



VISTAGE Perspectives®

ISSUE 4

LEARN HOW VISTAGE
FUELS LEADERSHIP
GROWTH



THE TWO SIDES
OF A SALE

The Game Changer

RAVEN SOFTWARE CEO BRIAN RAFFEL LEVELS UP
THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



From Isolation To Impact: How Vistage Transformed My Leadership And Organisation

As the CEO of Sheffield Churches' Council for Community Care (SCCCC), I have spent years dedicated to supporting older people in Sheffield. Our charity has been serving the community for over 60 years, providing practical and emotional support to those who are vulnerable, isolated, or struggling to maintain their independence. From hospital discharge support to befriending programmes and dementia-friendly initiatives, our mission is to fill critical gaps in care and ensure older people remain connected to their communities.

When I took on the role of CEO in 2015, SCCCC was at a crossroads. We lacked a strategic plan, governance needed urgent attention, and we were a small team—just seven staff members, 35 volunteers, and two core services. While our potential was clear, the road ahead was daunting. Over time, the challenges evolved. We focused on expanding the charity, navigating a difficult office move, and managing growing demands. By 2023, SCCCC had undergone a major transformation, with greater reach, an expanded team, and a stronger impact.

Despite these successes, leadership remained isolating. Even with a great team, I often found myself without a trusted space to discuss challenges or gain fresh perspectives.



As the saying goes,

"You're never alone, but you're often lonely." That's when I turned to Vistage.

Joining Vistage was a game-changer. The peer group discussions, expert speakers, and time for reflection gave me the

clarity and confidence to tackle challenges head-on.

Through Vistage, I learned to delegate more effectively and invest in leadership development for my senior team. This shift allowed me to focus on strategy and long-term growth, rather than getting caught up in

daily operations.

The impact has been profound:

- **Revenue Growth:** From £150k in 2015 to £1.2m today
- **Team Expansion:** From 7 staff to nearly 50
- **Volunteer Growth:** From 35 volunteers to 185
- **Service Expansion:** Now operating in 2 local authority areas with 11 services, up from 2 when I started

Many of these changes were inspired by the insights, strategies, and accountability I found in Vistage.

For me, 'living a life of climb' means constant growth—personally, professionally, and organisationally. It's about pushing boundaries, facing challenges, and striving for something better. Growth isn't easy, but it's worth it when you see the tangible impact on the people you serve.

Whenever someone tells me they don't have time for Vistage, my response is simple: If you're too busy, you need it the most. Taking time to reflect, refocus, and learn from others isn't a distraction—it's an investment that ultimately saves time, reduces stress, and drives meaningful results

■

"Vistage gives you the clarity, confidence, and community to lead better and achieve more".

– Mark Storey DL, CEO,
Sheffield Churches' Council for
Community Care (SCCCC)

MEMBER SINCE 2023

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Improving the effectiveness and enhancing the lives of CEOs, business owners and key executives of small and medium-sized businesses.

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This edition of Vistage Perspectives explores the complexities of buying, selling, or exiting a business - an endeavor that is equally challenging, intricate, and emotionally charged. While it presents significant opportunities, it also comes with inherent risks. As part of your Vistage membership, we are committed to providing the insights and guidance you need to achieve the best possible outcome, whatever that may look like for you.

On the following pages, we share the hard-fought lessons from fellow members. There's Brian Wainwright, President of The Wireless Experience in New Jersey. He rejected an offer to sell his business 10 years ago, joined Vistage and sold for almost five times the initial offer. On the other side is Molly Kellogg, CEO and president of a 175-year-old family chemical company that completed four acquisitions in four years.

You'll also read about a global pioneer in the video game industry, who felt a "Call of Duty" to keep his empire in Wisconsin.

Beyond the leadership lessons, I hope reading about their experiences gives you ideas on how to leverage the Vistage platform to your advantage, from engaging your peer group and global networks to events and resources. Our only agenda is your success.

