

VISTAGE

Member *Stories*

Mike Braun, Owner, Principal
Pivotal Advisors
Minneapolis

At a glance

Role: Owner principal

Industry: B2B Sales Management
Consulting

Employees: 1–25

Vistage chair: Jack Sell

Mike: “Vistage, without a doubt, has made things flow more smoothly. I get to bring great ideas back to the office and have even had a meeting where I brought my business partner, brother to the meeting as a guest just to get the feedback from the group on an issue I wanted to process.”

Mike Braun, owner, and co-founder of [Pivotal Advisors](#) is in the business of helping companies build healthy sales organizations. From his perspective, “healthy” translates into a company that is consistently growing while producing profits. And most of the sales team members are hitting their goals.

Mike should know. Before founding Pivotal Advisors in 2008 with brother Gary, he held several sales leadership positions at fast-growth companies where he learned how to move businesses through unpredictable dips and spikes in growth.



Over time, the brothers developed and refined a set of sales principles they call “Pivotal Performance Factors” that became the foundation and “secret sauce” for their consulting company.

With a group of 13 full- and part-time sales management consultants, Pivotal Advisors works with B2B companies \$10 million to \$300 million in revenue. “Most of our client companies are \$20 million to \$100 million,” says Mike. While Pivotal Advisors has clients across numerous industries, there is a concentration in manufacturing and technology companies. All the businesses they work with have invested in a sales team ranging from small to large, so the companies are anxious to optimize sales performance. Some of the firms have experienced explosive growth and have even been named to the list of Minnesota’s Fastest Growing companies.

Lately, Mike says larger companies have been coming to Pivotal Advisors asking for help. “We’re not marketing to these \$300 million companies intentionally,” he says. However, sometimes Pivotal Advisors will get contacted by a sales leader who had hired Mike or Gary while at a previous company.

“Most of our engagements start with an assessment of the company’s sales function and culture,” says Mike. “We talk to the CEO, sales leader, sales people, and supporting staff,” he says. The support people may include employees in contracts, operations, customer service and sales engineering. “We want to get a complete understanding of how everybody sees their situation,” he explains. “We look at current reporting and how the company is tracking and measuring.” Pivotal Advisors also examines financial processes and compensation systems.

The paid, in-depth assessment includes a close look at 24 specific sales management factors. “We have six broad categories and 24 sub-categories that we score companies on.” After the assessment, Pivotal Advisors typically works with the client company for an average of nine to 12 months to improve sales performance and predetermined metrics. Companies typically pay Pivotal Advisors \$3,000 to \$10,000 a month depending on their specific needs and the level of involvement. By the way, clients always see improvements in some measures, but behaviors first must change.

Mike likens Pivotal Advisors’ role to that of a fitness trainer. They meet with clients every week, assigning the sales team “workouts” to follow. “We help our customers stay with the program until they’re in better shape,” he says. The company also sells what it calls fractional sales management. Clients that are between sales leaders, cannot afford or do not need a full-time sales manager can contract for a part-time sales manager who will organize and set up a firm’s sales function and even help hire a permanent sales leader.

Joining Vistage Minnesota Champions

Mike’s been a raving fan of Vistage for eight years, about the same time that he and Gary hung out the company’s first sign in 2008. In fact, Mike is so bullish on his Vistage experience that he volunteered and was selected to become one of only 12 Vistage Minnesota Champions.

Minnesota Champions have been selected from among the 350 local Vistage members to become trusted advisors to members and grow Vistage membership. In addition to Mike and his sales management expertise, they include experts in inbound marketing, leadership assessment and development, IT services, ERP implementation, cyber security, health, safety and environmental compliance, construction, and wealth management.

“The real intent behind the Champions program is how do we help members leverage the expertise and experience of the more than 300 Minnesota Vistage members in other groups,” Mike says.

Vistage Chair Jack Sell Keeps His Group Members “Grounded”

Vistage chair Jack Sell leads Mike’s regular Vistage group. “For me, Vistage has been invaluable. We’re a small company, so I don’t have a board,” Mike says. He’s learned a lot from the other business leaders in Jack’s group. “You can bring them anything. They’re smart people that have grown successful businesses, and to be able to bring an issue or question to the table has been super helpful in helping me navigate the startup.”

His Vistage group has helped Mike climb through a weak economy in 2008 and has served as a sounding board on many issues. “They were my

market research group and my coach,” he shares. But, what he likes the most is the group’s, sometimes brutal honesty. “If you have a bad idea, they’ll tell you it’s a bad idea!”

Mike also credits his Vistage group for helping him realize his company wasn’t targeting the right audience segment or persona when he and Gary launched his business. He initially focused on company sales managers, but they were too close to the problem to recognize they had one. Plus, Pivotal Advisors was expensive. The company’s breakthrough came when his Vistage group encouraged him to target the business owner or CEO instead of sales managers. His group also urged him to move away from time and material billing to flat-fee pricing.

“The move to flat-fee pricing was a huge change. That’s what started helping us move in the right direction and bring in more consultants.”

Jack Sell keeps Mike and his other Vistage group members grounded in their meetings. “He’ll say something like, ‘That’s a superb idea, but how are you going to get that done? Where is the time in the day to do that one? Who’s going to do that?’” Mike says, “Jack is my founding “board” who keeps me on a good path and grounded path.”

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Mike’s been in Vistage longer than his company’s been operating, and he has no plans to change that course. **V**