



Vistage Helping Restaurant Grow From Local Chain to National Force

Dean Lavallee opened nine restaurants in the first 18 years he owned Park Avenue BBQ and Grill in Palm Beach County. With the help of his Vistage Florida Chair and Group, he's now looking forward to opening 400 restaurants over the next five years.

"My goal has always been to have 500 restaurants and now it's within reach," he says.

Lavallee initially met States Hines, who would become his Vistage Chair, at his first restaurant – "the toughest customer we've ever had. If we didn't perform, he let us know." By 1993, when his business had become large enough, Lavallee jumped at the chance to join Vistage.

"Vistage has been everything he told me – and more," Lavallee says. "They say it's lonely at the top – it's even lonelier in the restaurant business because we work nights, weekends and holidays – but my Vistage Group has given me access to businessmen with vast experience that made all the difference in the world."

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Dean Lavallee

Vistage Keeps Him on Track

Lavallee opened his first Park Avenue BBQs by taking over failing restaurants – a model that clearly isn't scalable to 100 new restaurants a year. After a frustrating two-year delay opening a new restaurant in Jupiter, he was tempted to revert back to the familiar when a failing restaurant in Fort Pierce became available. "I thought 'we can get that restaurant for nothing and make it work but that would have been letting the tail wag the dog,'" he said.

A meeting with his Vistage Chair put him back on track. "If it hadn't been for States and Vistage, I probably would have signed that Ft. Pierce lease," Lavallee recalls. "Sometimes he has to prod me with a fork until I admit I have an issue but when he finally got through, it was like he gave me a card to get out of jail free."

The Power of Perseverance

The first phase of new growth will focus on south Florida through Miami and north to Orlando then Jacksonville. His growth – and encouragement from fellow Vistage members – allows him to continually improve his product.

"Another thing I learned from Vistage is to have perseverance," he said. For instance, at first he couldn't buy pork that met his standards – never frozen, antibiotic- and hormone-free – but

now he has the buying power to have a truckload of premium pork delivered every four days.

Park Avenue's concept calls for a limited menu built around barbecued pork, perfectly prepared and served quickly by a well-compensated staff. Lavallee is counting on Vistage to continue guiding him as he develops a series of strategies that could catapult Park Avenue from a local chain to a national force. "We do pork better than anybody else in the industry – we can take over the world of pork the way Starbucks dominates coffee."

Vistage (TEC Florida's new name), formed in 1957 as The Executive Committee, is an international organization dedicated to increasing the effectiveness and enhancing the lives of Chief Executives. There are more than 15,000 members internationally and 70 Vistage groups in Florida, where Chief Executives meet in groups of 12 to 17 to give and receive feedback on business challenges and opportunities, share collective intellect and experience, and hear from outside experts.

Research shows that companies grow 2½ times faster after their CEO joins Vistage.

To learn more call Vistage Florida at 800-733-4832 or visit www.vistageflorida.com