All the best,

Sam

Sam Reese
CEO, Vistage Worldwide, Inc.

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Brian Wainwright grew his retail company to 100+ stores so he could sell on his terms



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Exclusive Insights

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Power of cross-industry wisdom

Ryan Simmonds Embraces Cross-Industry Insights with New Group Membership

REBECCA DREW – NEW MANAGING DIRECTOR OF VISTAGE UK & IRELAND

Strengthening SME Support at Vistage

Rebecca Drew, an accomplished business leader with over 20 years of experience, has taken on a pivotal role at Vistage, bringing her expertise from leadership positions at Chief and LinkedIn. Her appointment comes at a crucial time as businesses across the UK and Ireland navigate economic uncertainty, with Vistage seeing a 20% year-on-year increase in demand for its mentorship services.

Passionate about empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Rebecca is committed to enhancing mentorship programmes and strategic support initiatives.

She will focus on developing tailored solutions and strengthening partnerships to help SME leaders adapt, grow, and foster resilience.

With her wealth of experience and strategic vision, Rebecca Drew is set to drive impactful change, ensuring SMEs receive the mentorship and resources necessary to thrive in an evolving business landscape.

“**"I am thrilled to join Vistage at such an exciting phase of growth, where our members need our support the most," says Drew. "With economic confidence among SME CEOs declining, our role in equipping leaders with the tools and guidance they need has never been more essential."**

- Rebecca Drew
Managing Director,
UK & Ireland

VISTAGE STRENGTHENS COMMITMENT TO SME LEADERSHIP AMID ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

As Vistage continues to bring its unique approach to professional executive mentorship, we remain committed to scaling mentorship programmes and driving transformational outcomes for business leaders across the UK and Ireland.

Vistage's quarterly index, suggests that there has been a steep drop in economic confidence amongst SME CEOs, falling from 107.1 to 91.4 in the last three months of 2024. According to the report, issued quarterly, almost half (44%) of businesses have stated that economic conditions have worsened over the last year, and a further 35% feel the trend will continue for the coming 12 months.

The report underscores growing uncertainty within the economy, with only a third (34%) of all business leaders feeling optimistic about their firm's profitability in 2025. As such, we have seen an increased demand for mentorship services to help organisations navigate financial pressures and shifting market dynamics, with a 20% YOY increase in enquiries.

With that said, nearly half of all business leaders (46%) plan to increase hiring across 2025 in a bid to boost their investment in the talent pool. As organisations grapple with declining economic confidence and increased market pressures, We remain focused on designing initiatives to better support and protect the UK and Ireland's most vulnerable SMEs.

We will continue to spearhead customised mentorship solutions, build strategic partnerships, and enhance the support available to SME leaders and executives across the region.

CEO CONFIDENCE INDEX REPORT

Q4
2024

HOW VISTAGE FUELED MY LEADERSHIP GROWTH:

A CEO's Journey of Transformation



Gordon Stark - Murgitroyd CEO
Transformational Leadership
Growth with Vistage

MEMBER SINCE 2015

"Vistage has been pivotal in my leadership journey, providing the support, learning, and peer accountability needed to navigate the challenges and opportunities of leading a fast-growing global business."

When I first joined Vistage in 2015, Murgitroyd was a company on a strong growth trajectory. As I transitioned into leadership, I faced the challenge of developing my leadership style, moving beyond management, and leading a team across multiple continents and cultures. Vistage provided an invaluable peer group, a learning and development environment, and access to experienced leaders who were generous in sharing their insights.

Through issue processing, accountability, and expert speaker content, I gained deeper leadership awareness and the confidence to make key decisions. My Vistage Group Chair, Paul Pinson, and my peers have been an incredible sounding board, offering support, challenge, and encouragement at every step. The MyVistage platform and Vistage events have also allowed my colleagues to benefit from learning and development opportunities.



