

VISTAGE

Member Stories

Michael Vinje, Principal and
Cofounder
Trissential
Wayzata, Minn.

At a glance

Role: Principal and cofounder
Industry: Management and IT consulting
Employees: 150+
Vistage chair: Don Kielley

Company background

Trissential is a management consulting firm specializing in business improvement and project implementation. The company of 160 employees also has practices for Enterprise Transformation, Change Leadership, Supply Chain Management, Portfolio/Program/Project Management, and JD Edwards (ERP software for small to midsize companies).

For the fifth consecutive year, Inc. magazine has named Trissential as one of the Fastest-Growing Private Companies in the US by including the company in its prized Inc. 5000 list.

Michael Vinje is a principal and cofounder of management consulting firm Trissential. The company gets its unconventional name from Trissential's unique business model, which is based on three essentials that form the points of a right triangle. When Vistage met with Michael at his office, he had a laminated copy of the triangle propped up on his desk. "I use this to share our



consulting approach with customers," he said. Michael described each essential of the model: Effective strategy; Efficient management and Exceptional execution. Ingeniously, the triangle symbolizes the linking of what he describes as these three essential areas of business.

To underscore the essential theme and competitive differentiator, Trissential's consultants are even referred to as essentialists, for the value they bring to client companies. "They're more than consultants," he said, "They're essentialists."

Michael has worked with Minnesota Vistage chair, Don Kielley for several years, some of that time while Trissential traversed the recession of 2008-2009. They shouldered their way through those tough years and are stronger for it. Michael noted Vistage has been with them since the beginning when the company quickly went from zero to \$28 million.

Why Vistage? "The speakers are top notch," he exclaimed. "We needed help from the beginning," Michael shared, referring to his startup experiences with Trissential. The firm competes with consulting giants Deloitte and Accenture for consulting projects and staffing firms for execution work. That puts Trissential in the middle of these two extremes, or what he refers to as a Goldilocks market position. "Just right,"

referring to the company's size and capabilities.

Trissential's consulting revenue mix is approximately 65 percent IT projects and 35 percent business projects.

Michael has even lent his consulting expertise to others in his CEO group by joining several tiger teams, which are tasked to help other members navigate short-term turbulence in their businesses. He's played a significant role in his group's culture of focus and accountability.

Finding the right employees

Michael and his cofounder, Keith Korsi, brought several years of consulting experience to the fledging company in a perfect mesh of skills that complement each other. Michael said he consults, and Keith develops new business. Michael's an expert in project management and organizational improvement and has the string of certifications after his name to show for it. Keith loves finding and developing the right people to help grow the firm. He recognizes that training and motivating employees to operate at the highest levels is essential to succeed in the consulting arena.

Michael said that finding the right talent is mission critical for the firm. The company goes to great lengths—including an assessment—to make sure would-be employees fit their unique culture. Vistage chair Don Kielley introduced Michael to a profiling tool the company adopted to help Trissential hone in on employees with the right mix of skills, experience and attitude.

Trissential tends to hire workers, especially consultants, that have been “road-tested.” Their people often have 20 years experience and more. That also explains why Trissential's benefits costs run higher than a company with a more age-

stratified employee base. But it's also the experienced consultants that Trissential brings to a project that makes them a top choice for many clients—such as MoneyGram and Land-O-Lakes.

Deeply experienced consultants are also able to crank out white papers and thought leader articles with impressive regularity—a tactic Trissential uses to showcase its technical and management prowess.

A culture focused on delivering value to clients

Both founders take pride in the firm's culture. They're clearly focused on providing irreplaceable value to their clients and creating a place where everyone wants to work. By many measures, the strategy seems to be paying off. Trissential has a trophy case that could be the envy of any aspiring Olympian, but these trophies and plaques are etched with awards from Inc. Magazine, The Business Journal, Tekne, Minnesota Business and the StarTribune. Most recognize the firm for the best place to work, fastest-growing company, and most engaged workplace.

Through his experiences with Vistage, Michael has taken a lot from the monthly meetings with fellow CEOs and his one-on-ones with Don. Through discussions with Don and the urging of his peer group, Michael adopted the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) to drive the day-to-day operations of the company. Widely used by Vistage member companies, the EOS roadmap is described in detail in the book *Traction*, by author and Vistage speaker Gino Wickman. This book has become the business anthem for thousands of small to midsize companies.

Michael uses a Traction scorecard and

management dashboard for measuring every aspect of the business; he carries it with him all day. His leadership team knows what they're signed up for on the scorecard—in fact, they have their copy. "Traction has provided the framework to help manage the company," Michael explained.

Vistage has also helped reinforce the value of cultivating an industrial-strength culture, a fact that has always been obvious to Michael. "Our core values come from the heart," he extolled. And he also knows that his employees look to him to set the standards. He shared his company's growth plans in which he translated into the slogan Vision 2020. It's an audacious goal to transform Trissential into a \$100 million dollar company with seven geographies and 24 anchor clients.

It appears that Trissential is already well on its way to hitting its Vision 2020 goals. Stay tuned. **V**