



Brothers have to work way to top of Perfection Spring & Stamping

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Lou Kahn always gave his two sons the opportunity to work for the company he founded. But he never made it easy for them. When the brothers got jobs at Perfection Spring and Stamping Corp., they started at the bottom - sweeping floors, packing boxes in the shipping department and doing other chores.

On one occasion, he was working in his executive office when his oldest son, David, dropped in for a chat. The young man was covered with sweat and grease after working on the shop floor at the Mount Prospect company. Lou Kahn recalls telling him, "If you ever sit in this chair, never forget that there's a guy out there sweating just like you are right now."



Giving that advice came easily to Lou Kahn because, once upon a time, that guy had been him. Reared on the South Side of Chicago, he started Perfection Spring in his garage in 1955. He took on a partner, Pete Seyler, and together they gradually built the tiny business into a thriving company.

They moved it to Algonquin Road in Mount Prospect in the 1960s. Today, Perfection Spring employs more than 130 people and has annual revenues of \$17 million. And it's being run by a new generation of Kahns: David and younger brother Joshua and their brother-in-law, Michael Shapiro.



Lou Kahn, 68, stepped down as president in 1992. He's still chairman of the board and keeps an office at Perfection Spring, as does Seyler. Both men serve as informal consultants to the business.

Perfection Spring specializes in producing large volumes of small metal parts used in cars, televisions, home appliances and other products. Most customers are larger companies that make finished parts for major manufacturers such as General Motors, Ford, Zenith Electronics and Whirlpool.

"We deal with high-volume product - anything over 25,000 pieces per run," explains Joshua Kahn, sales manager of the company. "From prototype and short run quantities to large production runs, we make about 269 million pieces a year."

Under the leadership of David Kahn, who went to work at the company full time in the early 1980s, Perfection Spring has emphasized new technology, worker training and quality control. The company also has diversified its customer base, expanding into a variety of diverse markets to maintain a good balance and position.

"We've divided it up so that no single sector is going to make or break us," David Kahn says. "And we've aligned ourselves with companies that are growing."

Customers of Perfection Spring praise the company for its quality, experience and reliability. "They've been on time and worked real well with us," says Alan Sederlund of Precision Plastic, an injection molding company in Columbia City, Ind. He says his company was disappointed with the parts supplied by two other vendors, so it dropped them and tried Perfection Spring. "They've done a much better job for us," he says.

In the future, the Kahn brothers see the company expanding into the plastic and injection molding businesses, and increasing exports to Mexico and parts of South America. Joshua Kahn sees a growing Asian trend and is starting to focus on China as a potential manufacturing center in the world market.

Shapiro, who joined Perfection Spring in 1990, has spearheaded the company's recent formation of another business, Horizon Machinery, wholly owned by Perfection. It's the United States distributor of spring and wire forming machinery made by a Taiwanese company. "It works because ... of our expertise and past experience running the machines," Shapiro says of the enterprise, started in January 1994.

Lou Kahn, who divides his time between the Chicago area and a home he and his wife, Barbara, have in Door County in Wisconsin, couldn't be happier with the new leadership at the company. Kahn says he never pressured his sons to join the business but always hoped they would.

"That gives me the greatest pleasure of all - to create something and see it passed to the next generation," he says.