Since joining Vistage, Murgitroyd has grown from 240 employees to 420, with revenues rising from £35m to £104m. We've expanded globally and transitioned from a publicly listed company to private equity ownership. Throughout this journey, Vistage has been instrumental in helping me navigate change, seize opportunities, and ultimately lead with greater impact.

For those who think they don't have time for Vistage—my advice is simple: you can't afford not to. The investment in yourself as a leader will pay dividends not just for you, but for your business and the people you lead.

"Vistage not only enables you to be the best leader you can be, but also to inspire those around you to reach their full potential."

Gordon Stark - CEO
Murgitroyd

VISTAGE Social Connect

Social Connect is a series of events held across the UK, designed to bring together our members and chairs in a dynamic and engaging setting. Each event combines valuable networking opportunities with a learning component, along with a variety of interactive activities to enhance the experience.



Birmingham - East Anglia - Ireland - London -
Manchester - North East - Reading - Scotland - Yorkshire

VISTAGE CEO CLIMB WEBINARS

The Vistage CEO Climb Webinars are a dynamic and value-packed virtual experience designed for business leaders seeking to elevate their leadership skills and decision-making abilities. These sessions feature engaging, interactive discussions on timely and relevant business topics, providing insights that can drive growth and success.



30th April

Luke Quilter

New World Content - Content Marketing &
Thought Leadership



21st May

Nici Jupp

Hire with confidence - 5 foundational pillars to
more successful hiring and an engaged team

To find out more about our events please visit: vistage.co.uk

THE GAME

Raven Software's Brian Raffel Reflects on a Lifetime of Learning and Meteoric Success in the Video Game Industry

CHANGER

In 1992, the Middleton High School boys cross country team took home the Wisconsin State Championship. However, it was a bittersweet victory for Brian Raffel, the team's cross country coach. It would be his last before walking away from a successful teaching career and into his garage, where he hoped to build a video game company with his brother Steve.

Three decades later, as Raffel continues to lead as Studio Head of Raven Software, his proverbial gym banners trumpet a legacy of extraordinary wins:

- Growing his company to 350+ employees
- Shepherding a multimillion-dollar acquisition by Activision in 1997 (which was recently acquired by Microsoft for \$68.7 billion)
- Helping launch Activision's China operations
- Pioneering an estimated \$180 billion industry
- Advocating for state legislation aimed at transforming "The Badger State" into a gaming industry hub

A 2023 Vistage Lifetime Achievement Award winner, Raffel credits much of his company's stratospheric success to two things: Not knowing anything about business when he started out and learning along the way from his peers and invaluable speakers at Vistage.

"I don't think we would have survived if we hadn't joined Vistage," he says. "It opened my eyes to how to do interviews, how to build culture. Every speaker they bring in, you pick up two or three gems — and I've probably heard 200 speakers over the years."

WATCH BRIAN'S STORY
& LEARN HOW TO **LEVEL UP**
YOUR BUSINESS



Raffel in his garage office in 1992

BRIAN RAFFEL
Studio Head, Raven Software
2023 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner
Vistage member since 2004

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I GOT TO A POINT WHERE IT BECAME TOO HARD TO DO THE CREATIVE WORK AND RUN THE COMPANY. I STARTED TO REALISE: **MY GAME IS THE BUSINESS SIDE OF THINGS.**

BRIAN RAFFEL

Raffel joined Vistage at the urging of his mentor and attorney 20 years ago. A time of great opportunity followed, particularly when Activision brought the studio in to contribute to its tentpole "Call of Duty" series in 2010.

To prove to Activision that they had the chops to do "Call of Duty" work, they were given a chance to create new content for the franchise. "I knew that our whole future depended on this opportunity," Raffel says. "We did an amazing level, which opened doors for us. But knowing when to pivot, how to think through each new opportunity and

have the tools at the ready — if I hadn't gone to Vistage, I would have been flying blind."

