

Whistler Public Library

4 years after introducing the Service Leadership program

In 2012 the new Executive Director at the Whistler Public Library, Elizabeth Tracy, recognized that the "old" library service model had to be revamped. Patrons didn't receive the help they needed and didn't always perceive staff as responsive. If it was outside their immediate work area, staff was unsure how to help or whether they were even allowed to help. Problems were directed to the manager.

Nadine White, Public Services Librarian at Whistler Public Library remembers, "Creating a powerful service culture at the Whistler Public Library started 5 years ago with a simple question - how can we say yes more often?

Elizabeth Tracy continues, "Nadine jumped on the opportunity to change the service culture. What was missing was a framework or program that spoke to the bigger why, what, how and who. Call it a lucky coincidence that the Whistler Experience training (as the Service Leadership Program is called in Whistler) started in 2014. "When my managers heard Mark Colgate's message we knew we found the perfect fit for continuing to elevate the service experience".

Nadine adds, "To implement a barrier-free service model, we restructured our organization, redesigned our space, and overhauled our procedures. We eliminated the traditional divide between circulation and reference staff by introducing the role of service specialist. We now offer one point of service to our patrons, where all of their needs can be taken care of by the same staff member. We replaced an imposing desk, which served to divide staff and patrons, with two discreet kiosks. Patrons are now invited to stand side by side with staff during their interactions. Staff are encouraged to rove the library; to find patrons where they need help and to accompany them where they need to go. We now point with our feet and not our fingers. We also reviewed our procedures to ensure that they are barrier-free. We eliminated unnecessary fees, limits on check outs and renewals, and we relaxed our registration requirements."

"Since then we actively participate in the community's Whistler Experience program every year. At the library the **3Rs, TOFU and Moments of Power** are part of our everyday language. Staff set performance goals each year and their success is measured in terms of improving reliability, responsiveness and relationship building. As front line staff provide one point of service, the power of expertise and mastery are important concepts. Training is ongoing at the library.



As a learning organization, we coach for a **growth mindset**. We have daily micro meetings where we share stories of great service and celebrate our successes. We use the coaching feedback model to learn from our secret shops, asking what went well, what was tricky and what would we do differently next time.

We strive for a **tight-loose-tight culture**. We have a powerful vision, to inspire wonder, and a shared set of values, we are barrier-free, service-orientated, community-driven, responsive and responsible. We empower and trust our staff to provide service that is unique to the situation and patron at hand; a powerful tool for relationship building. We follow up by inspecting what we expect. In other words, we check in with staff and provide feedback to help improve their performance."

Nadine felt inspired, "In one of the workshops, Mark used his case study of Danny Meyer. At the library we followed Danny's philosophy of "enlightened hospitality": we relinquished the role of gate keepers, who build barriers to keep others out. Instead, we became agents, who make things happen for our patrons. We used the 3Rs as filters to create a new value system that favours relationships over processes. We created a framework to say yes."

Why did the Service Leadership training work for the Whistler Public Library?

There seems to be general agreement on 6 critical success factors:

1. The 3Rs, Moments of Power, TOFU are easy to explain and use.
2. Workshop tools are provided that can be incorporated into onboarding and staff training and everyday language, such as growth mindset and the 3R handout.
3. Using the 3Rs and TOFU in everyday language and team meetings. Personal goals now include the 3Rs.
4. Secret Shopper reports are the No 1 learning tool
 - a. At first, team members were anxious to be secret shopped. The report was shared only with the person who was shopped.
 - b. Then, the team got more comfortable so that Secret Shopper scores and reports are now shared among all. Great results are celebrated – every employee who receives a 10/10, is celebrated at the team meeting and receives a gift certificate. The report also becomes the basis for the next one-on-one coaching session.
5. The emphasis on coaching and the guidance on how to build a coaching culture.
6. The ability to integrate Service Leadership training with existing tools, such as Agile.

