

## Leadership programs leave deep and valuable lessons with alpinist entrepreneur

By Shari Bishop Bowes

Tom Schnugg was no stranger to precipitous heights when he found himself on the ropes course during the first of six Leadership Development programs he's taken at The Banff Centre.

He approached the experiential outdoor group lesson with the same thought he applies to his passion for ice, rock and alpine climbing around the world: "This is going to be fun."

What came as a surprise to the broadly experienced outdoorsman and entrepreneur were the lessons learned about ego and communication within teams.

"It was something of an awakening for me to realize how much ego was still involved in what I was doing, and I just was not aware of that. I thought I was pretty evolved from that perspective," said Schnugg, who is pursuing his Certificate of Leadership Excellence.

The highly interactive session taught him to pay closer attention to communication at its deepest levels. "I don't think I had ever paid that much attention to that level of communication before," he said.

Much to his surprise, the lessons deepened further as he experienced a variety of arts-based sessions, ranging from mask-making and clowning to dance. Raised in a family that valued scientific learning, and where the arts were not considered a viable career, Schnugg admits he did some eye-rolling as he perused program material in advance.

During the Developing Personal Leadership program, in a session on clowning, following what he describes as a "guided reflection", Schnugg gained a personal perspective that has changed every aspect of his life.

"I had probably the most profound learning of what I need to work on in my life right now, and it came through during this guided reflection as a metaphor," he said.

The revelation was this: "Loosen the grip." Schnugg learned, through the arts-based sessions that comprised part of his program work, that he did not need to keep such a tight rein on absolutely everything in his life. In fact, he found, by doing so he was preventing his ability to move ahead as a leader and as a person. It was a simple, yet profound learning that he says he's heard and read about, yet didn't internalize and integrate until completing the [Building Personal Leadership](#) program.

As vice-president of strategy for California-based Pure Power Distribution Inc., and with 22 years of experience in global sales, marketing and product management, Schnugg had been considering a university-based Masters in leadership when his research led him to consider the Leadership

Development programs at The Banff Centre. He has completed four of the five programs required for his Certificate of Leadership Excellence.

With a strong focus on the subjective side of leadership, the Leadership Development programs had strong appeal. He wanted to go beyond furthering hard skills development, with theory in logistics and schedules for running large teams, and formulating decision making within the context of large number of stakeholders. "Unless you have the agility and wisdom and hindsight and internal understanding of when and how and why to apply those tools, your ability to progress as a leader is limited. That's what The Banff Centre brought to me."