Video games, like blockbuster movies, rely on collaboration from a phalanx of talented studios. In 2019, under the kind of pressure a player might face in the middle of a "double-front war zone," Raffel decided to grow his team and split it into two: 125 people would work with the sister studio Treyarch on "Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War," and another approximately 125 would collaborate with the developer Infinity Ward on "Call of Duty: Warzone."

Incredible success followed — "Call of Duty: Warzone" alone surpassed 50 million downloads in its first month — and Raven emerged as a key figure among the eight studios that contribute to the popular series. Along the way, Raven also served as a powerhouse behind titles for Marvel, Star Wars and Star Trek.

As Raven has grown, so too has Raffel.

"I got to a point where it became too hard to do the creative work and run the company. I started to realise: My game is the business side of things," he says.

He leaned into culture-building and vision, propelling Raven through COVID-19 and workforce growing pains. This shift also inspired Raffel to level up his team.

"I'm frugal. Initially, that's how we had to survive financially," he says. "Vistage showed me that there's incredible value to putting money into a training budget."

Raven now sponsors seven members in Vistage Leadership Development Programmes, and Raffel is proud of his tight, well-oiled team.

To further nurture those future workers, Raffel is collaborating with the University of Wisconsin to create an ecosystem that will keep talented individuals in the state.

Once he's done rallying for Wisconsin, Raffel is considering someday going back to his roots as a coach, but for business leaders this time.

"I could see being a Vistage Chair," he says. "Over the years, I have seen other business leaders succeed because they kept learning, kept evolving."

Time will tell if Raffel returns to the sidelines to coach new players to victory. But it's clear his "gym walls" are not completely filled yet. There is still space for new banners and new wins. ■



Raffel with Raven Software employees enrolled in Vistage Leadership Development Programs



Raffel with Vistage Chair Sarah Gibson



THE FEAR & PEACE OF MAKING THE BIG SALE

Brian Wainwright grew his retail company
to 100+ stores so he could sell on his terms



BRIAN WAINWRIGHT
President & CEO, The Wireless Experience

In 2014, Brian Wainwright sat stymied in the GameStop boardroom in Grapevine, Texas. The company had just entered the mobile space, and GameStop executives were interested in purchasing Wainwright's New Jersey-based AT&T retail business, The Wireless Experience.

"They were asking me a lot of questions that I didn't have answers to," Wainwright says. "Sitting in that boardroom, it was clear I had no idea what I missed out on by dropping out of college."

Despite the lack of a degree, Wainwright had become a successful entrepreneur. He founded an auto- and boat-cleaning business, which he sold to employees before founding The Wireless Experience in 1997 and growing it to 42 locations as its president.

But sitting in GameStop's boardroom felt humbling, he says. Executives asked Wainwright questions about the company's financial standing and strategic plan, which he was unable to answer. Wainwright says he had been crunching all the numbers by himself, using paper ledger books and even wiring funds for payroll from his hotel before that meeting. The information he had about his company was scattershot, he realised.

GameStop executives made him an offer — a fair one, Wainwright says — based on his company's residuals. But he didn't accept. Wainwright saw that he had more work to do as a business owner before he felt satisfied. Taking the deal back then, he says, would have felt like quitting a race halfway through.

FINDING ANSWERS THROUGH EDUCATION

Wainwright knew that he had to find answers to the questions asked by GameStop executives and grow as a leader. After the GameStop meeting, Wainwright joined a Vistage group run by Ken Mandelbaum, a Chair with decades of retail experience.

"I was so thirsty for the knowledge that I probably hired the first 30 Vistage speakers," says Wainwright, who would take a full day from work and drive two hours each way to attend his monthly meeting. "This was a time in our industry when there was a requirement to get more sophisticated to survive and continue to grow."

Wainwright's thirst for knowledge led to reorganising his business's back office and developing a strategic plan. It also led to new growth, as two of Wainwright's group members pushed him to make his biggest acquisition yet.

