

VISTAGE

THE 6 HABITS OF WORLD-CLASS CEOs

Daily Practices to Integrate Into Your Life and Leadership



A person is standing on a rocky ridge in the foreground, looking out over a vast mountain range. The mountains are layered and hazy, creating a sense of depth. The sky is a deep, dark blue, and the overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The person is a small silhouette against the larger landscape.

"You do not rise to the level of your goals.
You fall to the level of your systems."

JAMES CLEAR

Vistage Featured Speaker & Author of Atomic Habits:
An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits
& Break Bad Ones

What do the world's most successful CEOs have in common?

Virtually all have the discipline to practice good habits every day. These aren't just any habits, however. They're the routines, systems and processes that support a CEO's most ambitious goals.

When consistently practiced, they optimize how a CEO makes decisions, leads teams, maintains focus, inspires innovation, deftly tackles the unpredictable to provide stability, and more. Over time, they can transform a good leader into a legendary one.

Exceptional CEOs tend to commit to these practices:

- 1** Focus on What Matters Most
- 2** Prioritize Productivity
- 3** Invest in Your Health
- 4** Learn for a Lifetime
- 5** Collaborate Intentionally
- 6** Embrace Accountability

In this guide, high-performing Vistage leaders identify the habits of success that fall under these six categories — and offer advice on how you can integrate them into your life and leadership.

1

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

Effective CEOs apply the Pareto Principle, or 80/20 rule, to their work. They focus on the 20% of tasks that generate 80% of business results, and delegate everything else. By directing their attention to the areas that matter most, these CEOs maximize their impact and use their talents to the fullest.

Habits to Master Your Attention

- 1. Block time for priorities.** Instead of creating a to-do list, set aside specific blocks of time on your calendar for every task you want to accomplish, advises Vistage CEO Sam Reese.
- 2. Create theme days.** Productivity expert Marcey Rader recommends designating a focus area for each work day. For example, Monday is for strategy; Tuesday is for marketing; Wednesday is for finance; and so on.
- 3. Review email in batches.** Email is the ultimate time killer. Instead of instantly responding to emails as they come in, review them in batches throughout the day, advises productivity coach and Vistage speaker Maura Thomas.
- 4. Set boundaries.** CEOs must learn to say “no,” says Rader, or else they’ll get sucked into meetings or tasks that drain their energy and detract their focus.

ASK YOURSELF

"Of what I do today, what will get me/
my team/the organization
closer to winning?"

HOLLY GREEN
Vistage Speaker



2

PRIORITIZE PRODUCTIVITY

Time is a scarce commodity, but best-in-class CEOs make the most of every minute. By treating productivity as a top priority, they drive greater profitability and sharpen their company's competitive edge. They plan carefully and delegate wisely, working smarter so their business works harder.

Habits to Ace Productivity

- 1. Start the day right.** Vistage Chair Tom Cuthbert recommends creating a morning routine you can stick to religiously. For him, that means waking at 5:30 a.m., reading his devotional, answering emails and hitting the gym.
- 2. Prepare thoroughly for meetings.** The key to productive meetings is preparation, says Sam Reese. His tips: Share an agenda ahead of time, clarify the meeting's purpose, brainstorm solutions in advance and build a 15-minute buffer between meetings.
- 3. Quit multitasking.** It doesn't work and it hurts productivity. Research from the University of Southern California also found multitasking creates more mistakes and reduces how much information is retained.
- 4. Limit yourself to three areas of excellence.** "My friend Jack Daley says each of us can only do three things well," says Cuthbert. "I am constantly asking myself: 'What am I doing that someone else could or should be doing?'"
- 5. Keep tabs on productivity.** Measure your productivity with metrics such as revenue-per-employee or profit-per-employee.

ASK YOURSELF

What emerging technology could help me maximize personal and organizational productivity?



3

INVEST IN YOUR HEALTH

High-performing CEOs put a premium on self-care. They recognize investing in their health and wellbeing pays dividends long term. By taking time to recharge their mind and body, they return to the office in peak form, ready to lead their business onward and upward.

Habits to Support Self-Care

- 1. Strength train two times per week.** Research indicates strength training two times per week improves cognition, mental health and cardiovascular health, says Luke Carlson, Vistage speaker and CEO of Discover Strength.
- 2. Act more like an animal.** Dan Miller, a Vistage speaker and nutrition and fitness expert, encourages CEOs to adopt animalistic habits such as eating natural foods, exercising more, drinking more water and sleeping when it's dark outside.
- 3. Keep a gratitude journal.** Take a few minutes each day to write down three things you're grateful for. This practice "keeps me connected to my purpose with a positive mindset," says Vistage Chair Brian Davis.
- 4. Practice good sleep hygiene.** Vistage Chair Giles Watkins disconnects from work and technology by 9 p.m., commits to getting 7-8 hours of sleep and goes to bed at the same time each night.

