

VISTAGE Perspectives®

SUMMER 2024

THE GREAT DEBATE
OF STRATEGIC
PLANNING



SEPARATE PEAKS
SHARED VIEW

NAVIGATING **GROWTH**

AGELESS WISDOM FROM THE UK'S
LONGEST-STANDING MEMBER



BAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH VISTAGE SUPPORT

Talia Sarafilovic is joint MD of Stephens Bakery, a 150-year-old family run business in Fife. After a decade of learning the ropes, Talia became MD and joined Vistage on the suggestion of her father who ran and grew the bakery with Vistage support.

"It didn't take long after leaving university to realise that Stephens was where I was meant to be. I grew up watching my parents run the business which I think subconsciously instilled a desire to run one myself.

When I became Stephens joint MD with my brother, Sean, our biggest challenge was stabilising the business after a period of sustained growth. My father, Andre and mother Rona, have successfully grown Stephens to a point where we now operate 15 sites and supply over 200 local convenience stores. He was the one to suggest I join Vistage, having benefited from it himself.

Growing a business isn't just about adding people. It's about having the vision, direction, and processes to scale effectively, which is hard to achieve when you're immersed in the day-to-day. Through Vistage, I can step away from daily operations and work on the business rather than in it. I've made so many improvements I wouldn't have achieved otherwise.

Changes I've made range from big ticket items to small details following a conversation I've had with my coach or a peer. Getting those outside perspectives and having my ideas challenged regularly prevents insular thinking and helps me make better decisions. The amount of intelligence around my Vistage peer group table is incredible.

There's a saying "if you're the smartest person in the room you're in the wrong room" and after every meeting I leave thinking I'm firmly in the right room!

Absorbing all that knowledge has a big effect on the business too. In the two years I've been a Vistage member – Sean is also one - our sales have grown by 20%, and this year we'll break the £20m revenue mark. However, I'd say the biggest change has been introducing a new management structure which was done off the back of a lot of very useful conversations with my peers and Chair.



Running a business is tough but with Vistage I feel I'm growing a business that's worth far more than its sales figures, and that makes me proud. My incredible peers, Chair and the expert speakers we get to listen to constantly challenge and inspire me to push the boundaries of what's possible. Together, we're working towards making it the best it can be." ■

TALIA SARAFILOVIC
MANAGING DIRECTOR

EDITORIAL

Victoria Carlborg
Joi Coles
Patricia Lee Como
Alan Denton
Glenn Jeffers
Mary-Jo Lipman
Katie McWeeney

DESIGN

Katy Larrive
Bridgette Beuttel
Mike Burgos
Kimberlee Farley
Annette Morton

CONTRIBUTORS

Hal Conick
Rachel Farrell
Katie Navarra
Mayrav Saar

EVENTS

Beth Lovell

SPONSORSHIP

Philippa Sargeant

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

Vistage International (UK)

Vanbrugh House, Grange Drive, Hedge End, Hampshire, SO30 2AF

vistage.co.uk



Strategy is the lifeblood of an organisation. It's about vision and knowing what to do and what not to do. Setting your organisation's growth strategy as CEO is critically important and often intimidating. In this issue, we look at Vistage members who embarked on strategic planning with different approaches but equal rigour.

You'll meet a second-generation CEO in Douglassville, Pennsylvania, who unlocked growth in the family's crane manufacturing business by creating a culture of grit, innovation and leadership development. Hear from the UK's longest-standing member of 32 years Jonathan Eddy and his inspiring story of ageless wisdom.

We hope the lessons on these pages prove helpful to you as you work through your own growth strategies with your teams and Vistage group. As always, we are here to help you make great decisions that benefit your company, family and community.

All the best,

Sam

Sam Reese
CEO, Vistage Worldwide, Inc.

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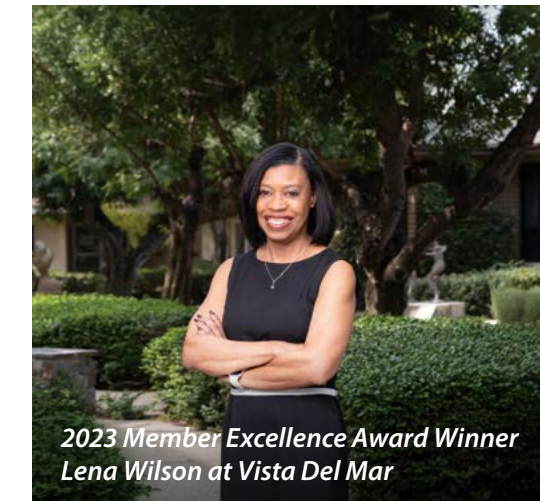
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GOING FAR BY GOING TOGETHER

MEMBER PEER GROUP SESSIONS



What would you say to people who say they haven't got time for Vistage?

I think I was one of those people! It's easy to run around being busy, but without necessarily making the progress such effort should produce. Vistage helps you make better use of your time. It's not how much time you're putting in, it's how you're putting in the time that counts. Taking one day a month out to look at how and why you're doing something in Chair 1-1s and peer group meetings is nothing in the grand scheme of things and so much more productive than doing the same thing over and over again.

SIMON PATIENT Heritage Manor
Vistage Member since 2021



What initially sparked your interest in Vistage?

I had more ambition for the business than I knew how to deliver. A woman that worked for a client of ours introduced me to Vistage and the concept of peer-to-peer support groups. I followed it up, got invited to a group trial and have been a member now for ten years.

ARCHIE BELL Excellimore
Vistage Member for 12 years



Tell us a little about your experience of being a Vistage group member?

Joining a Vistage peer group is the best thing I've done for myself and the company. The ideas you get from speakers, the challenge you get from peers, or even just the confidence you gain in your own ideas are priceless. My brother is a Vistage member of another group, which means we hear different conversations and speakers. The number of actionable things we put into our business on the back of these days is incredible.