Up to that point, Wainwright had acquired many mom-and-pop shops. But an opportunity for a large acquisition came up in the Mid-Atlantic market, and it scared him.

"I processed that fear with the group," he says. "They could draw parallels from their careers, and it was obvious that there was a consolidation play. Two group members encouraged me at a passionate level and gave me the confidence to make that deal. I still try to meet with them on an annual basis to acknowledge my appreciation for them pushing me. I don't think I would have done it otherwise."

By 2023, Wainwright had the answers to the deeper questions those GameStop executives had asked. And the answers were better than ever. The Wireless Experience had grown to 102 stores, and business was booming.

And that's when another potential buyer came into the picture.

THE RIGHT TIME TO SELL

Wainwright wasn't looking to sell, but Alliance Mobile came with an interesting offer. The business felt like a part of him, making the idea of a sale difficult at first, but Wainwright had seen other entrepreneurs wait too long to sell and lose out on value.

He had also spent his life working every day, maybe a half-day off on Sundays, often missing time with his wife and three children. Even on days off, Wainwright worried about the business. He didn't want to grow old and realise that he had waited too long to sell and missed important time with his family.

Wainwright dedicated himself to the transaction — a full-time job in itself — while also working in the business. The deal died and came back to life multiple times, but ultimately, he signed it and sold most of his company to Alliance Mobile.

The deal allowed him to keep some equity in the business while selling a majority stake of The Wireless Experience for almost five times the amount of GameStop's offer a decade before.

Suddenly, Wainwright, who says he still feels like a 23-year-old college dropout sometimes, became a 50-year-old entrepreneur who had sold his business for good money. His family was set for life; he no longer had to miss out on spending time with them.

"Look deeper than the headline number of a sale. How might taxes, fees and other expenditures eat away at the final sale number?"

BRIAN WAINWRIGHT



"I'm most proud of the organisation that we had created, money aside," Wainwright says of the team at The Wireless Experience. "We built something quite impressive."

renewable. When you sell, you've got the last harvest. There's a different level of conservatism that needs to come with managing that transaction."

Post-sale, Wainwright says that he can finally relax. He serves as Chief Development Officer at Alliance Mobile, still with equity in the business, but far from sole ownership. He recalls recently being on an extended vacation with his family, something that hadn't happened before, and glancing at emails that would have been very alarming — air conditioning going out, a car crashing into a store.

With multiple partners now by his side, Wainwright says he felt at ease.

"I had a sense of peace on that vacation that I don't think I've ever experienced," he says. ■



Brian Wainwright at the ribbon cutting for a grand opening of a new location in Hudson, Massachusetts

PREPARING FOR POST-SALE LIFE

When other entrepreneurs ask Wainwright about selling, he tells them to prepare for the emotions of a sale. What will it feel like to no longer own and lead your company? How will it feel when a group of employees are no longer hanging on your every word?

And he warns fellow entrepreneurs to look deeper than the headline number of a sale. How might taxes, fees and other expenditures eat away at the final sale number?

"It's like you've built this huge farm and yielded crops quarterly or annually," says Wainwright, a 2021 Vistage Member Excellence Award winner. "Generally, it was predictable, and you could count on it, and it was



Brian Wainwright with Chair Ken Mandelbaum

3 LESSONS LEARNED

With Ken Mandelbaum, Wainwright's Vistage Chair

1

DEVELOP A VISION OF SUCCESS

When I first met Brian, his team didn't have a clear path toward success. As we worked on strategy, he and his team created their mission, values and a vision of success. They used metrics that kept people accountable.

2

LEARN AS A TEAM

As he built a well-run organisation, Brian put five team members into my Key Executive group. That allowed them to learn as a team, which made a big impact on how the organisation operated.

3

PLAN FOR LIFE AFTER THE SALE

People have no idea what is on the other side of selling a business — it's frightening. Brian has worked to expand his network. He bought a non-related business called Fantasy Island LBI, an amusement park, and turned it into a thriving enterprise. He also gives back to his community. Brian will continue to discover new ways to find meaning after the sale.

