

# SHiFT

## CASE STUDY

THE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEYS OF  
A PRIVATE SECTOR AND A GOVERNMENT RUN ORGANIZATION

### A TALE OF TWO SHiFTIES



Jenevieve LeBlanc at the Drumheller SHiFT 2017



Duncan Daniels at the Jasper SHiFT 2015



BANFF SUNSHINE • LAKE LOUISE • MT. NORQUAY





## IF THERE IS A SINGLE CONSTANT ELEMENT IN THIS WORLD, IT IS CHANGE.

As individuals we grow physically, emotionally and spiritually. As private, public and not-for-profit businesses we grow in purpose, sophistication, and our social responsibility.

As tourism businesses, we must continually invest in new and enhanced product development, service development, and for those who wish to raise the bar and differentiate themselves from like businesses – experience development.

The ability to inspire change is impacted by the type of organization a person works for and their role within the company. Private sector, not-for-profit sector, and governments with tourism assets all need to support product development, yet the speed of change and the path to securing support differs greatly as this case study illustrates.

Some would argue that change is easy for private-sector business owners and CEOs, entrepreneurs who have the luxury of translating their business passions into action and are in a leadership position to drive investment decisions. Business owners, by nature, are entrepreneurs who are comfortable taking measured risks; they can tolerate ambiguity, are flexible, decisive, and are able and willing to break a few rules; sometimes defying conventional wisdom to get things done.

In not-for-profit companies, Executive Directors may have limits to their ability to influence product innovation without their Board of Directors' approval which involves education on the significance of the opportunity and consensus building.

In government, employees are empowered to differing degrees to affect change within their department or division. It often takes longer to educate colleagues on the opportunities and benefits of investing in change and to ensure long-term sustainability. Even with these steps in place, change may or may not be supported as quickly, or as fully when competing priorities for limited resources are factored in.

## REGARDLESS OF THE TYPE OF BUSINESS, TRUE AND LASTING CHANGE REQUIRES:

- Engaging everyone affected by the change, positively or negatively;
- Using language everyone understands to explain new ideas or concepts;
- Listening carefully to how others respond, valuing their input;
- Appreciating that some love the status quo and feel threatened by change;
- Exploring multiple ways to achieve positive results; and
- Accepting that your original ideas may need to change once informed by the input, perception and realities of others within your organization.



# SHIFT: TRANSFORMING PRODUCTS TO EXPERIENCES

Travel Alberta's investment in the SHiFT experiential travel training program is responding to a new level of tourism development supported by visitor demand.

Nineteen years after the experience economy was introduced, multi-sector evidence still abounds that the conscious design of customer experiences that engage visitors in memorable, relevant opportunities, coupled with experiential marketing techniques, can generate additional results for businesses and destinations that choose to invest.

The tourism industry is no exception. Mounting evidence shows that the experience economy is not a fad but a fundamental and permanent shift in the marketplace, and experiences still remain a tremendous opportunity for tourism operators.

Influencing change and inspiring others within your organization to explore experiential product development requires helping others understand what this means to the visitor and to the organization. Plus, there is a need to inspire others to support this new direction to ensure the development, visitor support, sales and marketing are aligned. It's not always easy but it is rewarding and as Adam Walker of Canmore Cave Tours shared, "the shift to experiential travel actually transformed our company culture and we now design tours and work together as a team completely differently since participating in the SHiFT course."

The process of gaining buy-in for a new program can be complex, especially when it involves working with staff who do not understand the value of authenticity or may not respect or value local storytellers and people with special talents, knowledge, and cultural connections within their community. To achieve success with any new program, it requires the full support from the team working toward a common vision. This takes commitment from management and requires coaching with staff who may not see the value of changing how we do business.



“ If people are not part of the process and there to discover first-hand the power of ideas that open up new value-cost frontiers, it's too easy for them to dismiss those ideas as irrelevant, deny their validity, then push to bend them right back to the industry's so-called "best practices" even when those best practices may be outdated or just plain awful. ”

– Blue Ocean Shift: Beyond Competing (2017) Proven steps to inspire confidence and seize new growth

# A TALE OF TWO SHiFTIES

In 2015, Duncan Daniels, head of marketing and communications for Alberta's Historic Sites and Museums Branch, enrolled in SHiFT. Two years later Jenevieve LeBlanc, media and marketing supervisor for SkiBig3 in Banff and Lake Louise, took the course.

