

INTERVIEW:

How Vistage Florida Peer Advisory Helped David Gussack Build a Business—and a Life.



David Gussack can still tell you exactly where he was sitting ten years ago when he heard the name Vistage Florida for the first time.

Not everyone can say that about the moment their life changed. But David can. He was at lunch with two trusted friends, navigating a major transition in both business and life. As his parents prepared to retire from the family business and his own responsibilities expanded, the conversation turned to a challenge many leaders face: who do you turn to when you're the one expected to have the answers?

There's a group of people, they told him. CEOs, Presidents, and business owners who understood what it felt like to be exactly where he was.

He said yes before the meal was over.

FROM FAMILY BUSINESS TO FLYING SOLO

David grew up in the family business. Exotech, a Florida-based company that processes and recycles exotic metals used in Aerospace, Electronic, and Power Generation industries, was built by his parents. For years, the three of them operated as an informal board, a built-



Who is:

David Gussack
President of Exotech

David leads Exotech, a Florida-based company recycling rare metals critical to the aerospace and power generation industries.

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in support system for every major decision. Then his parents began the process of retirement.

Over time, David found himself leading the company with less access to the built-in sounding board he'd relied on for years. Legal, financial, and strategic decisions rested on his shoulders, requiring him to expand his perspective and confidence as a leader. Add to that, his wife was pregnant with their first child. Everything was happening at once, and the final call was now his.

"I was overwhelmed by having to make decisions that, truthfully, I was not prepared or educated or knowledgeable enough to be making."

Vistage Florida connected him with eighteen CEOs from different industries who could challenge, advise, and support him.

WHAT HIS WIFE SAW

Ask David about the impact of Vistage Florida and he'll tell you something unexpected: his biggest advocate isn't a fellow CEO. It's his wife, Jessica.

She sees it every month, he says. She sees the excitement he brings to meeting days. She knows not to schedule anything that conflicts with Vistage Florida's events. She's watched him move heaven and earth to be there. And more than anything, she's watched him change.

The stress that used to follow him home doesn't anymore. He now handles difficult decisions with confidence and perspective. His team has noticed it too. When geopolitical pressures hit, when HR crises land, when legal issues surface, David takes a breath and focuses on next steps. No emotional spiral or dramatic reaction. Just resolve.

Jessica has become so convinced of what Vistage Florida has done for her husband that she's personally recruited members into his group. She told a friend at dinner one night that her husband needed to join Vistage Florida. Five years later, he's still in the group.

"She's seen firsthand how Vistage Florida has changed our company over the years."

THE HARDEST DECISION HE'S EVER MADE

Some decisions are business decisions. And some decisions are personal. During COVID, David had to make one that was both. He let go of two people who had been with Exotech since the beginning. People who had even been at his wedding.

He knew what needed to be done. The group had helped him see it. But knowing and doing are different things entirely.

He worked through it in group sessions, in one-to-ones with his chair Tom Evangelista, in conversations with members outside of meetings, role-playing scenarios, refining his approach, and ensuring he handled a difficult situation with clarity and respect. The professional relationship ended, but the friendship didn't.

"Had I not had the Vistage Florida group and Tom to work through that with, I don't know that I would have made those decisions. I probably would not have."

HOW DAVID MEASURES SUCCESS

David is straightforward about something most presidents and CEOs won't say out loud: right now, he's not trying to build a company to sell. *"Money and profit is one hundred percent not our goal,"* he says. For him, success looks like a remote Wednesday, and lunch with his wife. A five-week road trip with his kids one year, and a two-month road trip the next.

When he first took the reins at Exotech, he could barely step away for a few days. Today he can take his family on a two-month road trip, check in briefly, and trust that everything is handled. That's not luck. That's ten years of deliberate decisions about who to hire, how to lead, and how to build a team that doesn't need you in the room for every answer. His Vistage group helped him make many of those calls.

"When do you have the opportunity to have eighteen CEOs stop everything they're doing in their world to listen to you?"

If you think you're too busy for that kind of room, David would tell you something he's heard more than once inside it: You probably need it more than anyone.

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