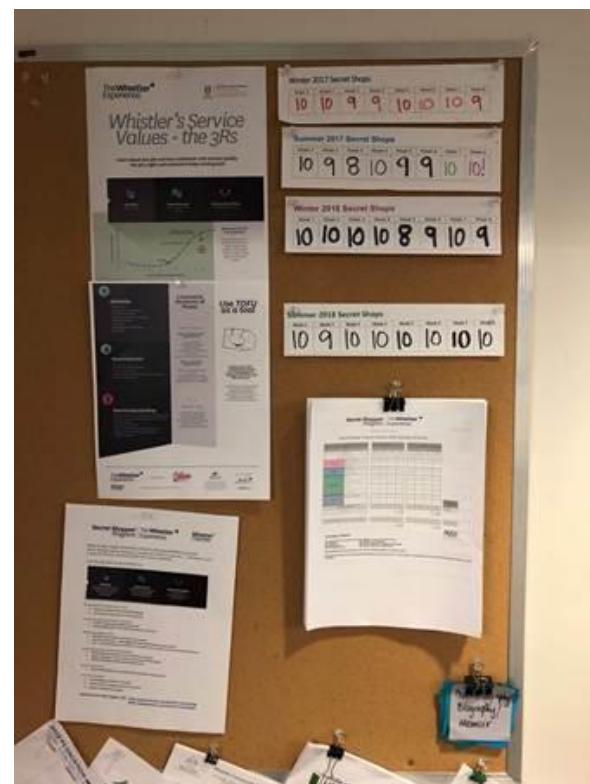


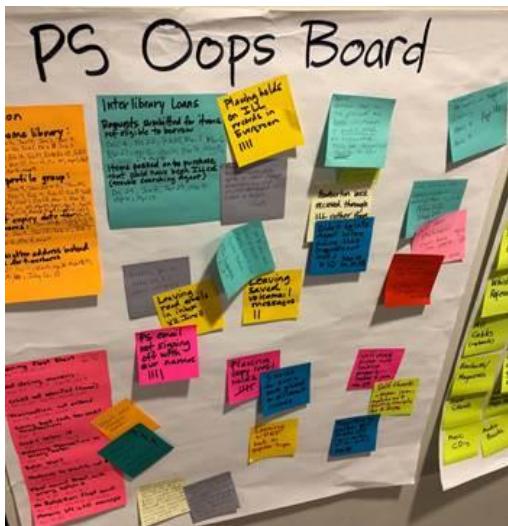
How do staff feel about the service focus and the pressure that comes with it?

- Staff agree that out of the 3Rs, it is most difficult to build relationships. While it can be "easy" when the library is empty, it can be challenging when it's busy.
- Staff feel the constant challenge to be better. "**To know that you can be secret shopped, adds pressure but it raises the bar,**" says one long-term team member. "The 3R concept helps to guide us and gives us opportunities to reflect".
- The new service approach coincided with a **change in culture**: leaders and staff adopted a growth mindset which was followed by a team agreement to always assume good intentions. This created a positive environment in which team members embrace feedback for personal growth as well as team improvement.

Which communication tools support the service focus and trigger improvements?

The Service corner on the department board outlines Secret Shopper scores and shares reports. Everything is transparent.





Staff also contributes to the What's Going Well/What Could We Improve?- board. Cool colours for issues that need improvement, warm colours to celebrate successes. These items are reviewed at team meetings and sticky notes are moved to indicate where they currently stand on the issue. The goal is to see cool colours moving to the warm side to indicate the team makes progress on issues that need improvement.

Mistakes and their frequency are tracked which allows the department to focus on recurring issues instead of one-offs. Any staff member, from any department can add items to this board which will be reviewed at quarterly departmental meetings.



What needs to be done?

As the Whistler Public Library is part of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), they cannot single-handedly incorporate the 3Rs and MOP into job descriptions, performance reviews and other HR docs. This would require the RMOW to take on the service concept.

Impact & results

The Service Leadership program helped to change the culture:

- Hiring practice shifted from hiring for hard skills and previous library experience to individuals who demonstrated a growth mindset and customer service focus.
- The program has built skills and confidence among library staff.
- Anxiety to be secret shopped has switched to a positive competition among team members.
- The knowledge of Moment of Power 4 – Problem Handling - has empowered the front-line. They now feel confident in coming up with solutions for most issues and rarely call on their manager anymore.
- More relaxed working environment.

The front-line team now describes their culture as “**safe**”:

"Safe to ask questions
safe to give answers and problem solve
safe to make mistakes
safe to grow and to deliver confidently."

It sounds cheesy, doesn't it? But: Who doesn't want to be part of a "safe to deliver" culture?

The front-line team recognizes that this cultural change wouldn't have happened without the leadership's commitment to keep referring to the vision, goals and the service framework.

Nadine sums it up, "We tore the library down to its foundation and built it back up as a great service organization." Likewise, she recognizes the team "Our continued success, however, is owed to our passionate employees who are engaged in the work they do. They show a high level of engagement that we maintain through training, communication and recognition."

Public (external) recognition

The Whistler Public Library has developed into a service role model. Twice they won the Secret Shopper program in their category – Services (Winter 2017 and 2018). They are proud to be part of a community movement that aims at setting Whistler apart as a resort town known for its service.



What's next?

Every team member answered the question independently but with the same message: Next year they need to win the prestigious Whistler Experience Service Awards. That shows determination!

And who knows, they might be on the right trajectory to earn recognition outside Whistler, too.

