

VISTAGE

Member *Stories*

Mike Litwin, CEO
Atmosphere Commercial Interiors
(Formerly Target Commercial Interiors)
Minneapolis

At a glance

Role: CEO

Industry: Commercial interior design

Employees: < 150

Vistage chair: Brian Davis

Company background

Minneapolis-based Target Commercial Interiors is a wholly owned subsidiary of Target Corporation (NYSE:TGT) that provides high-quality commercial furnishings and related services to business clients around the world. With seven offices in four states, Target Commercial Interiors is also one of the nation's largest dealers of Steelcase furniture.

The company operates in three major regions: Minnesota, Wisconsin/Illinois and Arizona. Primary market segments for Target Commercial Interiors span corporate offices, higher education, healthcare, hospitality and stadiums and arenas. Key clients include United Health Group, Target, Kimberly Clark, Arizona State University and Madison Square Garden.

Within those markets, Target Commercial Interiors provides a complete assortment of services in support of its products including



planning and design collaboration, project management, installation and move/add/change support, asset management and storage. By focusing on delivering exceptional client experiences, Target Commercial Interiors has built an impressive book of business across the United States and internationally.

Mike Litwin has been running Target Commercial Interiors (now [Atmosphere Commercial Interiors](#)) since 2009, following a seven-year post as Target's Vice President of Corporate Real Estate. While his business card may say "General Manager," he has all of the responsibilities of a CEO for the 160 person enterprise, which was established over 60 years ago. As Mike took the reins of Target Commercial Interiors, the directive set forth from the CEO of Target, whom Mike's leader reports to, was fairly straightforward: Grow the business, build a highly engaged team and, of course, produce results. And Mike has done just that, leading a transformational change in the organization that has increased team member engagement, elevated profits and expanded the scope of services and offerings.

Connecting with Vistage

A fellow Steelcase dealer from San Francisco initially recommended Vistage to Mike about a year ago. Mike had confided that he was looking for career growth, continuous learning and a person or group that he could engage in a healthy exchange of ideas and discussion. His peer in California told him about his many positive experiences with his local Vistage group and encouraged Mike to reach out to Brian Davis, a Vistage Chair in Minneapolis. It took Mike only one meeting with Brian to realize that he had found what he was looking for and, with the support of his leaders, he joined on the spot.

Looking back on his first year in Vistage, Mike can readily see why his company has been so supportive of his participation, “It’s making me a better leader, I’m returning to the office with enriched knowledge and perspectives that I wouldn’t have had otherwise.” Mike credits that deeper level of knowledge and perspective with helping him, and his leadership team, make better decisions about hiring, expense control and capital management.

As a member, Mike attends monthly meetings with the other CEOs in his group and also meets one-on-one with Brian Davis. Though his CEO group meeting means a full day away from the office, he eagerly awaits that day each month, “I am excited for those mornings; I want to find out what’s on people’s minds and hear, as well as share, what happened as a result of our discussions the prior month.” For Mike, it is a chance to exchange innovative ideas with people that share common interests and objectives, outside of the Target Commercial Interiors sphere.

Impressed by how Brian runs the CEO group, Mike sought to bring some of those best practices

to his leadership team with the goal of improving the quality of his staff meetings. Mike now starts each of his monthly direct report staff meetings by asking each leader to share a brief insight from the past month. Sometimes it’s a business story, sometimes a personal one and other times the question might be what they find most motivating about their role or their most significant personal impact on the team. It’s a tactic that helps build team trust and accountability, and Mike can see that it’s working. “We are having more effective meetings because expectations are understood before the meeting even starts.”

Mike also quickly noticed how the other CEOs in the group showed a strong bias for action. They moved swiftly to make critical business decisions. “As a group, they move more decisively than I did; they distill down to the essential issues, they make decisions and they move on.” Mike also brought this approach to his leadership team, encouraging them to clarify what the primary issues are, discuss them with full transparency and arrive at a group decision. Again, the results were immediately visible with Mike noting that this approach to decision making has been a real, quantifiable result for him, something that, with practice, “has gotten easier and easier.”

Delivering exceptional experiences

Mike describes one of Target Commercial Interiors’ biggest challenges as continually delivering exceptional experiences for every client. Best practices provide a baseline with which to start, but in the end, every one of the company’s projects is unique, because every one of the company’s clients has unique needs. The common thread that unites each project and client is Target Commercial Interiors’ overwhelming desire to provide a level of satisfaction and execution that cannot be matched.

To meet client's needs, the Target Commercial Interiors team researches and understands how people's work habits and needs are completely reshaping office space designs. "There's less emphasis on private offices and more emphasis on shared collaboration spaces and amenities," Mike notes. This has led him to encourage the entire team to better understand the constantly evolving technology and real estate needs in the workplace, as well as the importance of wellness and collaboration to today's worker.

That same eagerness to understand his clients' ever changing needs is one more reason Mike credits his participation in Vistage Minnesota as being so beneficial; the organization provides a wealth of new and exciting knowledge through its network of business professionals who travel the country, talking with other CEO groups. Topics have ranged from how to attract and hire top executive talent, to global intelligence briefings from a former CIA top executive, to a leadership retreat at West Point. Each of these interactions has expanded Mike's horizon and helped him develop a broader and more strategic perspective.

When it comes to describing the overall value of his Vistage membership, Mike doesn't mince words: "With masters' degrees from Stanford and UCLA and as a senior executive at Target, I have been exposed to some of the best business and leadership training in the world. But my Vistage experience trumps all of it in terms of its immediate and ongoing impact on my effectiveness as an entrepreneur and a CEO. Their mission is to increase the effectiveness and enhance the lives of CEOs, and that certainly has been true in my case." **V**