TALIA SARAFILOVIC Stephens Bakery
Vistage Member since 2022



Why would you recommend Vistage membership to others?


You cannot afford not to be a part of Vistage – no matter how big or small your business we all face the same challenges and a problem shared is a problem halved. The collective brain power, knowledge and experience is incredibly powerful and valuable and will lead to better decisions.

PAUL BARRATT Karndean Design Flooring
Vistage Member since 2015

THE GREAT DEBATE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Sustainable GROWTH 

? ! ? ?

HOW? 

3 CASE STUDIES DECODE AND EXAMINE HOW TO PLAN FOR SUCCESS



By Joe Galvin
Vistage Chief Research Officer

The pressure is on. In today's rapidly changing economy, CEOs need to develop strategic plans that keep their organisations agile, competitive and oriented toward growth.

The problem? There's little consensus on how to get there.

According to a Vistage survey of 1,511 small and medium sized business CEOs, 72% of leaders are using an internally developed process for strategic planning, 17% are using an established framework, and 11% are working with an external strategy consultant.

We spoke with three CEOs who have applied each approach with equally good results. In fact, through strategic planning, these leaders have built businesses that have withstood crises, outpaced competitors and thrived for decades.


\$ \$



USING AN ESTABLISHED FRAMEWORK

SCALING BACK DINING TO GET A BIGGER SLICE OF THE PIE

Chad Mackay
CEO
Fire & Vine Hospitality
Vistage member since 2004

Vision... 

On March 12, 2020, Chad Mackay did the last thing he ever thought he would.

The CEO of Seattle-based Fire & Vine Hospitality laid off 90% of his staff and closed all of the high-end restaurants he managed in the Pacific Northwest. Mackay had little choice: The COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing. "We were burning money by staying open," he recalls.

For the next two weeks, Mackay and the remaining members of his corporate team hunkered down in their home offices. "And then we decided 'hibernating' was no longer the operative phrase," he says. "Here was a chance to do all the things we always wanted to do with the business and make it work better than ever."

"Here was a chance to do all the things we always wanted to do with the business and make it work better than ever."

As part of the company's strategic planning, Mackay adopted a third-party cash-management framework that became instrumental in the coming months. It helped him and his team determine how much to apply for in Paycheck Protection Program loans, where to spend money, when and where to relaunch, and how many employees to bring back. He also used the EOS Vision/Traction Organisation to reimagine the company's strategy and develop a succinct, one-page business plan. Vistage helped Mackay

recognise who to engage in that process and what expectations to set for different levels of employees.

What emerged was a much tighter business model. Mackay realised his restaurants didn't need to offer lunch and dinner seven days a week; they could open for dinner only, five days a week, and still turn a healthy profit. He also identified new metrics — particularly sales-per-labour-hour — for monitoring and adapting to market fluctuations.

"Revenue is fantastic, but sales-per-labour-hour tells me if we're profitable or not," he says. "It's a great key indicator."

By the end of 2022, Fire & Vine Hospitality's restaurants were up and running again. The company also opened a new hotel lounge and event space that Mackay expects to generate approximately \$10 million in business annually.

Without question, Mackay says, the business is stronger now than it was before the pandemic.

"We've beat our pre-pandemic numbers, but with 40% less staff," Mackay says. "I'll tell you this: I'm fully a believer now that 'less is more.'"



In his 45 years of running a business, Zentech CEO Ramesh Maini has never hired a consultant for strategic planning.

Indeed, the approach has worked. Since its founding in 1978, Houston-based Zentech has grown into a \$32 million company with offices in Asia, North America, South America and the Middle East. Its client roster includes NASA, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Maritime Administration and several private companies.

Zentech designs, engineers and constructs semi-submersibles, drilling rigs, drill ships and other vessels for the oil and gas and renewable energy industries. It's a niche industry that Maini understands deeply, which is one reason why he's always relied on his internal process for strategic planning. His other reason is philosophical. He believes the company's strategic direction should align with its vision and values — summarised as "people over profits, service over sales, and honour over hustle."

Maini believes in taking care of his employees, distributing \$2 million in bonuses last year alone. He focuses on recruiting and retaining the best salespeople in the world.

"Right now, we're pursuing projects totaling \$800 million," says Maini, a 2022 Vistage Member Excellence Award winner. "That's because of our salespeople's efforts."

Maini's people-centric strategy helped Zentech survive a tough period between 2017 and 2021 when much of the business dried up as drilling clients lost major projects. While exploring new business opportunities, Maini ensured he retained key people while retooling Zentech's business strategy.

Since then, Zentech has diversified outside of drilling, recently acquiring an oil-processing company and working on green hydrogen and methanol production. Maini has also pledged to help with the collection of microplastics in oceans, rivers and lakes — not to make money, but because it's the right thing to do. He's also working with his Vistage Chair and peers on his long-term vision: transitioning to an employee stock ownership plan, fulfilling the ultimate act of taking care of people.

"If you take care of people," Maini says, "profit will come."

USING AN INTERNAL PROCESS

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST TO MAKE A BUSINESS LAST

Ramesh Maini, President & CEO of Zentech, Inc., Vistage member since 2015

"People over profits, service over sales, and honour over hustle."

WHY?



Taking the reins of a family business isn't always easy. "I was lucky," says Kelly Van Winkle, who stepped up as president and CEO of her family's roofing business, King of Texas Construction Company, in 2019.

Van Winkle inherited a healthy company. King of Texas had seasoned employees, a strong reputation and steady clients, some of whom had remained loyal customers for 35+ years. Repeat business was so plentiful, in fact, "We didn't need to bid on a lot of new types of work," recalls Van Winkle.