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BUILDING ACQUISITIONS ON TRUST

Molly Kellogg leans on hard-earned lessons
to grow her family's sixth-generation business



MOLLY KELLOGG
CEO & President, Hubbard-Hall
2024 Vistage Member
Excellence Award Winner
Photo by WORXbranding.com

It was 1994, and Molly Kellogg was guiding high-end bike trips across Europe when her father, Chuck, called. Their family business, Hubbard-Hall, had just bought a company, and he asked her to run the newly acquired division in Wilmington, Massachusetts.

Just a year after finishing her MBA, Kellogg saw an opportunity. "I could cut my teeth outside the mothership and learn to succeed or fail on my own," she says.

Now, 30 years later, acquisitions continue to be a cornerstone of Kellogg's career. Only now, as CEO, Chairman and President of Hubbard-Hall, she believes they will help the sixth-generation, 175-year-old industrial chemical business continue to grow.

MANUFACTURING AN ACQUISITION

Kellogg worked her way up the company, learning how the business ran and the intricacies of the chemicals it manufactured to treat metals. She saw how acquisitions could happen, expanding the business's capabilities, and how they could fail.

"It's like a sales process. You always have to remind people that you're interested," Kellogg says. "Fifteen years ago, a competitor/partner of ours was sold to a private equity firm. And we asked, 'How come you didn't come to us?' He said, 'We didn't think that you were interested.' We told him, but he'd forgotten. The conversation has to keep going."

Since becoming CEO 10 years ago, Kellogg has been searching for acquisitions, but she found little success initially. She'd talk to brokers, mergers and acquisitions firms, and competitors to gauge their interest in selling, but no deals worked.

Still, Kellogg kept the conversations going. Then, in 2020, everything changed.

CONVERSATIONS BEAR FRUIT

Hubbard-Hall has made four acquisitions in the last four years. All the conversations and reminders — they finally paid off.

"In the one that we just finished, I'm their competitor. I've known them for 20 years, and we started the conversation a decade ago," Kellogg says. "He didn't like my number, I didn't like his number. Eventually, the numbers came together."

As the acquisitions came in, Kellogg learned many lessons. First, she's learned that building trust is the most important factor in any acquisition. Each of the companies Kellogg acquired was a privately held

business managed by its owner. All were concerned about what would happen to their business, products and employees, Kellogg says.

These executives wanted to know that they were selling to a good steward. Likewise, Kellogg says that Hubbard-Hall must trust that the businesses it acquires are well-built, a required ingredient for growth.

"We can put everything in a contract, and you can do all the due diligence, but I've got to trust it," says Kellogg. "And the person on the opposite side representing their business, they've got to trust me."

TRUST PREVAILS

In a recent deal, trust led to the close. The two sides were far apart on a working capital number; they had already extended negotiations by a month, and the deal was down to its final Friday. Kellogg was playing in two hockey games that day — she played all four years at Princeton and was named captain her senior year — and received a call from her attorney between the games. More talk of extensions and extra time. Kellogg wanted to finish the deal now.

Between the games, Kellogg called the owner of the other business and kept it simple: "How about we go halves?" she recalls asking. They agreed to meet between the two numbers, and Kellogg got back on the ice.

"Underlying that deal was trust that we've both made a good-faith effort to get the numbers right," says Kellogg.

Kellogg has also learned that deals are tenuous until they're signed, which might take years. A lot of emotions are involved, she says, especially for sellers. It's best to keep deals low profile with a small, internal team until the close, Kellogg says.

Once deals are done, it's essential to ensure that the cultures are merged thoughtfully, adds Kellogg. Hubbard-Hall has been named a Best Place to Work for eight consecutive years with high cultural standards. After the acquisition, she knows that the newly acquired company will see a lot of change. To ensure a smooth merger, Kellogg says that they work slowly toward change, allowing new employees to become accustomed to the Hubbard-Hall way.

