

Vistage Member, President and
CEO of Seattle Fish Company

James Iacino

Interviewed by Neil Anderson, Fractional CMO at Chief Outsiders

James, tell us a little bit about yourself.

I was born and raised in Colorado. I went to Colorado State University and received my undergrad degree in Political Science and then did my MBA soon after that. I grew up in the business and have been working at the company since the age of 12--cutting the fish, working the docks and driving the trucks. After graduating from my MBA program, I first started out purchasing, then doing sales, moving up to sales management and then to Director of Sales.

I am now the third generation owner, President and CEO of Seattle Fish Company founded by my grandfather in 1918 here in Denver, Colorado. We are the top seafood wholesale distribution operation in the region. We source seafood from around the world to provide to restaurants and to grocers throughout the Rocky Mountain region. We receive, process and package all of the goods here locally in Denver.

I have been all over the world to learn about the different fisheries we source from. Volume-wise we get most of our product from Chile, Norway and Alaska but we source fish globally. Though I travel extensively for work, travel is also a passion for my wife and me. I also have a 3-month old son at home and he has already been to Arizona and Washington D.C.

When did you become CEO?

I took over as CEO of the company 7 years ago after working full time for 4 years with my father as CEO.

Can you tell us a little bit more about Seattle Fish Company?

Seattle Fish Company has been part of the Colorado community for 99 years and our relationships with our customers have been for multiple years. We also have a great group of employees – a number of which have been here for decades.

We have invested in transparency and sustainability and try to get lots of educational information to chefs and grocers, so that ultimately we can get more information to the consumer. We pride ourselves on taking the lead in the local education of global sustainability. We do trainings with wait staffs at restaurants so that the information on sustainability can be passed to the consumer.

How much Seafood is sold in Colorado?

~12 million pounds of fresh and frozen seafood processed and distributed throughout Colorado last year.

Vistage Experience

How did you find Vistage?

A friend of mine who is a CEO of an oil and gas company recommended the organization. He asked, “Are you looking for ways to improve your business? How to more efficiently run your business? How to be a great leader? Then you need to get involved with Vistage.” He went on to say, “This is a great space for CEOs to get development coaching and to have a board of peers to bring ideas for improving your skills as a CEO.” This was very appealing to me as a young CEO who is always looking for opportunities to improve.

How long have you been a member?

I have been a member for five years now. I am one of the more senior members in the group and half of the group is newer members. I think this has been a benefit to have new members because you are exposed to different businesses of different sizes and you are helping people throughout the process.

What are the top values you have seen coming from Vistage?

Ultimately, you get a forum and an opportunity to connect with peers from different industries to bounce ideas off of. You have a safe place to question strategies, challenges and big ideas. Overall, it is a great place to get advice and feedback before bringing the idea back to the company.

The second value would definitely be the personal relationship I have with the chair. Lisa Rogge has been my chair for my entire time with Vistage. The one-to-one coaching I get from her every month has been invaluable. Each meeting we sit down for an hour and a half and dig into what issue or big idea I am working on that month. She is helpful in holding me accountable, bringing me resources, ideas and opportunities to continue to grow as a CEO.

Has your business experienced growth?

Since joining Vistage, we have more than doubled our revenue in the last six years. Profits are up 700% and we have gone from 90 to 225 employees.

How has your strategy improved from feedback received from your Vistage peers?

I think it has helped me clarify strategy. Specifically bringing to the group a first outline of a plan of action or a new business venture to grow. I received great feedback that helped me focus on some core aspects of the business instead of getting distracted by other ventures. This ultimately helped me refine the strategy and drive more value for the company.

Have you felt a positive impact in your personal life?

Anytime you grow in a position you get more confidence. You start to be able to handle bigger issues and balance the business with your personal life. Vistage is also a place where I can bring up personal issues and hash out how it might impact the business and come up with solutions with a group of my peers.

How do you measure your return on that investment with Vistage?

If I didn't have Vistage, I wouldn't have seen the successes that we have had. I'm just sure of it because it really helped grow my understanding of how to work on developing my business versus working in the business day-to-day. It is beyond a great return. The growth we have seen in the last five years way outstrip the money and the time invested.

Could you talk a little about the Vistage Methodology?

You have a consistent routine each month where you'll have a speaker in the morning who is brought in to expose you to new and innovative ideas. This allows you to explore new ideas such as strategic planning, a new sales function or workplace culture. This allows you to really have exposure to new ideas that you can then bring back to your business.

The check-ins and group feedback give you an opportunity to focus on execution of the business. What are you doing? What did you say you were going to do? How did it work out? What didn't work? This is also a place where you can focus on issues with staff, revenue and execution.

What advice might you offer to someone considering joining Vistage?

If you would like to transform your business, become a better leader and start to focus on the business versus working in the business, then you need to join Vistage.

Have you had any experience attending Vistage Executive Summits?

Yes, I attend VES every year. It is an awesome event to see top speakers and have all the leaders from your region meet for a full-day session. It is an opportunity to bring in some incredible talent and to mingle with other leaders and to learn from each other. There are also some breakout sessions to interact with other Vistage colleagues and CEOs as well.

Thanks for sharing your Vistage experience with us today, James.

You're welcome.



About James Iacino

President and CEO, Seattle Fish Company

President and CEO James Iacino, grandson of Mose Iacino, founder of Seattle Fish Co., represents the third generation of the Iacino family in the seafood business. James oversees the largest seafood distribution operation in the region, including processing and distribution facilities in Denver and Kansas City, and a team that operates 24/7 to supply more than 15 million pounds of seafood annually throughout the Rocky Mountains. James has expanded the company significantly, growing distribution into the Western slopes of Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico. Seattle Fish Co. operates based on a vivid vision created by James in 2015. The vision defines why the company operates, to sustainably feed people to ensure the health of our communities and the planet. He's a recognized leader within the seafood industry, graduating from the National Fisheries Institute's Future Leaders program, and in the community, serving on the Cooking Matters Colorado Leadership Council, the Colorado Children's Chorale Board of Trustees, the ACE Scholarships Board of Advisors, and as the Founder and Chairman of the Green & Gold Foundation, benefitting Colorado State University.



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 insightsoftware.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.