But by 2022, Van Winkle recognised the company had peaked, and not in a good way. After the number of employees reached 100, "We got to the point where we weren't going to grow anymore," she recalls. "We weren't able to take on more work."

An absence of protocols, systems and unclear organisational structure was to blame. Employees' roles and responsibilities weren't well defined, leading to duplicated efforts and customer service issues. Poor communication between employees created conflicts in the office and on the field. Because the company had never documented its protocols and processes, new employees felt lost while experienced employees disagreed on how to get things done.

"It was not working smoothly, to be honest," says Van Winkle.

USING AN EXTERNAL CONSULTANT



ELEVATING A ROOFING BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Kelly B. Van Winkle, President & CEO of King of Texas Construction Company, Inc., Vistage member since 2021

She turned to Jonathan King, a Vistage speaker and CEO of the Frisco, Texas-based Lean Leaders, to develop a long-term strategic plan — the first in the company's history. Step one was to establish one- and five-year visions that would guide priorities and the path forward.

From there, Van Winkle assembled her core leadership team — "I call them the 'Fab Five,'" she says — and appointed them to own different parts of the business. She adopted new software to gather and report KPIs and keep department heads accountable. And, to position the company for sustainable growth, she identified two new service offerings to integrate into the portfolio.

"This is going to move us forward into the next generation."

In only three months, the company changed dramatically, Van Winkle says. Team meetings are productive and efficient. Employees feel like they're being heard, and culture and communication are both improving. Leadership decisions are guided by data instead of instinct.

Van Winkle plans to keep working with her consultant for the next two years to keep building on this success. "This is going to move us forward into the next generation," she says. ■

COMPASSION WITH A PLAN

VISTA DEL MAR'S LENA WILSON HELPS THE
UNDERSERVED WITH BOTH CARE AND RIGOUR



Lena Wilson, CEO, Vista Del Mar
Excellence Winner, Impact Award
Vistage member since 2021

Lena Wilson, J.D., grew up in a home filled with children her parents fostered. Children who experienced violence. Children born of hard luck. Children who needed help.

The situation would have tugged at anyone's heart — compassion in that environment is easy — and it led Wilson to a career in social work. But early on, Wilson realised that making a difference would require more than love. It would require a plan.

"In college, I volunteered at a group home, and I thought, 'How do we stop this?'" she says. "I decided to go upstream and become a case manager. But that wasn't far enough. Then I worked with the medically fragile unit of the state's foster care programme, dealing with newborn addiction, shaken baby syndrome, domestic violence and babies born with severe birth defects. But that wasn't far enough."

Eventually, Wilson became a leader of a Michigan-based statewide health and human services organisation, making tremendous inroads in adoptions and even affecting policy change to benefit pregnant and parenting teens. Still, she felt she wasn't going far enough.

While Wilson stretched and strived, Vista Del Mar in Los Angeles sought a new leader. For a century, the 500-person nonprofit served the most vulnerable populations in Los Angeles County. However, the organisation lacked fiscal discipline and an innovative vision. They needed Wilson. And Wilson had a plan.

In Wilson's capable hands, Vista Del Mar expanded its services, scope and financial runway. She diversified funding sources and trained the organisation's long-time leaders to balance their budgets and identify KPIs, resulting in more than \$18 million in new funding streams.

"At Vista, I have an opportunity to be inside an organisation, create change, help more people and be highly involved in advocacy and policy-making," says Wilson, who earned her J.D. from the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law.

She spearheaded five new programmes that secured \$8 million to aid unaccompanied minors, \$3.2 million in behavioural health infrastructure, \$2 million in grants for mobile crisis outreach teams, \$1 million to help commercially exploited youth and \$4 million for home visitation post-release services for unaccompanied minors in the Western region of the United States — Vista's first national programme.

Wilson achieved these changes not by cleaning house but by training up — starting with herself. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles in 2019, she joined Michal Clements' Vistage group where she is the only nonprofit CEO.

"People say health and human services isn't a business, but the same sound business practices necessary in for-profit are critical in nonprofits," Wilson says. "My group has a lot of small businesses, and I love hearing the different strategies and workshops that I can flip around and make useful in our organisation."

"THE SAME SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES NECESSARY IN FOR-PROFIT ARE CRITICAL IN NONPROFITS."

In turn, Wilson's creative energy and ability to apply learnings from everywhere inspire her group.

"Within our Vistage group, Lena is highly valued for her creativity and thoughtful questioning approach," Clements wrote when nominating Wilson for the 2023 Vistage Impact Award. "Lena can be counted on to go 'above and beyond.'"

Today, lawmakers seek Wilson's expertise and award Vista Del Mar meaningful federal contracts to help her continue building, growing and expanding.

"Our North Star is to be embedded in the community and ensure everyone has equitable access to quality services," she says. "My goal is that there will be no wrong door at Vista. No matter what aspect of care you need, we will have it or we will coordinate it." ■

Q2
2024

ECONOMIC CONFIDENCE GROWS ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND SMES AHEAD OF THE GENERAL ELECTION

Q2 2024 FINDINGS

On 26th June 2024 Vistage, the world's most trusted. Vistage, the world's most trusted CEO coaching & peer advisory organisation, has released results from its quarterly SME CEO Confidence Index for Q2 2024.

Ahead of the upcoming General Election on July 4th, business leaders have expressed cautious optimism about the nation's economy over the next 12 months. Overall business confidence in the UK and Ireland increased to 111.6 up 3.9 points since Q1. 44% of all business leaders believe that the overall economic conditions in the UK and Ireland have improved compared to a year ago. In contrast, only 15% believe conditions have worsened within the same time period.

Similarly, a striking 62% of SMEs are confident that their firm's sales revenue will increase over the next 12 months, with 50% of them expecting profitability rates to improve as a result.

