VISTAGE
FLORIDA

THE $1.8B EDGE: HOW VISTAGE FLORIDA TURNED ONE CEO'S GUT CHECKS INTO INSTITUTIONAL DISCIPLINE

When a rising entrepreneur joined a confidential C-suite peer group in Chicago in 1993, his family's core business was doing $124 million in revenue. Three decades later, after a journey that continued in Florida, it has grown into a $1.8 billion international operation—a seismic growth trajectory driven by a room most people will never see.

Steve Dehmlow

Chairman, Global Specialty Distribution and Manufacturing

Vistage Member since 1993

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Isolation scales faster than revenue.** As the business grew from **$124M to $1.8B,** the cost of making decisions alone increased significantly.
- **The highest ROI came from mistakes avoided.** Peer-tested decisions avoided a **$2M** acquisition overpayment and contributed to **$30M** in added exit value through the spinoff of a business division.
- **Confidentiality changed the quality of decisions.** A trusted peer environment enabled early discussion of acquisitions, capital risk, and succession.
- **Peer challenge sharpened judgment.** Decisions improved through assumption testing by experienced CEOs, not prescriptive advice.
- **Consistency drove long-term results.** Ongoing accountability compounded into market leadership and 60%+ niche share.
- **Leadership continuity required intentional design.** Multi-level peer advisory participation enabled an orderly transition to next-generation leadership.
- **Perspective reduced leadership load.** Time invested in peer advisory translated into faster decisions and clearer priorities.

BEFORE VISTAGE VS. WITH VISTAGE

Before Vistage	With Vistage
• Decisions made in isolation • Limited challenge to assumptions • High risk of silent, compounding mistakes • Anxiety and sleepless nights	• Decisions pressure-tested by experienced peers • Structured issue processing • Accountability that drives follow-through • Good night's sleep with confidence grounded in perspective

THE PROBLEM NO ONE TALKS ABOUT AT THE TOP

Rare Air, Zero Oxygen

Most leaders do not fail because they lack intelligence or effort.

They struggle because they are forced to make high-stakes decisions in isolation with a limited perspective.

Steve Dehmlow's experience illustrates what happens when isolation is replaced with confidential peer accountability and disciplined issue processing. This is not a story about overnight success. It is a story about compounding better decisions over decades and the measurable outcomes that followed.

THE STARTING POINT: RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT A SAFETY NET

When Steve joined Vistage in 1993, he was assuming full responsibility for a third-generation family business.

At the time:

- Combined revenues across multiple businesses were approximately **$124M**
- The core composites distribution business generated roughly **$95M**
- Ownership and leadership accountability were shifting rapidly

"I went from having experience around me to being totally responsible. I knew I needed to add to my collective wisdom."

WHY SMART CEOS LOOK FOR A CONFIDENTIAL SANDBOX

As the business expanded, Steve faced acquisition decisions with eight-figure implications, capital and balance sheet risk, succession planning across generations, and increasing geographic complexity.

He evaluated other peer organizations, but chose Vistage because it offered something rare and unique. A confidential environment where nothing leaves the room. A sandbox where decisions could be pressure-tested before becoming irreversible. A group of non-competing CEOs who understood what it means to sign the final check.

Through peer challenge and Chair facilitation:

- Transaction strategy improved, contributing to an estimated **$30M** increase in exit value from a partial spinoff.
- Negotiation discipline reduced the acquisition purchase price by approximately **$2M**
- Financial dashboards and balance sheet discipline became operating standards

"These were decisions I would not have made on my own, and they paid off immediately."

THE COMPOUNDING EFFECT OF BETTER DECISIONS

Ongoing peer challenge and Chair facilitation refined how the business was operated. And over time, disciplined decision-making compounded.

Business results included:

- Scaling the core distribution business from approximately **$124M to $1.8B**
- Achieving **60%+ market share** in a specialized industry niche
- Consolidating a fragmented market through disciplined roll-up acquisitions
- Establishing a reputation as a preferred acquirer known for fairness and integration
- Successfully exited a specialty manufacturing business at approximately **$150M**

GLOBAL FOOTPRINT TODAY

What began as a domestic operation now spans multiple regions.

- **44 locations** across the United States and Canada
- Expansion into **Mexico** through acquisitions
- Manufacturing operations in **Italy**
- Distribution operations in **England,** serving Europe and the Middle East

This level of complexity required a perspective beyond internal experience.

Curious what other Florida C-suite executives are discussing behind closed doors?

Vistage Florida groups meet monthly, in strict confidence.

FROM FOUNDER-LED TO FUTURE-READY

At one point, six to seven leaders within Steve's organization were participating in Vistage programs. This included the CEO, business unit leaders, and next-generation family executives. Over time, this created shared language, shared discipline, and shared expectations.

Today:

- Steve serves as non-executive Chairman
- The next CEO, also a Vistage member, is actively leading
- Succession is planned and operational, not reactive

"Vistage helped us think beyond the founder. That is not easy to do when you are in it every day."

THE HUMAN SIDE OF ROI

Ask Steve what changed for him personally, and he does not talk about ego or accolades. He talks about making fewer, higher-quality decisions. He talks about sleeping better. He talks about being more disciplined with his time. He talks about feeling less alone when decisions carried real weight.

"There were plenty of mornings I did not think I had time for the meeting. I was always glad I went."

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR FLORIDA CEOS

Steve's experience reflects what many seasoned execs discover, from the Windy City to the Sunshine State.

You do not join a peer advisory because you are failing. You join because the cost of a wrong decision is too high.

Vistage Florida exists for C-suite executives who want real challenge, strict confidentiality, and perspective before decisions are locked in.

This is not therapy.
And it is not networking.

It is a decision-making environment for leaders whose choices affect hundreds or thousands of people.

ABOUT VISTAGE FLORIDA

Vistage Florida brings together CEOs and senior executives into confidential peer advisory groups led by experienced Chairs.

With more than 45,000 members worldwide, Vistage offers perspective without agenda and accountability without hierarchy.

READY TO HONE YOUR EDGE?

If you are navigating growth, acquisitions, succession, or complexity, and carrying decisions alone feels increasingly risky, Vistage Florida offers a place to pressure-test your thinking before the stakes rise further.