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## Matthew Whitworth- Howe on Designing Beauty School 2.0

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Photo by Christine Semi



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**M**atthew Whitworth-Howe thought he might study acting but changed his mind as college approached. Instead, he combined interests in American history and European fine arts to graduate with a degree from the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies at New York University. It's not surprising that an executive who crafted his own major would later have an innovative vision and strategy to bring new educational opportunities to underserved communities.

As [assistant vice president \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/matthew-whitworth-howe-a936233/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/matthew-whitworth-howe-a936233/) at L'Oréal, (<https://www.loreal.com/en/>) Whitworth-Howe partnered with ROLFS Global Institute to launch the very first collegiate degree program for beauty professionals. Originally founded as a hair color business by Eugène Schueller in 1909, L'Oréal has grown to include ninety thousand employees and €32 billion in annual sales to support its growing international presence. Its brands and subsidiaries include Garnier, Maybelline, CeraVe, Redken, and the Body Shop.

The status of L'Oréal as an undisputed industry leader means that it can make a real difference. Whitworth-Howe, who came to the organization in 2008, is helping the company do just that as it invests in the future and trains highly specialized stylists to thrive in a complex and evolving landscape.

The nation's 1.2 million hairdressers were previously capped by a cosmetology school license, with few possessing a two or four-year degree. Leaders at L'Oréal Professional Products Division are changing that reality and challenging the stigma that beauty is a less noble vocation that requires little skill. "We're taking beauty from a trade to a profession. Beauty professionals do so much more than just cut or color hair," Whitworth-Howe says.





“We’re taking beauty from a trade to a profession. Beauty professionals do so much more than just cut or color hair.” [\(https://hispanicexecutive.com/\)](https://hispanicexecutive.com/)



*Amplifying the voices of Latino leadership in America*  
Matthew Whitworth-Howe

In recent years, Whitworth-Howe and his colleagues at L’Oréal Professional Products Division have worked behind the scenes in partnership with ROLFS, Mesa Community College, and Arizona State University to create the LEAD program. LEAD students can complete their training and receive an associate degree in two semesters or a bachelor’s degree in four.

Those who enroll receive more than just online classroom instruction—they also interact with industry professionals, connect with advisors, and get personal professional development training. The curriculum includes courses such as Salon of the Future, Evolution of the Beauty Profession, and Transformational Leadership Development.

Whitworth-Howe knows just how needed and valuable this type of knowledge is. He spent portions of his career in the field where he observed educational gaps in beauty salons, barber shops, and cosmetics stores. He started with L’Oréal as an intern while earning his MBA from the Gabelli School of Business at Fordham University.

After holding various [marketing](https://hispanicexecutive.com/category/industry/marketing/) roles, Whitworth-Howe asked for an international assignment and spent more than a year launching the professional brand matrix, or HQ, in Mexico. The task required him to understand the cultural preferences, nuances, and factors in play while working with distributors and business owners.

He returned to the US in 2014 and later trained sales teams to work with customers as a true [business](https://hispanicexecutive.com/category/industry/finance/) partner. Instead of pushing one product or line, his teams dedicated themselves to offering creative and holistic business solutions. L’Oréal Professional Products Division signed a contract with Summit Salon Business Center in 2016 to offer a full array of services and to implement the necessary systems and processes to make salon companies more profitable.



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Matthew Whitworth-Howe

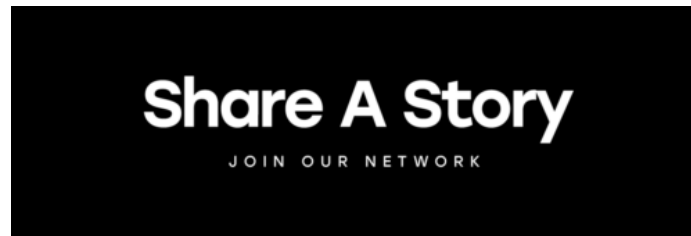
Today, Whitworth-Howe manages the partnership with Summit and L’Oréal’s Salon Emotion program, which teaches salons how to offer the best guest experience possible. “We’re dedicated to educating beauty professionals to help them succeed. Cosmetologists often stop their education when they earn their license and then work behind a chair and try to build a client list, but they don’t always know how to run a business. That’s where these programs come in,” Whitworth-Howe explains.



After nearly fifteen years with L'Oréal, the veteran leader still finds new challenges to tackle and new ways to develop in his career. The large company has maintained an entrepreneurial spirit that empowers him to do so. "I've learned that a career doesn't always need to be on the ladder," he says. "You gather and choose to take different paths, because that helps you get various valuable experiences. You can still get to the top, and you'll be more well-rounded when you do."

Founder Eugène Schueller had a saying in French that loosely translates in English to "Do, undo, do better." Whitworth-Howe has used the saying as his personal motto at L'Oréal as he tried new things, learned from missteps, and aimed to make valuable contributions. "Risk taking is encouraged here. That's how you innovate," the assistant VP explains.

Whitworth-Howe says L'Oréal Professional Products Division has big things planned. The company has already enrolled more than two thousand [students](https://hispanicexecutive.com/category/industry/education/) in its LEAD program and will continue to expand its offerings and grow internationally. After all, they're seeing how it impacts the lives of those who participate. "I've seen salons and stylists grow and develop in new ways through this program," Whitworth-Howe says, "And it's great to know that I've had a role in helping them fulfill their dreams."



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