SME CEOs remain somewhat tentative on AI adoption, with only 35% of leaders actively testing for select functions.

PROFITS EXPECTED TO GROW DESPITE RISING COSTS

This quarter's report found that almost half (44%) of business owners remain optimistic and expect that economic conditions across the UK and Ireland will continue to improve, but a smaller portion (15%) foresee a worsening of conditions, reflecting concerns over potential economic downturns.

As such, a significant percentage of business leaders (62%) remain largely optimistic that their sales revenue will increase over the coming year, with only 30% expecting it to remain the same, suggesting expectations of stable business performance. Further to this, exactly half (50%) of all business leaders feel confident that their firm's profitability will also improve.

Interestingly, higher interest rates do not seem to have had a significant impact on businesses thus far. Almost half of all respondents (47%) reported that higher interest rates are not currently impacting their business. Overall, SMEs seem confident about the future, with a significant portion (42%) also increasing their investment expenditures to meet future consumer demand.

BOSSES PRIORITISE LABOUR AND EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

For most SMEs, navigating inflationary change remains a top priority. A significant percentage (66%) of business leaders have identified labour as the primary source of current inflation affecting their business operations. However, just under half (42%) of SMEs predict inflationary pressures to increase more slowly in the coming year.

Amidst rising labour costs, most businesses have seen modest increases in workers' compensation, with 40% reporting increases of less than 10%. Meanwhile, a combined 18% reported either no change (15%) or a decrease (3%) in salary compensation over the past year. While businesses are managing various inflationary pressures, labour costs remain the most critical challenge, influencing both compensation and overall expense management strategies.

KEEPING PACE WITH AI DEMAND

SMEs remain cautious of Open and Generative AI adoption, with only 35% actively testing for select functions. However, only 12% of surveyed SMEs are currently using AI as part of their daily operations.

Further analysis shows that a small percentage of SMEs (33%) have increased technology spending to incorporate AI capabilities, whereas more than half (52%) reported no change in their investments.



Despite facing significant challenges from rising labour costs, inflationary pressures, and the rapid advancement of AI technologies, UK and Irish SMEs continue to show strong resilience and general optimism regarding their future prospects. Regardless of this the upcoming election could usher in an era of change. SME bosses who can demonstrate strategic foresight and adaptability, while also investing in innovation and workforce upskilling will be able to better maintain competitiveness amongst any upcoming political and economic change.

*Andy Perkins,
Vistage MD, International
Operations (UK)*

As a result, a notable 47% have reported no adjustments in personnel staffing and training in response to AI rising development, while only 35% of total SMEs are actively training their existing personnel. But a small portion of businesses are otherwise investing in upskilling their current workforce, with 11% redefining existing job roles to integrate AI functionalities and 10% creating new roles or teams dedicated to AI.

NAVIGATING GROWTH

Ageless wisdom from UK's longest-standing member

Jonathan Eddy, owner and CEO of the Hepworth Group, recently celebrated 32 years of membership, making him the longest-standing member in Vistage UK! From keeping him aware of the latest insights to seizing opportunities to grow, Jonathan reflects on how his membership helps him and why he's as committed to staying now as day one.

"I joined Vistage as a fresh faced 20-something eager to learn the ropes. It was the early 90s and I had just taken on the family business, B Hepworth & Co, as CEO. We've been going since 1868.

My reason for joining Vistage was simple. I wanted a safe place to work out issues and explore opportunities.



I also wanted help in taking the business to new heights. Hepworth is renowned globally for its wiper systems for marine and rail so we're continually innovating. Our projects range from custom solutions for nuclear powered aircraft carriers to Princess Yachts. You'll also find them on Cunard's Three Queens Ships: Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Mary 2.

While I've switched groups over the years – Tony Shadforth and Bob Battye were my Chairs before Paul Knee - the things I value most about Vistage haven't changed a lot. Although I don't revel in others' misfortunes, hearing your peers' problems often makes you feel better as they put your own into perspective.

We all have different businesses but generally the problems are the same and the solutions invariably benefit us all. 80% of problems involve people.

I find having breathing space to work on the business rather than in it invaluable. I also get a lot from the Vistage speakers whose takeaways often lead to changes at work. I appreciate being held to account on issue processing sessions, and knowing you'll face questions at the next group meeting is a powerful motivator! Without this it's easy for those day-to-day problems to drag on.

In my 32 years as a member, I've shared numerous challenges with my peers, from Brexit and Covid to the 2007-08 crash.

It's during these big hiccups that the power of peer groups truly shines. We've also experienced lots of fun together, from mountaineering in the Yorkshire Dales, surfing in Bristol, building motorcars from bits of plastic in Gloucestershire and sailing the Solent. Those good and bad shared experiences bind you as a group.

My organisation's mantra is "showing the way". It's a spin on being the best and innovation that we introduced a decade ago with the help of my then Vistage Chair, Bob Battye, and peers. This guiding principle is embedded throughout the organisation, from our internal processes to our interactions with clients. It's also woven into the way I am with my Vistage peers. Having benefited from Vistage for over three decades I'm often able to share with them a shortcut to solving problems. I enjoy paying it forward and especially helping the younger leaders in the group.

“

Investing in Vistage back in the 90's was the best decision I could've made for myself and the company. You can't stop learning as a leader if you want to grow. Chair Bob Battye described himself as a "student of authentic leadership", which I identify with. Even after 46 years at Hepworth and 32 years of Vistage membership there's still so much to learn.