"It's the right thing to do," she says. "We've got to keep morale as high as possible."

FINDING FEEDBACK TO ENSURE SUCCESS

Long before this flurry of acquisitions, Kellogg had help from her Vistage group.

She first joined a Vistage Key Executive group 25 years ago, changing groups as she moved up the ranks at Hubbard-Hall. In her current CEO group, fellow members and Chair Nancy Babine Kucinski have been pivotal in helping Kellogg learn more about acquisitions and asking tough questions about assumptions she's made, integration issues and whether a deal's financials will work.

Kellogg says Vistage has been helpful by allowing her to see acquisitions through the eyes of others. This was especially true during her first buy when she was still learning about deal structures and examining another company's finances.

"Vistage adds color and depth to how I'm thinking about what I'm doing," she says. "It may give me a new idea or take me down a road that I hadn't anticipated. That's the beauty of Vistage — somebody can present an issue that doesn't seem like it has anything to do with my business or me. But I always learn from those conversations."

Kellogg has also learned from her own mistakes during acquisitions of businesses in her industry. While buying another chemical manufacturer, Kellogg assumed that the company used the same terms as

MEMBER EXCELLENCE AWARDS



Molly Kellogg celebrates with Chair Nancy Babine Kucinski.

Hubbard-Hall. What she found was deeper complexity than she had imagined.

"We both used the same language but understood things differently," Kellogg says. "In an acquisition, challenge yourself to make sure you understand the terms. I keep learning that lesson every year."

Now, Kellogg says that Hubbard-Hall has two more potential acquisitions in the hopper. There's another that likely won't happen, but she plans to keep the conversations going — she's learned that you never know what will happen years down the line. ■

3 LESSONS LEARNED

With Nancy Babine Kucinski, Kellogg's Vistage Chair

- 1 **PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF**
During the acquisition process, Molly constantly asks questions like "What am I missing?" She wanted our group to question every move. She wanted to be challenged to make the acquisitions as successful as possible.
- 2 **BE STRATEGICALLY SOUND AND INNOVATIVE**
Acquisitions should be in strategic alignment with why the company exists. At the same time, Molly wants to expand possibilities for shareholders, partners, customers and her employees. When a CEO expresses that, the employees can embrace it. They have the confidence to try new things.
- 3 **BRING ABOUT CHANGE SLOWLY**
When you acquire a company owned by someone else for years, you have to take the velvet hammer approach to change. People are so important to our companies; leaders should communicate clearly to keep their confidence and trust. You don't want to lose partners, customers or employees because of rash changes.

"Transformational"

Alison Godfrey, Co-founder,
Godfrey Wilson



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EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS

'ATOMIC HABITS' AUTHOR ON GETTING 1% BETTER EVERY DAY

To aid in members' pursuit of continuous improvement, we invited No. 1 New York Times bestselling author **James Clear** to explain the benefits of "getting 1% better every day." By disrupting the idea that big goals lead to big successes, James shared insights on how to build goals at the atomic level.

In this exclusive — and entertaining — talk, James discussed the science of small habits, how they work and how their effects compound and multiply over time. Through his research and personal stories, members left with practical strategies to immediately apply in their personal and professional lives.



WORDS
TO LIVE BY

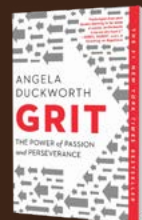
We do not rise to the level of our goals;
we fall to the level
of our systems.

JAMES CLEAR



GLOBAL FEATURED
SPEAKER: ANGELA
DUCKWORTH
ON GRIT

Angela Duckworth, the No. 1 New York Times bestselling author and MacArthur Fellow. Drawing from her bestseller, "Grit," she will help members explore several methods to foster grit, including developing a growth mindset, cultivating personal interests and engaging in daily grit exercises.