Duncan works for the provincial government; Jenevieve is employed by a large private-sector company. They both arrived at SHiFT at different points in their careers, with different organizational histories and personal knowledge of experiential travel. They both left the SHiFT program with a new understanding of the value of experiential travel and rose to the challenge of inspiring new visitor experience investment within their organizations.



## A HERITAGE JOURNEY

Committed, caring, tenacious and optimistic is one way to describe Duncan Daniels. He embraces his mandate for celebrating and preserving Alberta's heritage in ways that truly engage visitors, staff and community partners with the province's history and culture. Duncan recognized the need to facilitate the development of new Indigenous tourism experiences that would build relevant connections between people's lives and the unique themes and stories at their heritage sites. "Our brand promise is to share stories and experiences that have the power to create lifelong memories."



## TWO EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL DEVELOPMENTS CHAMPIONED SINCE SHiFT

**The Pis’kun (Buffalo Jump) program** was developed at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, located approximately 185 km south of Calgary. Twice per week throughout the summer, visitors are immersed in:

- Connecting with Blackfoot people and the ancient buffalo-hunting culture;
- Participating in a spiritual smudging ceremony;
- Tasting dried buffalo meat;
- Playing a role in the buffalo hunt re-enactment; and
- Learning how to hit a target with the ‘atlatl’ or ancient spear-thrower.

Admission to the site is \$15 per adult; the Pis’kun program is an additional \$25 per person.

As the catalyst for inspiring experiential product development, Duncan collaborated intensely with the Site Marketing and Special Events Coordinator, Quinton Crow Shoe from Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. “It was a two-way learning curve. I was learning from him and he was learning from me, and we ensured the Elders were involved every step of the way and we had their approval,” says Quinton. Duncan learned ways to incorporate traditional knowledge into heritage programming, the proper protocols when working with Elders and elements of the Blackfoot culture that were important to the new Pis’kun experience. Quinton discovered ways to broaden their revenue generating programming based on what Duncan shared from the SHiFT training program.



Photo: Alberta Culture and Tourism

## THE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The 17-month experience development process focused on building Indigenous cultural tourism experiences through:



Key planning principles included: maintaining authenticity, building respect for ancient buffalo-hunting culture and making connections on an intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical and social level.

Several collaborative steps occurred between Duncan, as the provincial catalyst for inspiring development, and Quinton at the historic site.

1. Using ideas generated from staff and following a program schedule with activities that had been tried and tested with other special events and school programs.
2. Identifying the ideal program space, discussing the program flow and purposefully identifying where and how to create goosebump moments, plus an appropriate takeaway.
3. Concept testing of the program in May at Rendezvous Canada 2015, followed by a product test in the summer with heritage tourism industry professionals, incorporating their feedback and refining the program.
4. Pricing the experience for the general public and travel trade including commissionable prices.
5. Creating the promotional information for 2016, including a flat sheet for the travel trade.
6. Training and mentoring staff, including a dress rehearsal that helped iron out the cultural authenticity which had the unanticipated benefit of creating an “Elders in Residence” program.
7. On July 1, 2016, the program launched for independent travellers.

## EXPERIENCE LAUNCH RESULTS

- 18 programs offered between July and August, Monday through Friday;
- 185 participants from across the globe;
- Attracted families and youthfully spirited adults; and
- Generated amazing feedback that confirmed they had created new goosebump moments.



## TWO YEARS LATER

The program was showcased to tour operators at Rendezvous Canada and Canada's West Marketplace, the response was fantastic and extended the invitation to international markets. Two years later, Duncan reports that the program has also influenced:

- Alignment with our strategic framework that builds relevance through connections with people's lives and stories at the site, delivering on the brand promise through creating lifelong memories and identifying ways to engage, partner and build relationships;
- Increasing the diversity of visitor programs and associated revenues;
- Aligning program development and staff training with the Alberta Explorer Quotient® visitor profiles;
- Increasing gift shop sales;
- Pride in creating a stronger Elders in Residence program;
- Seeing extremely happy participants and excited staff;
- Generating positive reviews and media attention.







## THE START OF AN EXPERIENCE HUB

Inspired by the opportunities presented by the Pis’kun program to broaden visitor engagement with Alberta’s rich Indigenous culture, Duncan was an influencer in igniting interest in a **second new visitor program – The Victoria Trail Voyageur Experience**.