Jonathan Eddy
Owner and CEO
Hepworth Group

THREE REASONS I BELONG TO VISTAGE

- 1 YOU'RE NOT ON YOUR OWN**
It's easy for CEOs to feel lonely. You carry the burden of responsibility for everyone and everything and can't always discuss your concerns with colleagues. Vistage gives me a safe space to navigate the challenges of leadership as a group, rather than face them alone.
- 2 YOU MAKE BETTER DECISIONS**
We can all be accused of going too far left or right. Growth can happen rapidly, but it needs to be maintained at a manageable and balanced pace. My Vistage members and Chair help me make the best informed decisions. It's why I rock up every month.
- 3 YOU HEAR FROM INCREDIBLE SPEAKERS**
We get some truly exceptional speakers. Roger Martin-Fagg is always a highlight with his entertaining talks. Their fresh perspectives have brought a wealth of ideas and innovative approaches that I've implemented throughout the Hepworth Group.

Vistage has helped my business in so many ways, from nurturing staff development and strategic planning to advising on acquisitions. I've bought two businesses in the last twenty years.

The first purchase was for a company larger than Hepworth, and my peers guided and supported me throughout the process, offering crucial sanity checks. As a result, we now export to 54 countries and produce 40,000 units annually. Our achievements were recognised last year when we received the SME News British Made Award for Best Windscreen Wiping & Wash System Manufacturer 2023.



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Dave Hall

Thinking Again:
The Strategic Role of Creativity



9TH OCTOBER

Marcus Child
Personal Power



13TH NOVEMBER

David Abbott

The Psychology of Pricing



11TH DECEMBER

Celynn Morin

Sante - Celebrating Wellbeing

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ELEVATING STRATEGIC GROWTH

CEO KAREN NORHEIM LIFTS
AMERICAN CRANE TO NEW HEIGHTS



Karen Norheim recalls her first thoughts after her father, Oddvar, asked her to join American Crane.

"I was reluctant," Norheim says.

As a child, Norheim had watched as her father, who migrated from Norway with nothing, built the Douglassville, Pennsylvania-based company from the ground up through tenacity and hard work. It was his vision, his direction and his planning that grew the company, with the decision-making driven entirely by him.

But once she joined American Crane & Equipment Corporation, Norheim realised the incredible opportunity to learn from her father and eventually make her mark on the company he built.

KAREN NORHEIM
CEO, American Crane
& Equipment Corporation



WATCH THE AMERICAN CRANE STORY AND SEE HOW NORHEIM LEVERAGED VISTAGE AND FOUND SUCCESS.



American Crane products haul large-scale projects like the 787 Dreamliner (top) and NASA's Orion spacecraft.



Karen with her father, Oddvar, in 2020.

Starting in an IT and marketing role, Norheim saw many opportunities for improvement her father did not amid his day-to-day grind. She modernised American Crane's technological systems, taking the company from dial-up to high-speed internet, updating its enterprise resource planning system and replacing its outdated DOS-based accounting software.

Along the way, Norheim learned all she could about manufacturing, the products American Crane produced and how each department worked. Her initial reluctance to join turned into a love for the family business and the manufacturing industry.

Years later, after Norheim was named president and COO of American Crane, her father called her into his office.

You should put your own spin on leading the company when you take over, he told her, seeing she had a more inclusive style of leadership and believing in her ability to take American Crane into the future.

In 2021, following the unexpected death of her father, Norheim became CEO, splitting ownership 50-50 with her sister, who sits on the board. Already, they're planning how they can set the company up to pass it on to her sister's children when the time comes.

"We did a lot of succession planning to make sure that when my dad passed, we'd be OK and figure it out," Norheim says, "We put a lot of work into that, and it all paid off. We lost him in 2021, which was really sad. But he set us up for success."

"WE LOST MY FATHER IN 2021, WHICH WAS REALLY SAD. BUT HE SET US UP FOR SUCCESS."

GRIT MATTERS

Soon after Norheim became the company's leader, the pandemic hit. While there's no planning for pandemics and revenue suffered, Norheim had been working on a far grander plan for American Crane.

After joining Vistage in 2018, Norheim was inspired by a fellow Vistage member's journey to improve their culture. Soon after that, she saw a presentation on company culture by Vistage speaker and author David Friedman that motivated her to lock in the culture at American Crane. It was already a great place to work, but nothing had ever been written or communicated. What would happen if the great culture went away when her father was no longer there?

Norheim decided to put her spin on the company by first writing a new company mantra and communicating its significance across the company. The mantra was based on what made her father a great leader and the company a great place to work: GRIT Matters.

This mantra and the following conversations highlighted the heart, perseverance and integrity the company had in working together, even during hard times. She was also intentional in communicating how the company wants to take care of its employees.

At first, Norheim wasn't sure if anyone would care. However, she had fostered an ability to be comfortable with uncertainty and decided to communicate her first big step as a leader and then learn from the employees' responses.

"This was putting words to all of the great things that we have in our culture," Norheim says. "What are the behaviours that matter? What is our mission, our vision? We started putting that together. Now, I'd say that we're on GRIT version 5.0. We're continually evolving that conversation."

Norheim's next big spin was introducing formal strategic planning. Most of her father's plans were in his head, passed on to her through years of working together. But with the company growing, Norheim wanted to ensure every employee was working toward the same goals.

She wrote the company's first strategic plan and shared it with other leaders, getting their feedback. In 2023, that process evolved to each department leader drafting their own plan under the umbrella of American Crane's overarching plan for growth.

"We're trying to move forward systematically, putting down new foundational blocks each year," says Norheim, a 2023 Member Excellence Award Winner.



American Crane works on new smart crane technology and machine health IoT devices.

One of those foundational blocks has been the company's Innovation Lab, formed in 2019. Much like Norheim innovated the company's technology early in her career, she knew that American Crane needed to innovate the products and services it offered to grow into the future. She wrote a mission statement for the Innovation Lab, instructing the cross-department team to research opportunities to expand the product line, improve the company's processes, and integrate new technology.

