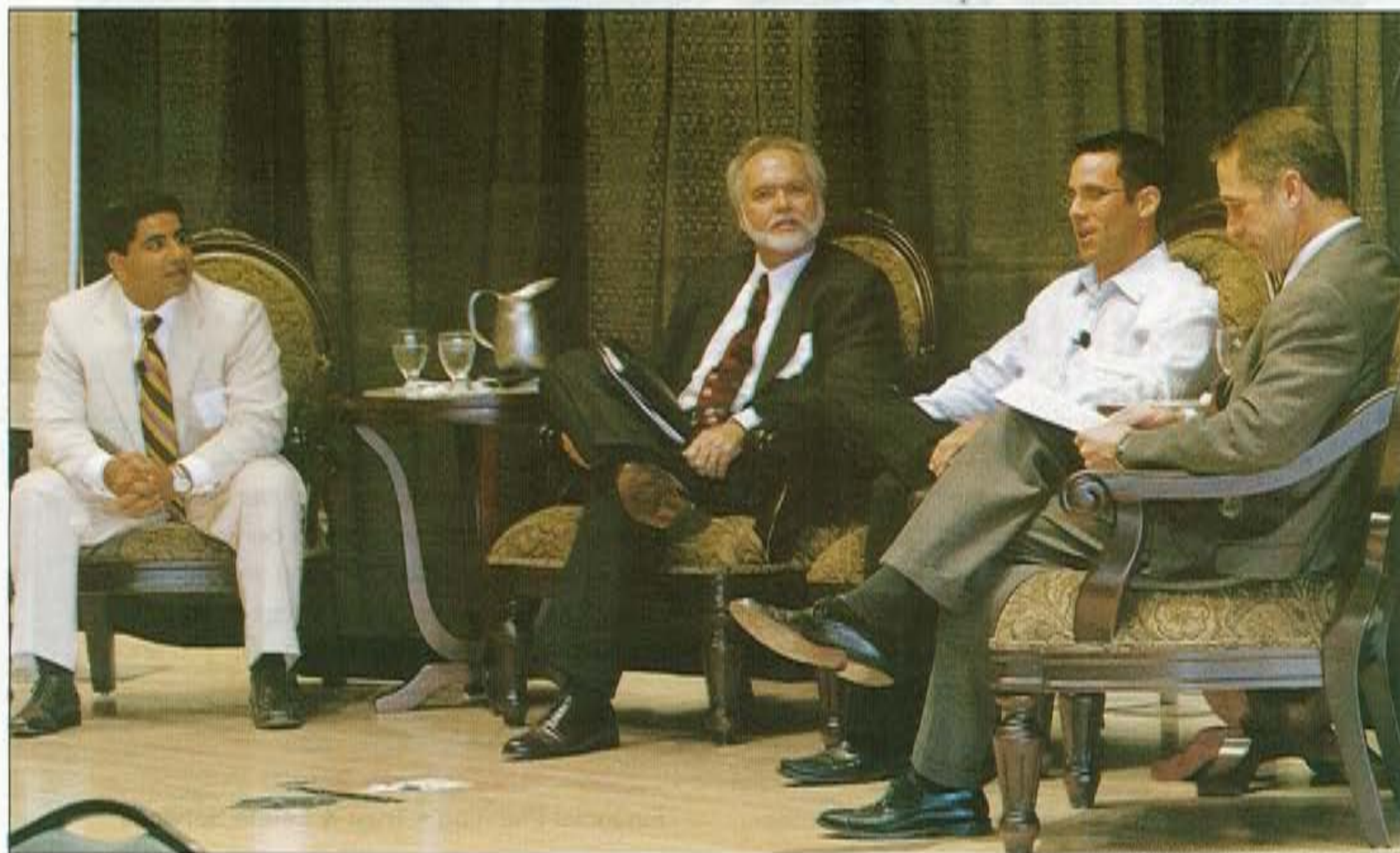


SECRETS

OF THE FASTEST-GROWING PRIVATE COMPANIES

From founder to manager



From left, Saber Corp.'s Nitin Khanna, Ankrom Moisan's Stewart Ankrom and Korvis Automation's Ben Wahlstrom share their secrets of growth with *Business Journal* Publisher Craig Wessel.

CHARLIE KLOPPENBURG | PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

Founders gain experience, grow along with their companies

BY ROBERT GOLDFELD
BUSINESS JOURNAL SPECIAL SECTIONS EDITOR

Guiding one's own company through a period of rapid growth can result in personal growth for the founder.

The three business leaders who spoke at the *Portland Business Journal's* recent Secrets of the Fastest-Growing Private 100 event not only helmed their companies during successful runs, but also captained them from the point of creation. The transition from founder to manager wasn't always easy.

"Architects go through separation anxiety," said Stewart Ankrom, president of design firm Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects.

