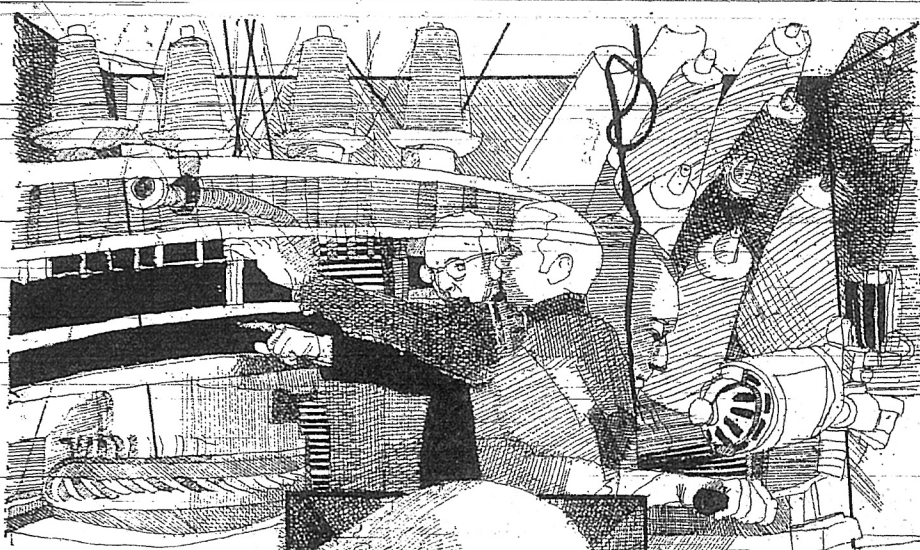


MAN IN BUSINESS



Consultant To Seventh Avenue: Kurt Salmon

By ISADORE BARMASH

Last year, when Kurt Salmon became 60 years old, a few kibitzers in the New York office of Kurt Salmon Associates wired him on the office Teletype to Atlanta where he was visiting. "In honor of the founder's birthday," the message said, "the New York office will be closed tomorrow."

A smiling taskmaster whose professional demands sometimes find themselves in conflict with his sense of humor, Mr. Salmon wired back, "Fine. Where shall we send your references?"

But the chairman of the largest specialist concern among the country's 3,500 management-consulting companies reacted differently the year before when all his co-workers in the United States gathered at an Atlanta hotel in honor of his 35th anniversary in business. The previous such testimonial had occurred about 20 years before when only five people were able to greet him in Kansas City, Mo. Between the two events he had not met with his full staff.

As he walked into the room in Atlanta, Mr. Salmon stopped short. One hundred and ten people stood ready to present him an old sewing machine that had been gold-plated for the occasion, and his eyes rolled.

Seeing all of them in person, he recalled afterward, dramatized the company's growth as perhaps nothing else had.

Since then, the domestic staff has expanded to 180, and the foreign staff totals 70 persons, reflecting both the growth of the apparel industry, which the company serves, and its own diversifying activities.

Last summer, during the Phase One period of the new economic program, the apparel industry sought to convince the Nixon Administration that wage increases should be allowed to workers in instances where productivity had been increased because of technological gains. A strong argument was advanced as a result of some hard-headed analysis and brain-storming. This was the work of Mr. Salmon, who, as is characteristic of consultants, preferred not to attract attention to the situation, but rather merely turn in his recommendations and stand by.

Although the productivity issue may remain unresolved, neither the industry, client nor the consultant has forgotten it. As Mr. Salmon commented recently, "It's imperative for the industry that earnings be related to productivity improvements."

However, the Salmon concern has clients not merely



Alan Cober

"Quidque agis prudenter agas et respice finem— Whatever thou doest, do it well and think of the consequences."

Kurt Salmon

"regional expertise," as Mr. Salmon put it.

As the apparel and other soft-goods industries grew, the complexity of the problems brought to the Salmon concern also grew. Such projects have run the gamut—including the need for cutting-room improvements, the utilization of materials, the conversion of a plant to a different type of manufacturing, making costs "more competitive" and the need to reduce manufacturing time.

Although Mr. Salmon holds the title of chairman, he has begun to phase out his activities in order to retire early in 1974. Many of his associates have become principals, or supervisory consultants. About 90 of the 250 employees are in this category and about 65 of them are stockholders in the privately held company. Mr. Salmon retains about 25 per cent of the shares but plans to cut this figure by retirement time.

Mr. Salmon explained, "We work hard to find and attract top-notch talent and to keep them by permitting them to assume leadership roles as rapidly as they are able and also by making them partners."

A frequent writer of policy memos, he is prone to advise his colleagues on matters both major and minor. In one such recent note, he told the younger men, "If you go into an area to handle a project and you find nothing nice to say about the town and you feel compelled to say something, just say, 'the air here is sure fresh.'"

But he also likes to use a few pet Latin phrases, such as "Quidque agis prudenter agas et respice finem"—which he translates to mean "whatever thou doest, do it well and think of the consequences."

Although he has two sons and two sons-in-law, Mr. Salmon some years ago decided not to become involved in nepotism and informed them that they must find careers outside his own company. "This has helped to stabilize our organization," he said. "My associates will eventually own the company when I step out and need not fear succession from anyone in my family."

The young men in the family have turned to other fields. Douglas E. Salmon is a computer executive with Informatics, Inc., while his younger son, Thomas Salmon, is studying opera and hopes to sing professionally.

Although Mr. Salmon lives in Washington, he follows the nomadic life of a consultant and travels widely. In between, he plays the piano, particularly Chopin and Mozart, reads, and, with his wife, has just taken a subscription to the concert season at the new Kennedy Center.

He's an unusual consultant in that, as he says, "We like to hatch our own eggs." He added, "Too many executives' shelves abound with consultant's reports which are never properly implemented. The question here is: If you can't stand the knife, why ask for a diagnosis?"

In the midst of this, new divisions were added to provide a full-service activity, while the move into regional operations also helped to provide the growing firm with

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