Two years after establishing the Innovation Lab, a new product created there is set to launch in 2024. The Smart Crane System is an Internet of Things device that provides real-time data to optimise crane performance and efficiency. The product will serve smaller and medium sized companies, as the Innovation Lab figured out how to create a lower-cost product in a typically high-cost market.

"We had to do this," Norheim says. "I'm looking behind me saying nobody's close just yet. And we've got to stay ahead of the curve with technology. My intuition was just screaming 'go, go, go.'"

In 2023, even before the Smart Crane System was launched, revenue was up 20% at American Crane. It's a sign of things to come, Norheim says, who believes that this bump in revenue is just the beginning of a new era of growth for the company.

INVESTING IN LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

One reason Norheim believes that American Crane is poised to grow is because of her next spin on the business: investing in the company's leaders.

In her own experience in Vistage, Norheim felt a profound shift in her work and leadership by learning from her Chair, group and speakers. She realised that for American Crane to have a great future — for her to be able to pass it on to a third generation — she had to invest in a leadership development programme.

Norheim started by inviting Jeff Griesemer, now COO at American Crane, to join a Vistage Key Executive group. The success of that investment led her to enroll select employees at every level into Vistage leadership development programmes, from C-level executives to experienced managers to rising stars. In 2024, she says, she hopes to bring even more staff into Vistage groups, potentially even a Vistage Inside group just for American Crane senior leaders.

"When Karen joined Vistage, I saw us transition to being more strategic in how we conduct our business," Griesemer says. "We brought more personnel into Vistage, and we started speaking a common language across the organisation, becoming more accountable and having higher expectations. It's not to say we weren't a great company before, but we're moving more into the future with care under Karen's tutelage."

Since she began focusing more on building up its leaders, the company culture and employee engagement are better than ever. Employees feel empowered and, with that, they're more productive.

"All of this leads to people feeling good at work," Norheim says. "I believe that means we're going to do well and be able to solve the problems that are in front of us."

With more people being trained and learning within Vistage groups, Norheim believes that a future American Crane will have less friction and more growth. Amid a time when companies have trouble recruiting talented employees, Norheim feels happy to see her company become an employer of choice with low turnover. When you take care of employees, she says, they take care of the business.

Norheim thinks back to when she was working with her father to take over the company. Then, she was so afraid of what might happen if he retired — could she fill his shoes? Now, she's happy she got to spend



Jeff Griesemer (right) and Tim Oliu of American Crane inspect components for a new product.

"WE BROUGHT MORE PERSONNEL INTO VISTAGE, AND WE STARTED SPEAKING A COMMON LANGUAGE ACROSS THE ORGANISATION, BECOMING MORE ACCOUNTABLE AND HAVING HIGHER EXPECTATIONS."

JEFF GRIESEMER
COO, American Crane,
Vistage Key Executive Member

so much time working on the company with him, learning how he built it and finding the confidence to put her spin on the business. She feels proud of how she and American Crane employees have handled the transition, knowing that they have a chance to grow for years to come.

When asked what she'd tell a new leader, perhaps even a younger version of herself, about taking over as the leader of a company, Norheim smiles. "No matter what obstacles come along, you can do it," Norheim says. "Keep doing what you're doing. Keep learning. Keep growing. Keep going to that point of discomfort and push outside of your comfort zone. It pays off." ■

3 LESSONS LEARNED

FROM JONI NAUGLE, KAREN NORHEIM'S VISTAGE CHAIR

CULTURE AND TEAM DEVELOPMENT ARE CRITICAL

Shortly after joining Vistage, Karen realised that American Crane would benefit from a defined culture and team development plan. Using her Viking heritage, American Crane created GRIT Matters around the four Viking Laws: Be aggressive, be a good merchant, be prepared, and keep the camp in order. Karen also realised that future growth and success required a team that is learning and growing, leading her to engage multiple leaders in Vistage and other development programmes.

INNOVATE FOR THE FUTURE

Being a visionary, Karen understood the impact technology and innovation have on the future. She launched the Innovation Lab, assigning resources to explore what could be possible. The result: American Crane is now launching its ACECO Smart Crane technology.

CREATE THE STRUCTURE, THEN GET OUT OF THE WAY

American Crane has a talented and long-tenured team. Karen recognised what was lacking was a structure defining accountabilities to foster efficiency and clear communication. Her goal is to continue to empower capable teams, trust them to excel in their roles and strategically step back to allow autonomy, innovation and employee growth.



Karen Norheim with Chair Joni Naugle (left).

EXECUTIVES LOVES LOVE INSIGHTS

It's our goal to provide the Vistage community with fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. To achieve this, we invite the foremost thought leaders to Vistage. These experts equip our members with the necessary knowledge, tools and insights to create an immediate impact on their organisations.

MARCUS BUCKINGHAM FIND LOVE IN WHAT YOU DO

In the fast-paced business world, CEOs are constantly seeking strategies to enhance productivity, engagement and the overall success of their organisations. Enter Marcus Buckingham, renowned author, speaker and expert in leadership and management. Earlier this year, Buckingham addressed our global community, sharing inspiring insights and stories about the most influential force in business: love. "Love is the most powerful predictor of human behaviour," he says. "It's only when someone says, 'I love it,' that we can actually predict what they're going to do."

Aimed at reshaping how CEOs perceive the intersection of love and work through their customers and employees, Buckingham's unconventional approach challenges traditional corporate mindsets.

As leaders reflected on Buckingham's profound insights, he tasked them with answering a fundamental question: How can they infuse love into every aspect of their organisations, from fostering environments where employees feel cherished to caring for customers at every touchpoint?



WORDS
TO LIVE BY

The best people don't find their passion. They don't find a job they love. They do find the love in what they do.