It takes awhile for them to switch from overseeing projects to overseeing a growing firm, Ankrom said. Allowing others to lead design projects in your place takes some realization that not every-

body performs a task the same way as you.

Saber Corp.'s Nitin Khanna said a couple factors eased his way into the roles of chairman and CEO of his software company. One factor was growing up in a family of entrepreneurs accustomed to being the top boss. A second factor was his brother Karan's role as co-founder, president and COO.

"I'm like an outside CEO, and my brother's like an inside CEO," Khanna said.

With his brother running the daily operations, Khanna said he felt free to pursue business development, such as the 2006 acquisition that nearly quadrupled Saber's revenue.

Ben Wahlstrom, president of manufacturing company Korvis Automation Inc., described himself as more of an engineer than a manager. CEO Rich Carone takes care of much of the management, particularly business finance, though he's taught Wahlstrom quite a few things over the past few years.

However they transitioned to managers, their companies have flourished.

Boosted by the acquisition, Saber's annual revenue climbed 327 percent — to \$58 million — from 2004 to 2006, allowing it to top the *Business Journal's* list this year of the area's fastest-growing private companies. Khanna said he wants to keep doubling revenue every year.

Ankrom Moisan's revenue grew 108 percent during the same period, to \$44 million, good for the 44th spot on the fastest-growing list. Once a two-person design firm, it now employs some 300 people.

Korvis Automation's \$23 million in 2006 revenue represented 448 percent growth since 2004, good enough for the No. 3 spot on the list.

On the following pages, learn more about how Ankrom, Khanna and Wahlstrom put their companies on such a fast pace.

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BAD CHEMISTRY:
Back away from potential sales if fit is wrong.

28



LEAN MACHINE:
Korvis keeps flat management structure.

32



BY DESIGN:
Entrepreneurial staff pushes Ankrom Moisan into growth spurt.

34





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Stewart Ankrom says teams at Ankrom Moisan have a good deal of freedom in pursuing design projects.

Ankrom Moisan: A long way from days of kitchen remodels

300-employee design firm tackles wide array of projects

BY LLOYD WOODS
BUSINESS JOURNAL ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When Stewart Ankrom and Tom Moisan started Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects in 1983, the economy was emerging from its doldrums and the Reaganomics theory was promising "trickle down" benefits for everyone as the economy improved.

Ankrom told the audience July 26 at the *Portland Business Journal's* Secrets of the Private 100 breakfast his new company began "at the bottom of the trickle."

Initial projects included kitchen remodeling, but the partners, mostly by word-of-

mouth promoting, soon moved on to larger projects, including the award-winning Oregon Public Broadcasting headquarters in Portland — their first major project.

By 1990, the company had 50 employees; 100 by 1997; 150 by 2000; and by 2001 another 20 in a new office in Seattle. Today the company employs 300. Its 108 percent growth in revenue, from almost \$21 million in 2004 to \$43.5 million in 2006, put it at No. 44 on the *Business Journal's* recent list of fastest-growing private companies.

Ankrom Moisan is the second largest architectural firm in Oregon, with a reach across the country and Mexico and Canada, making it the 41st largest architectural firm in the world.

The company's portfolio has grown to include commercial offices, such as Amber Glen Business Park in Hillsboro; health care, such as the OHSU School of Dentistry; and hospitality, including Hotel Lucia in Portland. The firm also designs mixed housing, such as 11th South in Los Angeles; churches, such as Good Shepherd Community Church in Boring;

'One of our keys to our growth is our entrepreneurial staff, who are always seeking opportunities.'

Stewart Ankrom

Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects

and public places, such as Riverwest in Vancouver. Its retail work includes The Shops at the Old Mill in Bend and its senior housing projects include Trinity Terrace in Fort Worth, Texas.

"One of our keys to our growth is our entrepreneurial staff, who are always seeking opportunities," Ankrom said.

When a new employee recently asked Moisan for an organizational chart, he drew a picture of a tree, explaining that the trunk of the tree represents the management team. Its role is to support and nurture the staff, providing teams with the resources necessary to be successful, including a deep knowledge base that goes to the roots of the company. The branches of the tree are the project teams. Each branch grows organically to meet the needs of clients and produces the "fruit" of the firm, which is architecture.

Another key to the company's success and growth, Ankrom said, is its relationships with its clients.

The company includes this statement on its Web site, aama.com: "Our clients know we put our creative talents to work helping them articulate and achieve their vision. We have the ability, experience and dedication to fulfill their needs — whether it's designing an intimate restaurant, a peaceful senior living community, or desirable high-rise urban housing. In short, we put our ears to work, not our egos. We listen. We collaborate. And we create beautiful results with client goals and budget in mind. That is the secret to our success."

Now, as the company nears its 30-year anniversary in 2013, the partners are preparing a transition plan to turn the company over to experienced shareholders.

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