"Grit is living
life like it's
a marathon,
not a sprint."

ANGELA DUCKWORTH

→ LOOK OUT FOR THE DISCUSSION
GUIDE

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for new and
innovative ways to
deliver the *ultimate
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there's Moneyppenny.

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Power of cross-industry wisdom

RYAN SIMMONDS

is the director of local search and web agency, Success Local.

Ryan joined Matthew Scott's V404 group to unlock the benefits of cross-industry wisdom.

Joined Vistage in 2023

Stepping into leadership for the first time is a chance to shape your style. Ryan Simmonds, director of Success Local, shares how joining Vistage and unlocking the benefits of cross-industry wisdom helps him be a better first-time leader.

"I've been with Success Local from the very beginning. While I didn't plan to be leader, I've grasped opportunities which have led me to the top. I took over the day-to-day running of the business from the original shareholders eight years after joining. Guiding the company through that transition as a new leader was my biggest challenge at the time.

Success Local is built on strong foundations, but I felt we needed outside perspectives to help us evolve. Although I'm part of a digital agency community, it can be a little bit 'groupthink', which can stifle your thinking and progress. The idea of engaging with business leaders outside my industry seemed like a powerful way to bring in new ideas.

"Vistage is of a different standard to anything I've experienced in the past"

Ryan Simmonds
Director, Success Local

I reached out to Vistage in late 2023 when I signed up for a taster session. From that moment on I was sold. Vistage is of a different standard to anything I've experienced in the past. I particularly like the format of meetings, and the issue processing sessions, where we present a problem to each other. I also value the speakers and Chair 1-1s. Leadership can be lonely and having experts with a wealth of experience to challenge your thinking and bounce ideas off really benefits me and the business.

A lot has changed in my first year with Vistage. Success Local has had one of its best years, delivering marketing for over 100 clients across the UK. We also have a clear plan for future success. An area my Vistage peers have really helped with is in recruiting the right staff and building a culture that aligns with our vision. Dedicating one day a month to hear and learn from business leaders further on in their journey has been incredibly valuable. I don't think transformational is too big a word!

I initially joined Vistage for the outside perspectives, but I've gained so much more. I've matured as a person and in my new role, and my understanding of leadership has evolved. Leadership isn't a destination with an endpoint. It's a continuous journey of learning and growth best done with Vistage as your guide.



Ryan Simmonds
Director, Success Local



FREIGHT EXPECTATIONS



A decade ago, John Brown's Vistage Chair challenged him to set a "Big Hairy Audacious Goal." Brown's BHAG? "Primary Freight will be a \$100 million company within 10 years."

"My sister, Kathy, and I were shareholders in a freight company that got bought out. The new owners minimized our shareholding," says Brown. "It left a bitter taste in our mouths. We launched Primary Freight because we felt our primary purpose was to serve our customers and the people who work for us."

The duo has never wavered from that mission. Nearly 40% of Primary Freight's staff have 10 to 26 years of service, and the company works with groups like Habitat for Humanity and The Salvation Army. It's been voted one of the Best Places to Work by the Los Angeles Business Journal, named to the Inc. 5000 list twice, and is a five-time nominee for the Orange County Business Journal's Best Family-Owned Business.

In 2013, Primary Freight was at a crossroads — transitioning from a transactional to an asset-based company and later becoming an integrated logistics company.

"My Vistage group gave me insights I wasn't getting elsewhere, helped me embrace change and become more strategic about this critical transition," says John Brown.

Simultaneously, John Brown wanted to ensure the company's legacy. After some disappointing private equity opportunities, a more exciting path appeared during a Vistage webinar with CSG Partners: an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP). In 2023, Primary Freight rewarded all 72 employees with company shares.



"Profits are important, but I believe that taking care of your people and making a difference in the community is the responsibility of every business," he says. ■

JOHN BROWN
CEO, Primary Freight
2024 Vistage Member
Excellence Award Winner

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