

Vistage Member and
CEO of TalenTrust,

Kathleen Quinn Votaw

Interviewed by Neil Anderson, Fractional CMO at Chief Outsiders

Kathleen, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

My father was a poor Irish immigrant with a sixth-grade education and married my wonderful mom when he came to this country. Together they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, worked at Traveler's and Aetna Insurance companies in Hartford, CT and got all five of us successfully through college.

In 1985 when I was a sophomore in college, Kelly Services hired me into their Hartford, CT branch. After graduating, I went to work in Boston at a small boutique firm. I started as receptionist and worked my way up the ranks. When Olsten Staffing acquired us, I was running the business for all of New England.

My husband and I moved to Colorado in 1998. At the time, I was managing the west coast operation for CDI Corp. and finding that large companies often "get in your way." I'm the type of person that if you tell me "no," I'm going to figure out how to get to "yes." I remember reading something from James Cameron who said, "Set your goals high. If you say you're going to the moon, you might actually get at least halfway there." I think sometimes people are simply afraid and they end up settling for mediocrity – and that's just not who I am.

When did you start your company TalenTrust?

I founded TalenTrust in 2003 after parting ways with CDI. After several years of growing the CDI business, I realized I just didn't fit. I knew then that I needed to start my own business.

Was it easy street? Or was it a rocky road?

Well, from 2003 – 2009 it was pretty smooth. The economy was cooperating and I had sufficient business coming in. But, it was a bit of a "lifestyle company" (designed for income rather than growth). Then in 2009, it felt like I was caught in a rip tide and I wondered if I would even survive. But that lasted just one year and from 2010 to 2015 I grew my business 15-fold.

When did you join Vistage?

I joined Vistage in 2008, not long before the bottom fell out of the economy.

What motivated you to join Vistage?

While I had run major divisions of large companies, I had never led an entire organization myself. I was lucky to join Chief Executive Group 576. Jean Maxwell is my chair. There were some expert, sage business owners in the group who became great mentors for me. I learned a ton about fiscal management.

That must have been an interesting time for you, as a woman running your own business.

Oh my goodness, "interesting" doesn't begin to describe it! You know, Catalyst.org has done research that says fewer than 2% of women-owned businesses ever achieve \$1M or more. That means that 98% just become lifestyle companies. And here I was, parachuted into a group of people who ran \$10M to \$100M companies. It changed my life!

How did it change your life?

In 2009 when the recession was crushing us, I nearly quit Vistage as I needed to pinch every penny possible. Then, one of my Vistage member peers stepped up and actually paid my dues for a year so that I could stay with the group and continue to learn. He did it anonymously and I didn't learn who it was until several years later. But, that tells you a lot about the kind of people that make up Vistage.

Are there other ways your Vistage experience has helped you with your business?

My Vistage peers have helped me understand the value I add in so many ways. My confidence has grown tremendously. I have accumulated so much more knowledge because Vistage is a knowledge sharing community. Participating in a Vistage peer advisory group teaches you humility but then brings your education to another level. As a result, the knowledge I bring to my customers is far better than it would ever have been.

Has your Vistage experience been entirely local to Denver?

I have met Vistage members and attended Vistage events all around the country. I've met, worked with, and learned from some great business leaders including Art Saxby, the CEO of your organization, Chief Outsiders; Brian Beaulieu, CEO of ITR Economics; and many others. And those experiences have helped me grow my business across all of North America. I have gained great mentors and relationships through Vistage.

How has your business strategy evolved over the time you have been a Vistage member?

We do things differently, in a holistic approach. We do a gap analysis, trying to understand what our prospective customers' unique people puzzle is for them. We then look at our services to design a plan for each customer focused on cultural alignment, competency based interview training, assessment tools, evaluations of systems and processes, onboarding, compensation analysis and strategic recruitment. We focus on more than just recruiting experience and skill set. We examine culture and employment brand. This is another dimension to getting the right organization in place to succeed at the highest possible levels. We help our clients build an internal culture that supports their brand, their employees and their customers.

You are a busy woman. I know you spend a lot of time with Vistage. How do you measure your return on that investment?

We actually track lead source here at TalenTrust. We have had more than 175 unique referrals over the years, meaning that 175 unique people have recommended us to a friend or colleague and have become TalenTrust customers. One prominent Vistage speaker referred more business to us just last year than our total revenue earned in our entire first year of business. Vistage has been a catalyst in getting these relationships and connections moving. The investment in Vistage is not trivial but the gains are significant and we measure it in many ways. We measure it in the resources we bring to our customers; we measure it in the knowledge we extract from the Vistage community; we measure it in our own organizational and corporate growth; and of course we measure it in dollars and cents.

How big is TalenTrust, what regions do you serve?

We operate throughout North America. We served 58 customers last year. Currently we have about 20 employees in 3 states and we operate as a virtual remote community that works through collaborative office space.

Thanks for sharing your Vistage experience with us today Kathleen.

You're welcome; my pleasure.

**About Kathleen Quinn Votaw***CEO, TalenTrust*

After nearly two decades in the industry, Kathleen Quinn Votaw determined that traditional staffing/recruiting models weren't working, especially for rapidly growing companies. She vowed to disrupt the status quo by revolutionizing how companies find, keep, and grow great people. TalenTrust, which achieved 300% revenue growth over the past three years and was named to the Inc. 5000 list for high-growth companies in 2015 and 2016, is a testament to both the need for change and Kathleen's industry leadership. Kathleen is the author of *Solve the People Puzzle*, writes a published monthly column, and speaks frequently. She has won numerous honors and awards and served on several boards.

**About Neil Anderson***CMO, Chief Outsiders*

In a career which includes executive management roles with early stage startups, mid-sized, privately held companies, and large, publicly-traded corporations, Anderson has spent the last quarter century infusing the interrelated, seminal elements of business strategy and marketing. Before joining Chief Outsiders, Anderson served as Vice President, Global Services at Spirent Communications PLC, a test equipment manufacturer publicly traded on the London Stock Exchange. Anderson has shepherded companies into the digital age; transforming insightssoftware.com's Hubble® marketing function from traditional outbound to a modern, digital marketing inbound marketing machine. There, he also established the company's "content factory" and the "Hubbleology" thought leadership content platform.