ASK YOURSELF

Is it fact or story?

"Questioning our thoughts frees the mind of stress and negativity."

LARA PATRIQUIN, MD
Vistage Speaker

4

LEARN FOR A LIFETIME

When it comes to their own development, first-rate CEOs are never satisfied. Inherently curious and motivated to challenge themselves, they carve out time for learning and creativity year-round. Even after they've reached the pinnacle of success, they recognize there's always room to grow as a leader — and that makes their businesses grow, too.

Habits to Master Lifelong Learning

- 1. Treat learning as a non-negotiable.** Prioritize activities like attending conferences, taking online courses and reading books relevant to your industry. If you're short on time, listen to podcasts or audiobooks while you're on the go, advises Dave Nelsen, an award-winning Vistage speaker and serial tech entrepreneur.
- 2. Schedule coffee chats.** Once a month, meet another CEO for coffee or schedule a session with your Vistage Chair.
- 3. Use the Performance Triangle.** This framework for learning and development helps you apply what you've learned by connecting skills, activities and results, notes Sam Reese.
- 4. Connect learning to strategy.** By tying learning and development to your company's strategies, goals, vision, purpose and values, you can get your team better aligned on what success looks like.

ASK YOURSELF

"Am I on a constant path of growth and learning?"

THE LATE GENERAL COLIN POWELL, USA (RET.)
Vistage Featured Speaker



Learn from the best at the next [Vistage CEO Climb Event](#) featuring world-renowned thought leaders and management experts.

5

COLLABORATE INTENTIONALLY

World-class CEOs constantly pursue opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Instead of trying to do everything on their own, they seek out others for their counsel, expertise and perspective. As a result, they're better equipped to navigate hurdles and make informed decisions.

Habits to Champion Collaboration

- 1. Join a peer advisory group.** By connecting with a community of trusted CEOs, you can gain new insight and unbiased perspectives that are invaluable for working through challenges.
- 2. Break down silos.** Silos are built from the top down, says Joni S. Naugle, Vistage Chair. To dismantle them, define initiatives that everyone in your company can agree on and work together to achieve.
- 3. Lean on your executive team.** Surround yourself with an executive team that has the IQ and EQ to collaborate effectively. Look for leaders who have diverse skills and backgrounds but are aligned on your company's mission, vision and purpose.
- 4. Talk to frontline employees.** They know your customers — and their latest feedback — better than anyone.
- 5. Make collaboration something you say and do.** Reinforce the necessity of working collaboratively when things go awry — because they inevitably will, says Joni Naugle.

ASK YOURSELF

"Am I coming from a place of curiosity and actively seeking differing points of view to make informed decisions?"

SAM REESE
Vistage CEO



6

EMBRACE ACCOUNTABILITY

Highly successful CEOs embrace accountability. They don't see it as a tool for reprimanding people, but as a guardrail for keeping their ambitions on track. Accountability helps them stay cognizant of their goals, and it gets them back on the wagon if they ever fall off. Accountable leaders uphold their commitments, and that builds trust and credibility among their employees.

Habits to Increase Accountability

- 1. Identify your core values first.** Values become behaviors and behaviors enable goals, notes Greg Bustin, Vistage Master Chair and author of *Accountability: The Key to Driving a High-Performance Culture*.
- 2. Set a goal and a timeline.** Bustin likes to ask CEOs in his Vistage group, "What do you want to be celebrating a year from now?" He has them score their progress 12 months later.
- 3. Make your goals SMART.** Choose SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) goals, and have weekly and monthly check-ins to review your progress. To reinforce those goals, say them out loud to your peers.
- 4. Focus on results, not activities.** It doesn't matter how hard you've worked or how many hours you've put toward a goal. It's the outcome of your effort that counts.
- 5. If you're struggling, ask why.** Get curious about the reason you're falling short, says Vistage Chair Emeritus Cheryl McMillan. But be gentle with yourself. "Ask, 'Why is staying accountable to this difficult for me?' rather than 'Why do I keep messing this up?'" she says.

ASK YOURSELF

Who are my peers?

Many CEOs have discovered that when they say their goals out loud to peers, they're more likely to follow through with action to support those goals.



Make these habits yours.

Your journey to excellence is different from every other CEO, and so are the routines, processes and systems that work for you. With that in mind, make these habits your own.

Adopting new habits is hard work, but it's exponentially easier in the company of your peers. Consider joining a peer advisory group — like Vistage — to get support from CEOs on the same path as you.

