

VISTAGE

Member *Stories*

Tom Schoen, President
BTM Global
Minneapolis

At a glance

Role: *President*

Industry: *IT Services and Software*

Employees: *51–100*

Vistage chair: *Clayton Schwerin*

Tom: *“I’ve gained so much from the perspectives and ideas of Vistage members and speakers. They’ve shaped how I view critical business decisions and challenges, and have helped inform my own decision-making for the better.”*

[BTM Global](#) has only been around since 2004, but it’s on a steady trajectory led by Tom Schoen, company president. During a recent tour of BTM Global, Tom explained the company’s roots and keys to its success.

Founded by Andy Huynh, a former software architect at Retek in Minneapolis (now Oracle Retail), BTM Global provides system integration, development services, support and strategic technology planning for retailers around the world. Most of us know of or have an experience with an enterprise technology implementation that went horribly wrong, and Andy understood that service and foresight are just as important to the success of a technology project as technical expertise.



To lead the company during the critical start-up years, Andy turned to Tom, a former Retek colleague and fellow engineer. At first, Tom wasn’t sure if he wanted to take on the newly created job of president, but he agreed to come aboard and stay for a few months or perhaps a year at most.

Today, Tom is still at BTM Global—and he hasn’t looked back. Its diverse teams of experts now span two continents and serve retail clients ranging from small regional chains to the world’s most recognized brands.

Vistage: From Skepticism to Believer

Early on in his tenure as president, Tom considered joining a business leadership peer group but had been turned off by past experiences with groups that didn’t feel genuine, authentic or even challenging.

So when he heard about Vistage from a friend, he did his homework first. After learning about its mission and goals, he joined and has since worked with two leaders: John Sundet, who later retired, and current Chair Clayton Schwerin.

Tom likes working with Clayton because, “He has an engineering background—and he’s a lot like me. I think the world of Clayton,” he notes.

Tom also appreciates the diversity of opinions and ideas that come from other senior leaders in his group, which is made up of approximately 15 other CEOs and presidents. “I already know a lot of people who think like me, so I want to hear from other points of view,” he explains. “Vistage gives me the opportunity to hear new angles and advice in areas where I don’t have all the answers.” He finds it especially valuable to bring a challenge or situation to the peer group and get their feedback or advice.

He adds, “I’ve been able to make better decisions based on the ideas and perspectives from other members in my group. I also take away a lot from the Vistage speakers, including one who taught us how to build consensus and get everyone on the same page within your company.”

Vistage has provided value beyond Tom’s work with BTM Global, as well. For instance, Tom and Andy have founded Kids Promise, a nonprofit organization that provides housing, education, and other lasting solutions to Vietnamese children living in poverty. Tom was able to draw from the experience of a fellow group member who had also set up a nonprofit organization.

The Importance of Strong Relationships

It’s obvious that Tom cares deeply for people and how companies treat them. That passion for respect and kindness trickles down to all his employees. “You can’t fake what we have here,” he says, referring to several online videos where employees talk about why they like working at BTM. “We work hard to support our employees and help

them grow. Our culture is a diverse one, so transparency, openness to new ideas, respect and honesty are critical.”

He recalls a conversation he had with his father. “My dad taught me that no matter how good you are, there is always room for improvement,” he says. “You can’t rest on your laurels because you don’t know it all.”

Tom most enjoys Vistage’s opportunity to share ideas and listen in an environment that is free of hidden agendas and politics. “It’s an entirely safe environment and I love the debate!” he says. **V**