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[pilgrim associates]

Dick Pellegrini The CEO Coach

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LAKELAND | It isn't only athletes or students that use coaching. So do business executives, entrepreneurs, even CEOs. In Lakeland, Dick Pellegrini is their Vince Lombardi or Bear Bryant.

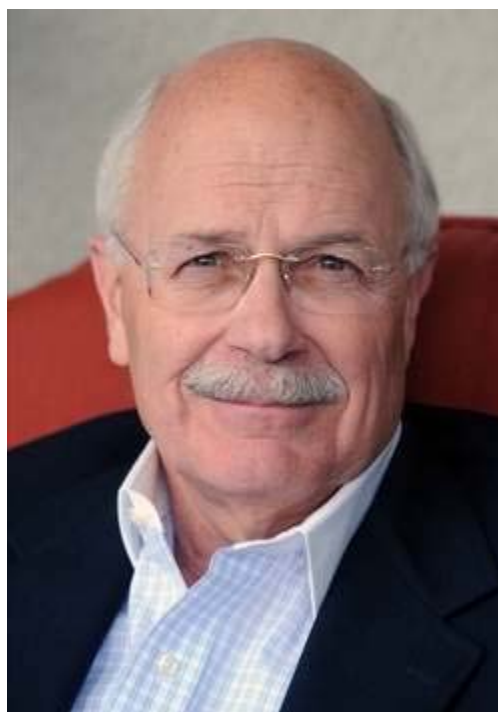
In the winter of 1997, as a refugee from the cold, gray North, Pellegrini came to Lakeland to found Pilgrim associates, a senior executive business consulting and coaching firm. It's still going strong and operates on the premise of strength in numbers - two heads are better than one, three better yet, etc.

Member clients work together with Pellegrini, helping each other to brainstorm and develop "next-level" strategies that will grow their businesses while providing personal and professional leadership styles.

Through a confidential platform of monthly group meetings and personal coaching, Pellegrini conducts his programs throughout Polk County.

Pilgrim is aligned with Vistage International, a global CEO coaching organization.

Established in 1957, Vistage has about 16,000 members located around the world. In



SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER

Dick Pellegrini, president/owner of Pilgrim Associates, in Lakeland, FL on Monday March 8, 2010.

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Florida, about 1,000 Vistage members generate well over \$30 billion in combined revenue. Studies have shown that Vistage-member companies outperform their competitors and, on average, grow their revenues at three times the growth rate after joining its programs, according to the Vistage Web site.

Pellegrini, 66, said his focus is "helping small-to-midsize businesses recognize strategic issues and challenges important to their sustainable growth."

He emphasizes the importance of working in a group to that end.

"The current economic recession is a strong testimony for the need of business leaders to reach out for collaborative help from peer executives. Oftentimes, the best business solutions come from talking to fellow executives inside and outside specific business environments," he said.

Examples of Pellegrini's work and names of his clients cannot be used because conferences are in strict confidence. But what they have in common is the knowledge that the recession has changed everything.

"There is a widely recognized concept in today's businesses that the survivors of our current recession will emerge into what is called the new norm," Pellegrini said.

"Ostensibly, CEOs are now recognizing how to manage with less people, less overhead, less service supports and less anything that will not contribute to favorable bottom-line results. The necessary lifelines are becoming strategically outsourced support services."

Pellegrini, happily married to Martha for 43 years, with three grown children, does not yet have retirement in his near sights.

"I love it here. I want to do this as long as I can," he said. "I enjoy it very much. My clients enjoy the commitment I provide to be their coach, mentor or adviser."

Pellegrini came upon his current career after working in corporate manufacturing for 35 years. Prior to coming here, he served as president of Matthews International Corp. in Pittsburgh, a high-tech company that made identification systems in printing on products and security coding.

"In '97, we were all passing through the dot-com bubble. It was scary, with no magic wand to make it right. I had been in corporate manufacturing for 35 years, providing CEO and president leadership to a handful of nationally based companies.

"I determined that my energy, at this point, would be better positioned providing

other CEOs with the business acumen and experiences that I had acquired in my globally based career. A little serendipity happenstance in 1997 landed me some clients in Lakeland, Fla., of all places. My wife and I quickly fell in love with the Lakeland area and decided to relocate from New England to finish my business career here."

Pellegrini said Vistage programs have helped many businesses improve their growth strategies in Polk.

"Many, many firms have been revitalized or retooled from a downward-spiral market presence to a strategically realigned, more profitable direction," he said.

Steve Scruggs, executive director of the Lakeland Economic Development Council, said of Pilgrim and Vistage: "What we like about Dick's approach to helping small and midsize firms is that anything that provides constructive infrastructure in businesses in order that they operate more effectively while building a sustainable growth strategy is a win-win for Lakeland and the general area. In turn, it makes our Lakeland community a stronger and more attractive place to develop a new business. We like the concept, we support it, and we refer people to the Vistage program.

"Dick is a man of character and integrity. We trust him. He does what he said he's going to do. He provides professional growth values to the community."

Lisa Hickey, CEO of Douglas Screen Printers in Lakeland, has a similar take on Pellegrini.

"He's a very shrewd consultant," she said. "He's always sharing recommendations. He knows the internal dynamics of a group of businessmen, one-to-one personal coaching, and acquiring and relating resources to the groups. Dick's a good networker and connector of people."

Pellegrini earned a humanities degree from the University of Vermont, and did graduate study in business operations at Clark University and international marketing at Harvard University.

He serves on several boards of directors in business and the community, and is a long-standing member of several local business associations. The Pellegrinis live in Lakeland.

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