

## 10 New Members: Vistage Chair Virginia Knudsen Shares How the Ideal Group Exercise Works

Signing on as a new Chair in January 2013, Virginia leveraged the Ideal Group exercise as an opportunity to develop strong member candidate referrals, create a sense of group ownership with existing members, and build a diverse representation of industry experience and perspective within the group. The result: More than 40 member referrals for candidates culminated into ten new member joins which filled her first CE group to capacity, further strengthened the membership of her KEY group, and ultimately positioned her to launch a second CE group.



**Virginia Knudsen**  
Vistage Chair since 2013  
Groups: 2 CE, 1 KEY

“The feedback I got from doing the Ideal Group exercise is that it made members feel like it was more about finding the right fit for them and solidifying their experience, as opposed to just helping me get new members for the group.”

President of Leaders Edge Consulting, Inc., a professional training and consulting firm, Virginia has served as Executive Vice President and COO of Bank of George; Senior Vice President and Region Manager for First National Bank of Nevada; and as Senior Vice President and Regional Sales and Service Manager at Nevada State Bank. She is a graduate of the Center for Creative Leadership – San Diego, and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Business and Master’s of Science degree in Organizational Leadership from Regis University. Virginia is the 2009 recipient of the Women of Distinction Award – Glass Ceiling from the National Association of Women Business Owners.



As a former member, Virginia applied insights from her own member experience to generate group ownership, presenting the premise of the exercise first in one-to-ones, and then adapting the exercise in the group setting by incorporating Empty Chair elements. "I just followed the Ideal Group exercise outline and Vistage model. First, I had the members break into groups to talk about the industries they wanted, and second, I asked who knew names of people in those industries. We started putting industries and names up on the board," says Virginia.

Virginia's members decided that their group was missing representation from the banking, accounting, manufacturing, gaming, and medical industries. Once they began suggesting people they knew in those industries, she assigned her members with the task of directly inviting their referrals to be guests at the next group meeting – a Speaker event. She followed up with her referring members through a reminder email and in their one-to-ones. This strategy effectively helped support the member ownership of the group and provided a warm introduction to new member candidates. Five of the candidate referrals were confirmed as guests for the very next meeting following the Ideal Group exercise, and the eventual ten new members included representation from the banking, accounting and medical fields. "Having potential candidates as guests at our meetings has always been really helpful," Virginia affirms.

When recently asked by another Chair if she's had a hard time getting her group to refer people, Virginia replied, "I don't because members are simply inviting candidates to come see a great speaker, to come see what they're doing. It's not that they're referring them to me for a hard sell on Vistage." Virginia's proactive approach to constant member development has

allowed her groups to be judicious in finding just the right fit for their group dynamic. Despite one of her CE groups now being at member capacity, its members continue to make referrals, directing the overflow of candidates to her second group for their consideration in availability. At the time Virginia was interviewed for this article, her group members had 17 new candidates confirmed to be guests at their next meeting.

## Virginia's Best Practices:

- **Build member ownership of the group.** Involve the members in all aspects of group development from the beginning, including establishing member referrals as an integral component of strengthening the group dynamic to the members' benefit. "Instead of me building my business, or Vistage building Vistage's business, it's more about, 'What do you guys [members] need?'" says Virginia. Provide accountability with members by asking them to make the first contact with their referrals and set them up for success with a group event they can invite candidates to. Finally, keep track of the task with follow-up emails and a progress update in the one-to-ones.
- **Tap into former members in good standing.** A strong strategy Virginia applies is to reach out to former members who previously left for economic or career changes during the recession, and who are presently reestablished in their professions. She leaned on the positive experience and value gained from their prior involvement to invite them back to a group. From this effort, two of Virginia's new members were also former members who fit the bill of the group's desired industry and expertise.

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