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After years of disruption and uncertainty, signs of stability are returning to the commercial furniture industry. Backlogs are normalizing. Pipelines are steadier. Forecasts, while modest, are increasingly reliable.

For many dealers, this shift has created more space to think long-term. Not just about this quarter's backlog, but about service models, pricing, diversification, and leadership transitions. And at Solomon Coyle, we're hearing many of those conversations happening in peer groups.

Across Solomon Coyle's peer groups, leaders are openly sharing their experiences with ERP transitions, pricing models, staffing strategies, and market expansion. But more than that, they're finding clarity in conversations that push their thinking, offer new angles, and help them navigate decisions with greater insight.

To better understand how those groups are leveraging and delivering value within their peer groups, we spoke with four leaders who shared what the experience looks like in practice and what it's made possible in their own organizations.

A Mirror for Strategic Clarity

Jackie Dallier, Franklin (Steelcase-aligned)

Franklin is a founding member of the 5.5 Peer Group. Jackie Dallier, the company's VP, joined five years ago and quickly realized the value went far beyond metrics. It became a space for her to work through some of the biggest questions of her career.

Over time, she's brought major strategic decisions to the group: how to navigate succession planning, how to handle internal realignments, and how to approach service and sales integration. It's where she goes to get outside her own perspective and pressure-test ideas with people who understand her business.

> "There's such a mutual respect among the group," Jackie said. "Over the years, we've built real relationships. I've never had someone ignore a request or hesitate to help. You start to feel a sense of accountability, like, 'If they need something, I'm going to show up.' Members consistently put in the effort to be present, to contribute, and to care. You really do get out what you put in."

Jackie also uses the peer group to clarify her own thinking before returning to her team with new ideas. It's a place where she can refine a direction before rolling it out, and ensure it's rooted in broader strategic insight, not just instinct.

Grounded by Data, Guided by Perspective

Joel Petersen, iSpaceEnvironments(Teknion)

For Joel Petersen, Founder & CEO of iSpace, insights from Solomon Coyle's performance benchmarking surveys often become the starting point for key business conversations within his peer group. Whether it's reevaluating team structures or validating new strategies, the ability to compare iSpaces' data against a broad industry backdrop and then explore it with other leaders facing similar dynamics provides not just clarity but a catalyst for action.

> "We run our business based on numbers. Every month, we do a full financial analysis — comparing our actual results against our budget and against Solomon Coyle's high-performing dealer benchmarks. It gives us something to measure ourselves against beyond our own expectations. If we see a department falling short of that benchmark, it forces us to ask, 'What are we doing differently?' and 'What can we do better?' We've made real changes because of that data."

Joel says the return on that investment is clear.

> "If I can improve one cost ratio to sales by even a fraction of a percent, it more than pays for itself. And we've repeatedly increased our profitability thanks to efficiencies and better practices we've learned at Solomon Coyle".

Leveraging the Room for Strategic Growth

Cory Eyink, Innovative Office Solutions, Inc.

For Cory Eyink, the peer group environment has been key in learning the nuances of the contract furniture industry and in testing ideas for growth.

> “Just the amount of knowledge in the room is incredibly powerful. It reduces the learning curve and helps me understand why other businesses have made certain decisions and what the outcomes were,” Cory said. “For us, that’s especially helpful as we explore business expansion and entry into new markets and product lines”.

That growth isn’t just theoretical. It’s actively shaped by what he hears in the room.

> “There are people in that room who have experienced something that you haven’t and can shed a great deal of perspective,” he said. “If you came into this environment not wanting to be challenged by your peers, then it’s probably not a good use of your time”.

Slowing Down to Think Bigger

Scott Marshall, CWC Office Furnishings (MillerKnoll)

Scott Marshall joined his peer group at the recommendation of a friend and wasn’t sure what to expect. What he found was a space built entirely on transparency, trust, and forward thinking.

Scott uses the group to think out loud, test ideas, and ask the kinds of questions that don’t fit neatly into a dashboard. In one recent meeting, the conversation turned toward long-term dealer business models—recurring revenue, services, partnerships—and he left with new ideas, clearer questions, and a sharper view of where the industry might be heading. He also values how much can be learned just by visiting a fellow member’s space.

> “Every time we visit another dealer’s showroom, we walk away with something. There’s always something you can apply, even if it’s seeing what not to do,” he said “It wouldn’t work well if you had competitors in the room. That would kill the transparency. What we’ve got is a group of people who really share and who show up. And that makes all the difference”.

What Members Say Makes Peer Groups Work

Across every conversation with peer group members, one message consistently emerged: the value of being part of a peer group doesn’t come from simply occupying a seat—it comes from how actively and intentionally you engage.

