

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

From Startup Grind to Strategic Vision: How Vistage Florida Helped Austin Russo Grow His Business 10x



Key Takeaways:

- Austin Russo has helped his company, StyleCraft, achieve 10x revenue growth since joining Vistage Florida
- One pivotal Vistage Florida group meeting saved him from a costly mistake that was months in the making
- From bottleneck to visionary, here's what shifted

Austin Russo walked into his Vistage Florida meeting thinking he had it figured out. The StyleCraft team spent months working on a minority deal, a way to take some chips off the table while keeping control of their business. Austin wasn't looking for permission, just wanted a gut check from his group.

The plan didn't survive the meeting.

"Within an hour, fellow Vistage Florida group members had uncovered many weaknesses in the plan."

Who is

Austin Russo

Co-Founder of StyleCraft

Austin co-founded StyleCraft, a professional grooming and beauty appliance company that was named the second fastest-growing manufacturing company in the United States by Inc. 5000 in 2022.

A newer member who ran a family office methodically challenged every assumption behind it. The covenants. The control provisions. The ways a minority partner could gradually shift leverage over time. Things Austin wouldn't have seen until it was too late.

The meeting wasn't comfortable, but it was invaluable.

BUILDING SOMETHING WORTH PROTECTING

StyleCraft designs and manufactures professional grooming appliances for barbers and hairstylists worldwide. Since joining Vistage Florida, revenue has grown 10x and EBITDA 7x. The team grew from 10 to 75, and StyleCraft earned a coveted spot on the Inc. 5000 as the second fastest-growing manufacturing company in the US in 2022.

"We come out with about a hundred new products a year. One of my favorite adages is move fast and break things. There's definitely some breaking things, but moving fast has been a huge edge for us."

That edge didn't come without costs. In the early years, Austin was working until 3am most nights. Everything crossed his desk. The company was growing but the ceiling was him. He knew it wasn't sustainable. He just didn't know how to change it.

THE ROOM THAT CHANGED THINGS

Austin heard about Vistage Florida twice in the same month. Once from a successful entrepreneur, once from a close friend who knew his business well.

"If one person I respect tells me something, I take notice. If two people I respect tell me the same thing, I really dig deeper."

He went to a Vistage Florida group meeting and got hooked. The idea of spending a full day away from the office felt unfathomable at the time. But he did it anyway.

His Vistage Chair, Georganne Goldblum, kept telling him the same thing: work on the business, not in it. Almost everything that changed traces back to something he heard, learned, or was challenged on in that room. Vistage Florida introduced him to EOS — the Entrepreneurial Operating System — which became, as he puts it, the company's Bible. The leadership team that didn't exist when he started now includes a CFO, a COO, a group vice president, and a CTO.

THE LEADER HE BECAME

"Ferocious yet patient."

That's how Austin describes his leadership style today. He pushes hard and doesn't let up, but he's learned to move at the speed the business and the people in it can absorb.

"None of this happened alone. Vistage, my business partner, and our leadership team all carried this transformation together. A few of our key team members are now in Vistage Key groups themselves, which says everything about how far the ripple effects go."

He has a four-year-old son and a daughter on the way. The 3am work nights are behind him.

THE ADVICE HE'D GIVE

"One day a month. No emails, no fires. In a room of peers who will be honest and tell you the truth, even if you don't want to hear it. The investment is real, but the return is bigger."

He'd know. A single meeting once saved him from a decision he'd spent months building toward. And that was just one afternoon.

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