Located approximately 120 km northeast of Edmonton, the experience engaged three partners: Métis Crossing through the Métis Nation of Alberta, Edmonton-based Haskin Canoe and 2017 SHiFT participants, and the Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site.

Substantial groundwork was required to facilitate meetings with various local organizations such as the Francophone Economic Development Agency, community development agencies and future partners such as Haskin Canoe and staff from the Métis Nation of Alberta and the cultural centres.

At present, the four-hour immersive program includes engaging Métis cultural activities such as learning how to jig and weaving an infinity sash on a weaving loom. Aboard a voyageur canoe with a friendly guide, guests paddle 7 kms downstream on the North Saskatchewan River, discovering evidence of beaver, birds and historical points of interest, and sing voyageur songs in French.

At Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site, the new voyageurs are greeted by costumed interpreters and introduced to “Hairy Bag” the Indigenous name for the site that dates back over 6,000 years. At Fort Victoria, the participants create spiritual connections and pride for the Métis people by engaging in traditional activities such as carrying Hudson’s Bay Company cargo on their backs with a leather tumpline across their foreheads, reading a series of short letters based on historic stories, making a braided round rug out of recycled material, and tasting home-made licorice cooked over a wood stove.

The long-term goal is to increase the number and diversity of Indigenous cultural experiences and a vibrant tourism hub along the historic Victoria Trail that is part of a larger travel itinerary in northeastern Alberta. In 2017, the experience was tested by tourism experts and the Métis community and in 2018 the package is being priced to be export ready and sold at Rendezvous Canada and Canada’s West Marketplace.



Photo: Alberta Culture and Tourism





Photo: Alberta Culture and Tourism



Photo: Alberta Culture and Tourism

### REFLECTING BACK ON THE TWO NEW EXPERIENCES, WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

“We are on a journey of discovery that goes beyond developing salable tourism experiences. The focus on experiential travel development is bigger than getting a new tourism product into marketplace” says Duncan. It’s about:

- Creating new relevant, immersive experiences that are chocked full of goosebump moments;
- Building relationships within the Métis and Blackfoot communities while simultaneously helping non-Indigenous people learn how to support the development of Indigenous tourism experiences;
- Continually educating people within our organizations on the value of hiring Indigenous people to co-develop and deliver the program; and
- Involving the Elders who add a spiritual dimension and traditional knowledge that are valued by guests.



## DISCOVER THE MOUNTAINS

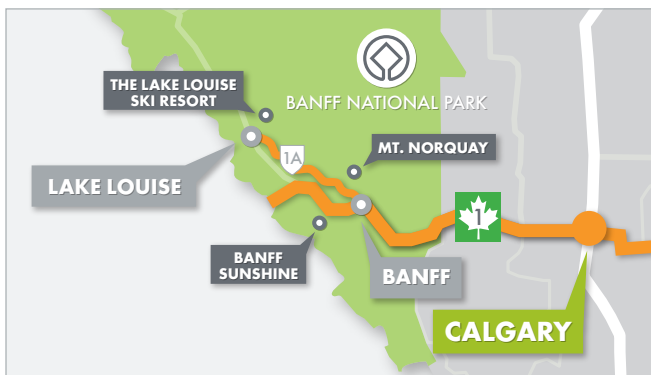
Jenevieve LeBlanc is as passionate as they come, with a zest for life that is infectious. She loves where she lives and wants to share her love of Banff Sunshine, The Lake Louise Ski Resort, and Mt. Norquay with the world in ways that tap into the pulse and personalities of the people who call Banff and Lake Louise home.

### A KEY EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL DEVELOPMENT SHE CHAMPIONED

The SkiBig3 Guided Adventures is a new personalized \$415-per-person ski adventure designed for skiers and snowboarders of intermediate and higher-level ability.

The program includes:

- Three consecutive ski days including Banff Sunshine, Lake Louise and Mt. Norquay;
- Guiding provided by CSIA-certified snow pros;
- Personalized ski and resort navigation tips from a local, including hidden powder stashes, secret views and favourite photo stops;
- Interpretive and historical storytelling;
- Lift-line priority;
- Skiing customized for each group's ability and terrain preferences;
- A 'truly Canadian experience' at Mt. Norquay; and
- A limited-edition SkiBig3 toque.



