

# VISTAGE

## Member *Stories*

---

Todd Leyse, CEO  
Adam's Pest Control, Inc.  
Minneapolis

### *At a glance*

**Role:** CEO

**Industry:** Pest Control

**Employees:** 76–150

**Vistage chair:** Frank Solomon

**Todd:** *“Frank [my Vistage chair] makes sure that I'm setting goals and he's periodically applying gentle pressure to make sure I'm working towards those goals.”*

---

In an economic environment where some companies are challenged to string three consecutive growth years together, family-owned [Adam's Pest Control](#) has grown its business every year for the past 46 years. Indeed, one could say the company built its business by putting bugs and other sketchy creatures "out of business."

That 46 consecutive years of growth spanning multiple recessions and economic speed bumps, “Is something we're kind of proud of,” says CEO Todd Leyse, whose father started the company with one other partner. Over a 20-year period, Adam's Pest Control has shot from 25 employees to 95.

When Vistage spoke to Todd, he was on the road, returning from one of his frequent trips to Adam's Pest Control's satellite operation in Nisswa,



Minn., an acquisition he made in 2009. It's difficult to stand out in the pest control industry, with some 175 competitors in Minnesota alone. Todd estimates his company ranks in the top five in the state—possibly number one in the Twin Cities—in market share and revenue.

The company differentiates itself through in-depth knowledge and a full gamut of capabilities. Says Todd, “We're full service, in that we can do wildlife, goose control, mosquitoes, and more. We can pretty much handle everything.” Sure, the company does take on anything, but Todd says he has to back it up with excellent service. The company's techs and line employees receive extensive training, much of it led by a board-certified entomologist with a Ph.D.

Over time, Todd has experimented with a range of marketing tactics, including pay-per-click advertising and TV spots. “It used to be pretty easy. They found us in the Yellow Pages,” he says. Back when Yellow Pages advertising was the bulwark of marketing strategies, the most

innovative tactic was creating a company name that appeared before the competitions' in the famed book. He ticks off a handful of companies started by former Adam's Pest Control employees: Abba, Abracadabra, Abate, Accurate, Action, and Acorn.

"Marketing has become more complicated as we've grown," observes Todd. Today the company spends money on image advertising, branding and its website. Articles on the website's blog educate prospects on pest control and help drive visitors to the site. Additionally, with nearly 50 years of history behind it, Adam's Pest Control has grown through referrals and word-of-mouth, still a top marketing tactic for any business.

### **Training Helps Adam's Stand Alone**

He says the company's success over the years has also come from a culture that cares deeply about its employees. Indeed, enough care to spend an average of 50–60 hours a year to train his employees. Few competitors come close to that much training. "When we hire new employees, we have to train them all to bring them up to our standards."

Eighteen months ago, Todd began working with Vistage and his chair Frank Solomon, in part to work on his professional development, but also to benefit the company. He had been thinking about joining Vistage for years, but when the company hit 100 employees, Todd realized he needed a peer group to help him navigate the journey to 150 or even 200 employees.

He says the processing of issues in his Vistage peer group has already paid dividends with lessons learned from other senior leaders. "I enjoy processing issues of others because I'm constantly trying to learn and challenge my brain about what

I would do in that situation. And if it ever came up in the future I would know how to handle it," he says.

### **Vistage and Chair Frank Solomon Challenge Todd and His Company**

Todd meets with Frank, monthly in one-on-one meetings, or sometimes along with two or three other CEOs. "Frank makes sure that I'm setting goals and he's periodically applying gentle pressure to make sure I'm working towards those goals," Todd says. The guest speakers featured at his Vistage monthly meetings are another source of inspiration for Todd. He cites a recent presentation by Luke Carlson, CEO of Discover Strength, and fellow Vistage member, speak about the long-term benefits of strength training. The take away from a Vistage meeting is "a mix of business and personal development ideas," shares Todd.

He often brings other Adam's employees to learn directly from the guest speakers, something he didn't know was possible when he joined.

Todd also had high praise for Vistage's annual All City event, which features acclaimed economist Brian Beaulieu, who captivates audiences with his accurate macroeconomic predictions. In fact, Todd says, "I've made business decisions based on his predictions, so I'm curious about what he'll predict next."

Like some companies, Todd's business challenges encompass finding talent. "But it's not unique to us," he says. "We've had a couple of speakers talk about HR related issues, so I think that's helpful to us." Todd and his leadership team tend to work "on the business" instead of "in" the business during the offseason, which runs from October through the end of March. During a recent

offseason, Todd's team dived into the book "Scaling Up." That study encouraged the company to implement a cash management program. Now his team is reading "Traction" and considering implementing the Entrepreneurial Operating System, like so many of his fellow members.

Vistage chair Frank Solomon also recommended Todd bring in a small Six Sigma consulting company after the company's leadership team devoured a book on the same topic. A Six Sigma project led to the company better tracking and controlling contract cancellations. Before the new process put in place to retain customers, "We would just accept it and say, 'thanks for your business.'" Todd says, "We worked on how can we try to save these customers. If they were moving could we resell them at their new house or could we resell the new homeowners at their current home? If there was a service issue, could we address it as opposed to just canceling the service and giving up?"

The result of the new customer retention process: "We saved \$100,000 in contract cancels over the course of 2016, and that's significant!" says, Todd. He points to Vistage as the catalyst that's helping grow his company with this idea, and the many more that are sure to come. **V**