Becoming a Vistage member unlocks these benefits for building good habits:

- 1 Focus on what matters most** by devoting 1 day per month to your strategy with support from a trusted group of CEOs.
- 2 Prioritize productivity** by learning firsthand from business leaders who practice it daily.
- 3 Invest in your health** by attending events featuring fitness, nutrition and wellness experts who are grounded in the business world.
- 4 Learn for a lifetime** by accessing exclusive webinars, speaking events, thought leadership content and proprietary research.
- 5 Collaborate intentionally** by tapping into the perspectives of 12-16 CEO peers from non-competing organizations.
- 6 Embrace accountability** by working one-to-one with an executive coach with deep C-suite experience.

Ready to Start Your Journey?

BECOME A MEMBER

LEARN MORE

VISTAGE

FEATURED EXPERTS



SAM REESE | Vistage CEO

Since becoming CEO of Vistage in 2016, Sam Reese has propelled Vistage's global membership to more than 45,000 executives in 35+ countries. Sam is the author of two books about account management, a keynote speaker, and frequently featured as an expert on business and leadership topics.



MAURA THOMAS | Vistage Speaker

Maura Thomas is ranked among the "Top 10 Time Management Professionals in the World" and the most widely cited authority on attention management. Her proprietary Empowered Productivity™ System has been embraced by NASA, Dyson, Google and more than 250 Vistage member companies.



HOLLY GREEN | Vistage Speaker

Vistage Speaker Holly Green is CEO of THE HUMAN FACTOR Inc. She was previously President of The Ken Blanchard Company and a biotech startup. Clients include Google, Microsoft, Arby's, Hyatt, and numerous small and midsize businesses.



TOM CUTHBERT | Vistage Chair

Tom Cuthbert serves as a Vistage Master Chair, Best Practice Chair and CEO Coach in San Antonio. He has had a 35-year career of building, buying and selling businesses across multiple industries, with the most recent company, Adometry, acquired by Google.



LUKE CARLSON | Vistage Speaker & CEO, Discover Strength

Luke Carlson is the CEO of Discover Strength and a Vistage Speaker. He is a practitioner, speaker and author on the topic of strength training and evidence-based exercise programs.



DAN MILLER | Vistage Speaker & Nutrition and Fitness Expert

Dan Miller is an internationally renowned nutrition and fitness expert. In 2015, he was featured at the Vistage International Speaker Showcase and in 2018 he was awarded Vistage International Speaker of the Year.



BRIAN DAVIS | Vistage Chair

Brian Davis is a business leader with a PhD in Organizational Psychology. He has over 25 years of leadership experience at PDI Ninth House (Korn Ferry), and is recognized as one of the country's top Vistage Chairs.



GILES WATKINS | Vistage Chair

An author, speaker, coach and facilitator, Giles Watkins works with individuals and groups, primarily in the C-suite, to gain the positive benefits of improved sleep.



LARA PATRIQUIN, MD | Vistage Speaker

Lara Patriquin is a physician, speaker, and teacher of Transformative Inquiry and Mindfulness Meditation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Lara is the founder of Thinking 2.0, a consulting and coaching firm specializing in cultivating peace of mind, innovation, and engagement through the use of inquiry and mindfulness.



DAVE NELSEN | Vistage Speaker & Tech Entrepreneur

Dave Nelson joined Vistage in 2003. He started four tech companies, attracting \$70M in venture capital. He was recognized as E&Y Entrepreneur of the Year (2000) and as Vistage Best Speaker of the Year (2011).



JONI S. NAUGLE | Vistage Chair

As a Vistage Master Chair, Joni helps Vistage members achieve more than they ever thought possible. During her 25-year career in banking, Joni was part of the executive team at Sovereign Bank (now Santander) that created and executed the acquisition strategy resulting in explosive growth in the late 1980s and 90s.



GREG BUSTIN | Vistage Chair

Greg Bustin is a 19-year Vistage Master Chair in Dallas. In addition to advising SMBs, Greg has worked with multinational companies including Bank of America, Burger King, Fujitsu and PepsiCo.



CHERYL MCMILLAN | Vistage Chair Emeritus

As a Vistage Chair, Cheryl McMillan focused on improving the lives of Vistage members. Previously, she held several leadership positions, including president and board member, at multiple organizations.

VISTAGE

Vistage is the world's largest and most comprehensive approach to executive coaching for small and midsize businesses. For more than 65 years, we've been helping CEOs, business owners and key executives solve their greatest challenges using our proven platform of confidential peer advisory groups and one-to-one executive coaching sessions with accomplished business leaders. Today, more than 45,000 members in 35+ countries rely on Vistage to help make better decisions for their companies, families and communities.

Learn more at [vistage.com](https://www.vistage.com).

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