### WHAT MAKES THIS EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT?

It is flexible and customizable. It tells the story of the mountains and the people, and because the experience involves all three mountains, there is no major burden on a single ski hill. It's different from taking a ski lesson; it is a true mountain adventure and a great way for visitors to quickly get to know their way around and to discover where they want to spend more time after the program. The goal they set is to deliver 500 programs over three years.





## THE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The experience concept identified in March 2017 secured its first sale in September and was delivered in December, a 10-month process. The organizational engagement included:

1. Researching for an opportunity based on a gap in SkiBig3's current offering.
2. Developing a concept that aligned with the SkiBig3 joint venture agreement.
3. Learning, through discussions with the sales team, about what makes a product easy to sell to independent travellers and tour operators from a destination perspective.
4. Engaging in costing discussions with the sales team to achieve a realistic price point, which required reminding the team about the value of the experience itself which was a new way of thinking for them.
5. Meeting with the reservation team to understand the logistics associated with guests being able to book the experience through the online booking system.
6. Building the communication tools for tour operators, the reservation team, the website and key partners including Travel Alberta, Banff & Lake Louise Tourism, and Destination Canada.
7. Launching the new product online with partners and tour operators.
8. Revising the costing and pricing of the experience with the accounting team which resulted in a retail rate change to enhance profitability – a step that should have occurred before the online experience launch.
9. Meeting with the Snow School Supervisor regarding program delivery. The timing of seasonal staff hiring, however, impacts programs on a ski hill.
10. Engaging the entire delivery team and all departments to explain the purpose of the new experience and its backstory.
11. Providing the public relations agency, provincial and regional marketing organizations with the program information, followed by creating a blog about the experience and arranging a photo and video shot.

The first program was delivered in December 2017, 10 months after SHiFT, and SkiBig3 is now setting its sights on applying for a Canadian Signature Experience designation for this new offer.

## WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

- Seeing people within my organization and community partners realize there is a new way to engage travellers beyond traditional ski activities to diversify the visitor experience by sharing with them how travellers' behaviours are changing and that our offers should reflect this. I invited people on our team to think about what makes a successful trip when they travel and helped them see that by stepping out of our traditional box, we could introduce some new authentic experiences.
- Working within a destination that is focused on attracting new and return visitors, so they are willing to provide support and work with us.
- Being able to apply my SHiFT learning to help others grow their business with us, even if it was just to plant seeds of thought for the future with community organizations; I feel I've found my niche in tourism and I love it; and
- Achieving my goal of developing a new experience. When we made our first sale, it felt awesome.



“In developing the experience, I connected with a lot of people, but the most important person I should have touched base with, but did not till later, was in the accounting office. There were some new considerations that affected the cost and therefore the retail price.” – Jenevieve LeBlanc

## INSPIRING A SHiFT

It can be argued that all travel is an experience. Tourism businesses who recognize the opportunity to create deeper, more meaningful visitor experiences need to invest differently to generate new results. Others will ignore the opportunity, decide it's not relevant to their current business goals, or affirm that experiential travel has merit, but it's the wrong time for their business.

Inspiring a sustainable shift within an organization requires more than one voice, one champion.

Experiential travel development requires investing in people, creative thinking, and identifying the ideal storytellers and partners. It is different than packaging.

Packaging travel involves taking existing travel products that business partners believe will sell well together and add extra value to the guest (e.g. hotel rooms, green fees on a golf course, theatre/dining tickets, etc.). The traveller saves money or benefits from the convenience of companies collaborating on pre-discounts that in turn will make the package have even more value. On the business side, however, tourism operators may have to forfeit 10 to 30 percent of their revenues to be part of the travel package.

Tourism businesses that invest in crafting new experiences choose a different path. They:

- Design travel around memories, themes and stories;
- Engage one or more storytellers to bring the experience to life, and involve people from the local community to increase the authenticity, personal connections and sense of place;
- Combine elements that travellers can't access on their own, weaving together a unique travel opportunity incomparable with other companies or destinations; and
- Focus on value over discounting.

In reflecting on the journeys of SHiFT participants who embrace the opportunity to **transform products into experiences**, several lessons have been learned since the program launched in 2015.

In sharing these tips from various people in the Travel Alberta SHiFT family, the hope is that others' experiential journey is smoother and easier and benefits from those who have taken the deep dive into creating innovative visitor experiences while igniting sustainable interest in the value in responding to travellers seeking deeper, more authentic connections to the destination.