COMING SOON

JAMES CLEAR
AUTHOR OF
'ATOMIC HABITS' ON
HOW TO GET 1% BETTER
EVERY DAY

Taking a company to the next level requires grand strategies, innovative ideas or groundbreaking technologies. Yet, beneath the surface, daily habits and routines are what shape an organisation's well-being. Based on his bestseller, "Atomic Habits," James Clear comes to Vistage this summer to demonstrate how members can apply this philosophy in their businesses.

Central to the concept of "Atomic Habits" is the idea of small, incremental changes that compound over time to yield remarkable results. This method offers an approachable way for leaders grappling with the challenges of running a company to harness the power of minor, yet continual improvements.

→ View more upcoming events at myvistage.com/events

SEPARATE PEAKS, SHARED VIEW

VISTAGE ACQUIRES DENMARK'S EGN TO ELEVATE 45,000+ EXECUTIVES WORLDWIDE

When EGN CEO Jonatan Persson first met Sam Reese, CEO of Vistage Worldwide, the two bonded over their shared backgrounds as elite athletes. Reese was a former All-American in college as a distance runner; Persson represented Denmark as a member of its Olympic sailing team.

Both understood the hard work it took to excel, the focus and determination to reach the top, the challenges that must be conquered to move forward, and the work and collaboration with others needed to achieve success. Little wonder, then, that both Reese and Persson ended up leading organisations that elevate CEOs and executives through executive coaching and peer advisory.

"We both believe that a peer advisory group paired with executive coaching is the best model to help leaders learn, grow and make better decisions," Reese says. "When we met six years ago, I saw immediately what that strategic fit could mean for both our companies."

Indeed, that shared belief in the power of peer perspectives led Vistage to acquire the Denmark-based EGN. With the addition of EGN, Vistage now serves more than 45,000 members across 35 countries worldwide, cementing its position as the world's largest executive coaching and peer advisory organisation.

But the acquisition means more than that, Persson says. For EGN, which provides peer advisory across 70 key executive functional areas, it means adding a robust CEO membership strategy and additional resources to help them reach more business leaders across Europe.

"WE BOTH BELIEVE THAT A PEER ADVISORY GROUP PAIRED WITH EXECUTIVE COACHING IS THE BEST MODEL TO HELP LEADERS LEARN, GROW AND MAKE BETTER DECISIONS."



SAM REESE
CEO, Vistage Worldwide

"I always saw it as the perfect fit," Persson says. "We're in different geographies and have developed ourselves a little bit differently, but our members are having the same conversations. They're issue processing. The whole idea of helping people and companies grow through our learning, sharing and discussing is exactly the same as I see it."

Both Persson and Reese stressed that alignment around mission and vision was the primary reason for the partnership. Despite the geographical divide, the two organisations separately discovered the benefits of peer advisory between executives — Vistage 65 years ago in Wisconsin and EGN 32 years ago in Svendborg, Denmark.

With that alignment around core beliefs, coupled with EGN's growth — 16,000 members across 16 countries in Europe — a lot of the heavy lifting has already been done, says Vistage President of International Operations Rob Ristagno.

"WE'RE IN DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIES AND HAVE DEVELOPED OURSELVES A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENTLY, BUT OUR MEMBERS ARE HAVING THE SAME CONVERSATIONS."



JONATAN PERSSON
CEO, EGN

It's now a matter of leveraging this new partnership to foster more connections among small and medium-sized business owners and executives around the world.

"Across the globe, the challenges that CEOs face are the same. Leaders feel lonely at the top, and are looking for a sounding board," says Ristagno. "We have the best apparatus for how leaders learn, and we want members to tap into the power of the global community and the benefits that Vistage offers."

For now, Vistage and EGN are sharing best practices and further aligning on strategy. In the long term, they will become more integrated as they pursue a shared vision of being the world's most trusted resource for CEOs, Ristagno says. "The plan is to find healthy opportunities for growth, so for right now we'll continue to learn from each other and continue to have a worldwide impact."

While the obstacles in business may be different from those on a racing boat, Persson says the principles of overcoming them are the same. Success — whether on the water or in the boardroom — is never inevitable, but it is always achievable. The key is to surround yourself with peers who challenge you, inspire you and make you better. ■



“Transformational”

Alison Godfrey, Co-founder,
Godfrey Wilson



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Life OF CLIMB

We spoke with three
inspiring Vistage
members who share their
thoughts of what a 'Life of
Climb' means to them.



GOING FURTHER, FASTER WITH VISTAGE

ANDREW BLAQUIERE

Managing Director, Maritime Developments Ltd (MDL)



Andrew Blaquiere is the MD of Maritime Developments Ltd (MDL), which provides tailored consultancy, equipment and personnel packages for the global energy sectors.

"My leadership journey has been something of a rocket ship" says Andrew Blaquiere, Managing Director of Maritime Developments Ltd (MDL). I joined the company's Houston office in 2017, then in late 2020 during the pandemic I relocated to Scotland to take on the role of MD at its global headquarters in Aberdeen.

In just three years, I'd gone from being a non-managerial employee to overseeing MDL's operations and performance. Although I'd had ambitions to run a business and live internationally since graduating, transitioning to such a demanding role in a new country with cultural differences was challenging.

The biggest hurdle I faced as a first-time managing director was knowing how to handle complex situations, manage stakeholders and communicate effectively with my boss. Luckily, my boss was a longstanding Vistage member. He suggested I consider joining a Vistage peer group to help me express myself, push my limits, meet others, and get top-tier mentoring. I'm so glad he did.

The Vistage experience has absolutely changed my life. Thanks to the mentoring, group sessions and support network that extend beyond monthly meetings, I now have an outlet to explore my ideas and thoughts. I also feel I've gained a very dependable circle of peers that consistently challenge my approach which benefits my day-to-day operations.

