

The Counselor



Michael Salsieder

Because watching and working with the company's employees is one of Michael Salsieder's favorite parts of his job as president of Kolbe and Kolbe, it seems fair that the industry is "watching" him as well.

Since taking command as president of Kolbe and Kolbe in Wausau, Wis., just over a year ago, some of the changes Salsieder has instituted have involved shining the spotlight on employees.

Not long after Salsieder joined Kolbe in 2002 as vice president and general counsel, founder Herb Kolbe passed away. Kolbe's daughter Judith Kolbe Gorski was originally named president and chief executive officer (CEO), but in March 2005 Salsieder was elected as president of Kolbe and Kolbe and Gorski assumed the role of CEO.

"Being appointed as the first non-family president, I take it very seriously as anybody would," Salsieder says.

In the last year the company has implemented a lean transformation process, or continuous improvement, as Salsieder refers

Michael Salsieder, president, Kolbe & Kolbe

Age: 54

Years in the industry: 4 - Building Products

One quality needed in a leader: Respect

Describe yourself in one word: Passionate

Thoughts after hearing he was one to watch: "I was really honored."

to it. The goal of the process has been to remove non-value-added activities from the manufacturing process, driving the idea of quality products with short lead times.

"We have literally incorporated our entire organization into this concept, where hundreds and hundreds of our employees are involved in continuous improvement teams where they identify areas where it is critical to remove non-value added activities," says Salsieder. "What you are left with is very little waste activity, and essentially you're driving increased productivity and efficiency."

Salsieder notes that hesitancy toward change is generally a challenge, but that employees have embraced the changes and become involved in finding additional ways to improve the efficiency of the company's manufacturing process.

"It's safe to say about 500 of our employees have been involved with this process and that they get up in front of their peers and talk about how to make improvements. They have the confidence to talk through what they see ... and they get recognized for it," says Salsieder.

He adds, "The people who work here really care about some person who is building a home in Chicago or Atlanta, that they're getting a really good product."

"Being involved" is important to Salsieder, who is involved in both the community and the

industry. In addition to his involvement in community organizations, he sits on the board of the Window and Door Manufacturer's Association.

"When I was asked to be on the board I quickly agreed because I think we can impact things that benefit the industry as a whole."

Involvement in the industry is one of the qualities found in strong leaders, Salsieder says. However, respect for others, and the ability to command respect, tops his list of necessary characteristics.

"I think the leader needs to establish himself as a very credible, ethical person. It's that old saying of 'if you expect respect from people, you have to treat people with respect.'" Another saying goes that some people are born leaders. Salsieder believes there may be some truth to that, but really leadership skills come with time and experience.

"Maybe people are born with certain attributes that can take you there but I think it's something that's developed over time."

He can point to one model who he feels exhibits exemplary leadership qualities. *The Lombardi Rules*, about football coach Vince Lombardi, sits within arm's reach of Salsieder's desk.

"It's not really about football; it's about establishing a leadership model in business."

It looks like Salsieder has taken that advice to heart—and succeeded.

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