaluations were extremely

encouraging and positive." She comments on one of the key reasons for the good fit. "The Banff Centre has customized the program to the specific needs of the credit unions. The fact that this is a credit union-only program is one of its greatest assets for us. We are such a unique and varied group across the country. This allows for some incredible networking opportunities. Credit unions are independent businesses, but when they come together in a setting like Banff they share concerns, challenges, and their vision of the future with other leaders in the system. They also explore the many aspects of leadership with these colleagues."

Byrne also credits the experiential nature of the programs in Banff. "All good programs combine a blended approach to learning. Before our participants go to Banff, they take an e-learning course from Harvard, which primes them with concepts before the experiential learning. The experiences at Banff really drive home some personal revelations and the executives realize they have stronger skills than they realized. A key learning I hear about is the awareness of how others think and approach a challenge."

The latest issue of the CUSOURCE newsletter, *In Touch*, is filled with glowing testimonials from recent participants, and Jim Lynn, CEO at the Heartland Community Credit Union in Ontario captures the mood. "Besides the networking, the real value of this program for me was the action plan we developed at the end of the session, and the practical tools that we left with. Within two weeks, I was already working with our senior management team with some of these tools. We have a strong progressive team; however, I believe these tools can assist us in moving towards our vision of the future."

Byrne agrees with his enthusiasm. "Participants are raving about their Banff experience, and that tells me something. The Banff Centre is well-priced, in a beautiful location, and provides an intense leadership curriculum with the right elements that our people can benefit from."

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