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# University of Victoria, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business

**Category:** Engagement With Business

**Location:** Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

**Accreditation Status:** Accredited



### Innovation Title

*The Whistler Experience*

### Innovation Statement

The Whistler Experience is a partnership between the Whistler Chamber of Commerce and the University of Victoria's Gustavson School of Business to increase economic success in the region by providing customer service training for an entire town.

### Call to Action

Whistler is a scenic resort town nestled in the mountains near Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The area relies heavily on the tourism and hospitality sector with its many ski resorts, hotels, and restaurants. As such, companies have a large number of transient and seasonal employees from around the world. Additionally, the town boasts a number of four- and five-star hotels, which elevates visitor expectations when interacting with other businesses. Service is a fundamental driver of the guest experience, an experience that is carefully measured by the Municipality of Whistler and others in the region.

In 2013, the Whistler Chamber of Commerce was looking to improve customer satisfaction and repeat business for all of its members. The feeling was that this could be achieved through better training in service. Their intention was for employers and employees to have tools to consistently deliver great guest experiences throughout the entire town. The Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria worked in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to develop and run a trial program for 140 people. Building on the success of the first year, the partnership continued to develop quality content with further training events, online learning, and materials.

The Gustavson School of Business has been a crucial element in Whistler's long-term

economic success as they educate, inspire, and provide ongoing support to employers and employees of an entire municipality.

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## **Description**

The Gustavson School of Business has created a framework where both employers and employees learn tools to provide consistent service and drive higher sales. The vision of The Whistler Experience is to become the No. 1 resort town in the world for service. The philosophy of the program is simple: to elevate your service, first you have to elevate your people.

The program content is based on a series of foundation courses called Moments of Power that includes eight principles based on research by Gustavson School of Business faculty members. Key learning objectives include:

- To more completely understand how human behavior can lead to business success
- To appreciate the importance of ethically executing these moments of power
- To recognize the importance of not wasting these opportunities
- To be aware that the practice of executing these moments of power is the key to success—not just knowing them

Participants have the opportunity to further participate in leadership courses on topics such as coaching and emotional intelligence for better service. In some cases, businesses have arranged customized implementation workshops with Gustavson faculty.

The program also features the ServeUs Challenge, offering employers service feedback and recognition as well as #TheMostStoked, a no-cost engagement initiative to keep front-line service enthusiasm high. It is offered annually as several thousand new seasonal employees arrive in the resort each year. Trained coaches are also sent into businesses to ensure the tools are used properly and momentum from initial training continues.

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## **Impact**

Over 500 businesses and 5,100 people in the resort have learned about Whistler's service values and principles. By the end of the training season, 50 percent of the total workforce is expected to have been trained. In the first 18 months of Whistler Experience training, almost 11,000 attendees have heard about the same service values.

In a resort town, attracting and retaining employees can also be difficult. As an unexpected impact, The Whistler Experience has become a way for businesses to be more attractive to employees. Participants in the program receive benefits that include ski passes and discounts on further training courses. Based on internal employee satisfaction surveys, some companies have found that their employee retention was not only based on the positive work relationships but also on The Whistler Experience training that helped increase individual employee skill sets.

As word of The Whistler Experience is spreading, more and more organizations from the surrounding area (for example, Sea to Sky Gondola) and hospitality companies in Vancouver are coming to Whistler to attend training. In the fall of 2015, approximately 270 attendees from

outside Whistler attended The Whistler Experience. In spring 2016, national telecommunications company TELUS adopted The Whistler Experience as part of its customer service training strategy.

This year, First Nations interest has been particularly strong. The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre held a private training event where Gustavson professors relayed The Whistler Experience content by weaving in Indigenous stories.

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### **Related Links**

- [The Whistler Experience](#)
  - [Forbes Magazine Article](#)
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