

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

From Legacy to Leader: How Vistage Florida Helped One CEO Drive 667% Growth



When **Zarko Ognjenovic** was named CEO of MJW Consolidated, he wasn't handed a transition plan. Instead, he received one cryptic piece of advice from his predecessor: "It'll do you good." Turns out, the outgoing CEO was referring to Vistage Florida. At the time, Zarko didn't know what Vistage Florida was about, let alone how it would 'do him good'—nor did he know much about the crushing demands of running a multi-faceted company. He had just been handed the reins of a construction company with nearly 100 years of family-led tradition, with a task of transitioning it from family-run business to professionally managed operation.

THE SECRET WEAPON: INSIGHTS FROM OTHER CEOs

Looking inside the company for answers wasn't going to cut it.

"If you look internally for the change, what are you going to find?" mused Zarko. "Something that happened in the past. And then you'll try to figure out how to apply that to the future."



Who is:
Zarko Ognjenovic
CEO of MJW Consolidated

An accomplished engineer turned chief executive, Zarko took over the reins of a construction company with nearly a century of family-led tradition, and spent the next 15 years modernizing its culture, outpacing the S&P 500, and growing its value by 667% — while never leading alone.

VISTAGE
FLORIDA

Fast-forward fifteen years, and MJW's value has increased nearly sevenfold, outpacing the Dow Jones by roughly 2x and the S&P 500 by roughly 50%. Thankfully, employee commitment remained strong throughout.

While Zarko is quick to point out that most of the credit goes to his employees, he's also candid about what Vistage Florida offered him that no other organization could.

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF LOOKING INWARD

MJW Consolidated stems from a family business that was founded in 1917. By the time Zarko took over, it was an established, respected company—but one in need of profound transformation if it was to keep up with the increasing pace of changes in the marketplace. New systems. New culture. And a new kind of leadership.

As an accomplished engineer, Zarko was trained to find the right answers no matter how challenging the problem. But overhauling a company isn't a math problem; it's a people problem. And the only place he found real-world insights into leading people through change was in a room full of CEOs that knew nothing about construction.

"There's no real school to teach you that kind of stuff. Specifically not for the company you're running," says Zarko.

The peer group gave him what his own industry couldn't, pattern recognition across completely different businesses, applied to the same fundamental challenges: hiring, culture, decision-making, accountability.

WHAT ACTUALLY SHIFTED

Zarko describes his early Vistage Florida experience honestly: he was defensive. Challenged in group sessions, he dug in. Over time, something changed. He stopped protecting his position and started interrogating it.

"You leave your pride at the door after a while. And then you want the challenge."

That shift, from defensiveness to intellectual confidence, is what he points to when asked how his leadership changed. His team noticed. The word he uses is conviction: the ability to make a call, stand behind it, and bring people with you.

It also unlocked something he didn't expect. As an engineer, the analytical side of his brain had always run the show. Vistage Florida, over time, helped him access the other side—emotional intelligence, empathy, the ability to lead people, not just processes. He now mentors his own team the same way.

At 15 years in, Zarko is thinking about succession. Three to five years from retirement, he's widening the org chart and building the leadership pipeline, topics he works through, still, in his peer group.

His company has come a long way from the day his predecessor told him Vistage Florida would do him good. Turns out, he was right.

- 667% company value growth over 15 years, credited in part to peer-driven leadership development through Vistage Florida
- Peer advisory filled a gap no internal resource could, Zarko gained cross-industry pattern recognition on hiring, culture, and decision-making from CEOs outside his field
- Leadership transformation after Vistage Florida challenged Zarko to move beyond his engineering mindset, leaning into emotional intelligence and the ability to guide people through a cultural overhaul

He didn't know what Vistage Florida was. Now he can't imagine leading without it.

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