THE POWER OF PEERS:
How the Company You Keep Drives Leadership, Growth, & Success

By Leon Shapiro & Leo Bottary

“By working with their peers in a manner that’s highly selective, strategic, and structured, CEOs can transform garden-variety peer influence into something much more powerful—something we call peer advantage.”

– Leon Shapiro & Leo Bottary, The Power of Peers

Many CEOs report feeling “lonely at the top.” Not only do they need to make tough decisions about their organizations day in and day out, but often they do so in a vacuum—without input, or even much pushback, from others.

In THE POWER OF PEERS: How the Company You Keep Drives Leadership, Growth, & Success (Biblio motion, Inc.; hardcover; March 22, 2016) authors Leon Shapiro & Leo Bottary introduce “peer advantage” a concept that transcends peer influence. By harnessing the power of peers, CEOs and senior leaders of small to midsize organizations come together to gain fresh perspectives, solve problems, focus on opportunities and possibilities, and make decisions that accelerate the growth of their businesses.

THE POWER OF PEERS features stories of business leaders from a range of industries to explain how peer advisory groups can be beneficial to CEOs who suffer from a “lonely at the top” mentality. The authors illustrate this through the five essential factors for peer advantage:

1. Select the Right Peers: Nicole Mouskondis is co-CEO of Nicholas and Company, a $600-million food service distributor. Nicole’s experience working with peer advisory groups gave her (and the co-CEO) the courage to hire senior-level executives from outside the food service industry. As a result, the company has benefitted from implementing exciting new practices that the company never would have discovered, had they not ventured outside the industry.
2. **Create a Safe Environment:** Greg Fricks and his brother worked out an agreement with their father to take over their family-owned, high-performance concrete flooring business. But when the time came to hand over the reins to his sons and leave the company, he wasn’t ready to step down. In a peer advisory group, Greg found a safe environment to talk about this issue with his group – to be vulnerable and free from judgment. He received the support he needed to confront his father, take over the family business, triple its profits, and preserve harmony in the family.

3. **Utilize a Smart Guide:** According to Hay Group’s Cecelia Wooden, “Striving for peer advantage is nothing short of an act of courage. It’s a big deal for CEOs to want to have their assumptions examined through an outside lens.” The smart guide creates the environment that allows CEOs to achieve greater clarity and a broader view.

4. **Foster Valuable Interaction:** Peter Senge described a learning organization as one “where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people learn how to learn together.” It’s the difference between riding a bike and being a bicycle rider. Peer advisory groups serve as a mechanism to create bicycle riders by fostering the application of deep learning through collaboration.

5. **Be Accountable:** Walter and Debbie Jones started an architecture firm when they were first married. Today, they have a $30 million company and have raised a family. All the while, Walter participated in a peer advisory group who held him accountable for planning for the future – for long after they planned to retire. The group’s culture of accountability helped Walter do what he said he would.

Beyond these five factors, the true success and magic of peer advantage comes from the peers themselves. “It’s where experience and spontaneity create extraordinary moments of kindness, wisdom, creative genius, and understanding,” the authors explain.

In the book, the authors identify the value and effectiveness of engaging with peers in four distinct ways – connecting, networking, optimizing and accelerating - showing the value of each type and when and why there are needed.

CEO peer advisory groups are shining examples of what’s possible when people are committed to accelerating their growth—to stepping outside their company and industry to see beyond the limits of their individual perspective so they can learn, grow, and meet the challenges of an uncertain future. **THE POWER OF PEERS** reveals the magic that happens when you put great players in the right environment.
About the Authors

Leon Shapiro served as the CEO of Vistage Worldwide (2013-2016), the world’s leading peer advisory membership organization for CEOs, business owners, and their key executives. He is a member of the Vistage Board of Directors and also a Director at The Advisory Board Company (NASDAQ: ABCO).

Between 2007 and 2011, Leon served as Senior Vice President, Strategy and Operations, at Warner Music Group. From 2005 to 2006, he served as Group President of The NPD Group, Inc., a global provider of consumer and retail information, where he led all of their entertainment and technology related businesses.

From 1989 to 2004, Leon served as President, Gartner Executive Programs for Gartner, Inc., the leading provider of research and analysis on the global information technology industry. Leon earned his bachelor’s degree in economics and political science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel.

Leo Bottary is Vice President, Peer Advantage for Vistage Worldwide, where he directs a thought leadership initiative on the power of peer influence for business leaders. Leo also serves as an adjunct professor for Seton Hall University’s Master of Arts in Strategic Communication & Leadership program (MASCL), where he leads online learning teams. In April 2015, he was named adjunct teacher of the year for Seton Hall’s College of Communication and the Arts.

Prior to joining in 2010, Leo enjoyed a 25-year career counseling leaders in strategic communication. During that time, he served as a Senior Vice President (Corporate Practice) and Director of Client Service for the US at Hill & Knowlton. He also founded an award-winning public relations agency, which he sold in 2000.

Leo earned a BA from Jacksonville University, an MA in Strategic Communication and Leadership from Seton Hall University and is expected to receive his EdD from Northeastern University with a concentration in Organizational Leadership in 2016. Leo’s dissertation focuses on the power of peer influence for CEOs.

About the Book

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