“One voice is too often not heard. However, when we sing as a choir, we hopefully will be heard by many.”

– Duncan Daniels,  
SHiFT 2015 participant

“I'm a believer that in life, we're measured by the number of meaningful connections we make and the chance meetings we have. They create every opportunity that comes before us, opening the door for us to create change in our lives. We're either in tune with them or not. Nothing happens by accident; people just have various levels on which they choose to listen.”

Bruce Poon Tip; founder, G Adventures  
Looptail: How One Company Changed the World by Reinventing Business (2014)



# SHIFT

TRANSFORMING PRODUCTS TO EXPERIENCES

- ☐ Explore and scan your environment to find champions with whom you can build relationships that leads to sustainable change and could impact the corporate culture or a business or organization.
- ☐ Inform and educate others about the opportunity and why it is a worthwhile investment of time, money and resources.
- ☐ Ignite interest by aligning your experiential travel development interests with the current priorities of the business.
- ☐ Create a small and easily managed experience and engage those you wish to influence in participating in it so that everyone has a common, shared experience on which to build on in future discussions.
- ☐ Ask different questions, pose different outcomes and benefits to pique curiosity and stimulate conversation.
- ☐ Listen carefully to what is said and heard as you pitch the opportunity for experiential travel; be aware that many people will not know what it is.
- ☐ Respect that there will be a range of responses, from caution to excitement. Listen and learn from what's being said and, based on this new information, be purposeful and allocate sufficient time to develop ways to work together and provide continual feedback throughout the development process and debriefing everyone involved after delivery to so adjustments can be made.
- ☐ Build trust by inspiring engagement throughout the experience development process, especially with front-line staff who are the face of your business and the ongoing interface with visitors.
- ☐ Develop a skill set and a network of supportive colleagues to help you tackle obstacles and antiquated thinking from the 'old guard' and by those who feel threatened by change and innovation.
- ☐ Facilitate change by focusing on the benefits; help find solutions for what some of your colleagues might see as obstacles.
- ☐ Reflect your measures of success, beyond visitor numbers and revenue, to incorporate additional variables such as number of partners, new markets reached, earned media, consumer generated imagery and testimonials, number of offers in a new revenue stream, expanding seasonality.
- ☐ Incorporate the wisdom of others, empower others to participate in creating a shared vision; be flexible, and yet focused on evolving your ideas, too.
- ☐ When working with Indigenous communities, engages the Elders and discuss roles and contributions. Help them embrace the idea there are new or modified ways of doing business to reach the best outcome for visitors and the community.
- ☐ Accept a slower pace of change with incremental steps, given there are always competing priorities, particularly in large or bureaucratic organizations.
- ☐ Accept that there will always be tourism businesses and potential partners who don't need or want to diversify their business until they are forced to do so.
- ☐ Realize that some staff have never had to deal with costing, pricing and/or being responsible for revenue generation and they don't understand the value that experiential travel can bring to a business. Find examples to help demonstrate what you know and what can be achieved.
- ☐ Appreciate and accept that your passion may not be shared with everyone and that more time will be needed to realize incremental success along the experience development journey.
- ☐ Be honest, tenacious, strategic and remain optimistic, especially with naysayers who thrive on the status quo.
- ☐ Pilot your new experience, learn from the test run and make the necessary changes before selling it to the public.

Leaders ruffle feathers! They have a vision that not everyone can see but through caring, sharing, learning, coaching, adapting and accepting, those who embrace experiential travel say that they have experienced rewards far greater than getting a mere product to market. Their eyes light up when speaking about goosebump moments their guests have experienced, staff and partner relationships that are deeper, more satisfying as they push to new heights and market opportunities that could not be achieved alone.

### **THIS IS THE POWER OF SHiFT.**

“I left the SHiFT program completely invigorated but soon realized it’s tough to translate to others, especially when they do not see a need to change. Some get it and others still don’t understand the value of tourism and how to create meaningful relationships within the Indigenous community.”

– An anonymous, not-for-profit SHiFT participant

“There were more barriers and surprises to deal with and overcome than I anticipated. Believe that the process is as important as the end result.”

– An anonymous SHiFT participant

“As an enabler, I have to show a return on objectives, whereas the private sector has to show a return on investment.”

– An anonymous, not-for-profit SHiFT participant

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