I really respect the Vistage process, and I especially like having a safe space I can go each month to talk openly and honestly on topics I wouldn't want to discuss at work

or home. With each group session I feel myself getting stronger, and every time I feel stronger, I know I can go further up the proverbial mountain. Vistage is unlike anything I've experienced before.

Vistage's impact on me has rippled through the business. In my eight months as a Vistage member our headcount has increased by 30% and our turnover has grown by 35%. I've also made significant strides personally". ■

"I'm so convinced by the benefits of Vistage membership that I recently recommended my finance manager join a Vistage key executive group. He came away from the first meeting saying: 'wow, that was amazing. I've never been in anything like that.' I said: 'yes, it's quite a unique experience'."

DRIVING GROWTH WITH THE HELP OF VISTAGE

HEATHER MATTHEWS

Managing Director Little's Chauffeur Drive

Heather Matthews is the managing director of Little's, Scotland's oldest and largest chauffeur drive company. Since joining Vistage in 2017, Heather has led the family firm on a journey of growth marked by notable achievements.

"Nature, nurture and drive have made me the leader I am today. I joined Little's, the luxury chauffeur business my father started in 1966 and became MD in 2005 when he retired. His entrepreneurial spirit instilled in me an appreciation for owning and running a business. However, it's the skills and confidence I've gained over the years that have allowed my own entrepreneurial spirit to shine.

I became a Vistage member in 2017, 12 years into my role at the top. Although the business was doing well and turning over £2.4m. I'd reached a point where I was struggling to take it any further. I felt I needed some outside help for it to scale.

Vistage, with its unique blend of coaching and peer networking, provided the perfect solution. Just being in a group with successful business leaders facing similar issues is immensely reassuring and beneficial. This is especially true for the 'issue processing' activity where we get to share our most pressing concerns and tackle them together. In the travel industry, there are always fresh challenges to navigate!

The travel business is constantly susceptible to changes in demand and unexpected disruptions, but nothing could have prepared us for Covid. We lost up to 90% of business for about a year and a half. Laura Gordon, my Chair, held weekly Zoom calls to ensure we had the information and support we needed to stay strong and steer our way through it.

My ability to adapt and evolve according to what is going on in the outside world has transformed enormously since the pandemic. Last year we even won 'Resilient Business of the Year' at the Women's Enterprise Awards.

I began entering awards as a personal challenge but it has been hugely beneficial in promoting our brand. In the last few years, we've also scooped the National 'Entrepreneurship Family Business of the Year' award and 'UK Chauffeur Company of the Year' accolade, defying London giants. In 2019, we also won 'Established Business of the Year' and 'Businesswoman of the Year' at

the Business Women Scotland Awards.

Since joining, our revenue and employee numbers have grown by 50%, and we've expanded our services to 465 cities worldwide.

Vistage has been instrumental in this growth, teaching me the importance of always learning, always moving forward even when you get to the top of

that proverbial mountain. After all, there's always a new challenge and mountain to climb." ■

"Vistage membership is more than just being part of an incredible peer group, receiving high-calibre coaching, or gaining insights from influential speakers. It's the combination of all these elements that makes it special. It's also had a big impact on our bottom line."



FROM LAWYER TO BUSINESS LEADER: A DECADE WITH VISTAGE

MURRAY MCCALL
Managing Partner, Anderson Strathern

Murray McCall is Managing Partner of Anderson Strathern, Scotland's oldest law firm. A member of Laura Gordon's Central Scotland Vistage group, Murray talks about his journey from employment lawyer to the dynamic world of business with the support of his Vistage group.

"I began my career via the conventional university path, moving up the ranks at various law firms. What began as an interesting legal career took a serendipitous turn towards running a business when I joined Anderson Strathern as a partner in 2006.

Anderson Strathern is Scotland's oldest law firm with over 300 years legal practice. Despite its centuries-old history, the firm had never had a Glasgow presence, so my first step into running a firm was opening a Glasgow office. My next big step in running a business was becoming managing partner of the whole firm in 2014.

I discovered Vistage about six months into my new role as managing partner. At the time I had several major challenges on the go - low market profile, dwindling partners and mounting debt. It was a symptom of a firm that had been around for a long time and lost its way.

We needed to boost our profile. We needed to invest. And we really needed to get our mojo back. Joining Vistage became a turning point, helping me systematically navigate the firm through these issues to emerge stronger, wiser and better. We've won several prestigious awards in recent years.

"Some people call Vistage the board you can't afford, and I think that sums it up."

Vistage's secret ingredient in my view is the peer group. As a leader you need to innovate to stay relevant and being around such a diverse and talented group of leaders enables you to take stock of their experiences and ideas.

The one-to-one coaching, mentoring and insights from top-class speakers also contribute to a continuous cycle of learning which helps you continually adapt and grow.



Right now, I'm looking at challenges such as AI and deciding what we need to do to stay around for another 300 years. Stepping out of the office for one day a month to learn something new from my peers or from world-class experts is invaluable, and often leads to a step change within my organisation. Some people call Vistage the board you can't afford, and I think that sums it up.

In my decade as a Vistage member I'm proud of our company achievements. The annual turnover has grown to over 30 million and our staff headcount has risen from 300 to 360. The Glasgow office has also grown exponentially, doubling in revenue and rising to 100 members of staff. More recently we also opened an office in Shetland and are exploring ways to increase our geographical footprint in remote areas by taking advantage of remote working trends.

Vistage's has a mantra - 'live a life of climb' - which for me epitomises this idea of continuous learning. You're absorbing the latest insights, techniques and thinking through speakers, books, podcasts and interactions with your peers. Being a Vistage member is much more than belonging to a business network. It's about being in a community where learning and camaraderie converge to help you become a happier, more effective leader".

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