Here’s what they say makes it work:

Trust makes the real conversations possible.

For Jackie Dallier, trust isn’t just a byproduct of participating in a group; it’s something that is built slowly and deliberately over time. She shared how, after years of working alongside the same members, a deep sense of mutual accountability and respect has taken root.

> “Over time, you build relationships,” she said. “It’s not just about business. It’s about caring enough to show up for each other”

This trust allows members to be candid, to ask for help without hesitation, and to offer honest feedback when it’s needed most. Jackie emphasized that she’s never had a request for help go unanswered and has always been equally willing to extend support to others.

> “You start to feel a sense of accountability, like, ‘If they need something, I’m going to show up.’ That kind of trust doesn’t happen overnight. It grows because people consistently put in the effort to be present, to contribute, and to care”.

Preparation sets the tone for deeper discussions.

Showing up ready makes all the difference. Whether it’s checking in with a leadership team beforehand or studying fellow members’ business models in advance, preparation elevates the conversation.

Cory Eyink shared that he often researches fellow members’ companies ahead of meetings, digging into how they’re structured, what markets they serve, and who’s on their teams, so he can ask sharper questions and draw more meaningful parallels.

> “Ideally, you’re going to their individual websites and LinkedIn pages and really trying to inform yourself… so the dialogue is a lot more impactful,” he explained.“It helps me ask better questions and actually learn from what they’re doing”.

This level of preparation not only sharpens his own questions but enriches the collective discussion, allowing the group to draw clearer connections between challenges, solutions, and outcomes.

Challenge is part of the value.

The environment created in a peer group allows for a level of challenge that’s difficult to replicate elsewhere. Members aren’t there to validate each other—they’re there to help each other grow.

Cory noted that some of the most valuable insights have come from being asked tough questions or being pushed to consider something from a completely different angle.

> “If you came into this environment not wanting to be challenged by your peers, then it’s probably not a good use of your time,” he said. “But if you do, you’ll get so much more out of it”.

That mindset of coming in ready to be pushed, to hear feedback, and to push others in return, is what fuels the group’s value.

Data keeps the conversation grounded.

While the peer group format encourages dynamic discussion, it’s the structure behind those conversations that gives them staying power. Solomon Coyle provides extensive benchmarking tools, financial metrics, and industry research that serve as a foundation for dialogue.

These shared reference points help focus the discussion, identify outliers, and guide action. The conversations are facilitated by Solomon Coyle consultants, industry veterans who help structure the dialogue, offer perspective, and ensure the data is applied with intention.

For Joel, these tools don’t just guide decisions. They boost confidence.

> “It’s not just about running a better business,” he said. “It’s about running a better business with confidence”.

The Payoff of Coming Together as Peers

For members of Solomon Coyle’s peer groups, the return on participation is tangible and multi-layered. The benefits span from immediate problem-solving and operational gains to longer-term strategic clarity, stronger networks, and more resilient leadership practices.

Scott Marshall described the value in practical terms: avoiding costly missteps by learning from others who have already navigated the same terrain.

> “They’ve helped us avoid mistakes,” he said. “We don’t need to step in the same pile someone else already has. That alone makes it worth it”.

Whether it’s implementing pricing strategies, evaluating new services, or managing rising employee costs, peer group members gain insight that helps them act with greater confidence and speed.

But the impact goes far beyond the tactical. For many leaders, the group is a rare and essential space for professional reflection, mentorship, and growth.

> “If you want to continue to learn and grow, it’s a great group to be in,” she said. “You just have to be willing to show up, ask questions, and be open to hearing the answers even when they challenge you”, Jackie shared.

That willingness to be challenged, and to challenge others in return, is what members say sets Solomon Coyle’s peer groups apart. These are not passive gatherings. They are active, high-trust environments designed for meaningful exchange. Members leave with new frameworks, not just new ideas; with stronger relationships, not just contact lists.

Over time, the peer group becomes more than a sounding board. It becomes a trusted circle, a space where leaders feel seen, supported, and sharpened by the collective wisdom of peers who share their challenges, but not their market.

As Scott put it, “If I had to pick just one industry group to be part of, this would be it. You can’t have better conversations than the ones we have here”.

For leaders who want to move further, faster, and with more clarity, SolomonCoyle’s peer groups create a distinct advantage by blending benchmarking with real conversation, data with nuance, and strategy with community.?

Interested to learn more about Solomon Coyle peer groups?Visitsolomoncoyle.com/peer-groups/overviewor emailsupport@solomoncoyle.com.