

What Do You Do If You Don't Work For Kodak Or Xerox?

By Edwin F. Stevens

You work for one of the multitude of smaller companies in the area — like Burleigh Instruments, Inc., in East Rochester.

The founders of Burleigh (Scott C. Arrington, Robert G. Klimasewski, and William G. May, Jr.), like many engineers, have advanced engineering degrees, and at one time or another they have worked for medium-size or large-size companies. But a common characteristic in the background of each founder is the progression in his career from conventional engineering to management, marketing, production, or finance. Such diversity of job experience has turned out to be indispensable, because a new, small company requires each member to stretch himself as far as he can go, and then some. (It must be said that Burleigh is going well: in its second year, the company has sales of close to half a million dollars.)

Burleigh is a midget of an operation compared to Kodak and Xerox. But the people at Burleigh have a giant esprit de corps. The common goals of the employees, the ready evidence of progress, the participation of all people in many major decisions, and freedom from restriction to a single job contribute to this spirit.

In August '72, Burleigh started with two persons in a few hundred square feet of operating space on Linden Avenue. The reason for its existence was to develop, produce, and market laser-related instruments.

Immediately, the company proved successful. (If you don't believe this, talk to its competition, Burleigh management says.) In March '73, Burleigh moved to new quarters in the old Penn Central car shops in East Rochester. Space increased to 4,000 sq. ft., and the staff to five.

The staff has now grown to 12. Products have grown too. In addition to laser-related products, the company has developed a unique electromechanical actuator capable of .003 microns resolution over 25 mm of travel. Other products, which are under development, will be for use in biomedicine, pollution control, and spectroscopy.

What's it like to work at a small company? One big difference between the larger and the smaller company is the length of the management chain. In a small company it may be one or two links long. This short chain of command allows decisions to be made rapidly. For example, products thought of in June can be designed, developed, tested, and on the market in August without any dilution of quality. This is a most pleasing experience to anyone interested in rapid results and seeing the fruits of his labor.

Burleigh products are marketed to laser researchers and others working in the forefront of technology. And, since an engineer at Burleigh works directly on both the products and the sales of the products, he gets caught up in the wave of excite-

ment these research and development efforts generate throughout the country and world.

For instance, many believe laser fusion to be the energy source of the future. Burleigh sells directly to major labs doing this research and works closely with researchers in the area.

Most engineers might balk at selling. But selling at Burleigh is not the usual kind. Selling is done through a low-keyed technical discussion with the potential customer. These discussions are a lively exchange with knowledgeable customers, and a sale is completed only if a product can genuinely help them. No attempt is made to sell snow to eskimos.

Engineers at Burleigh can't jump into a rut and hide. They must not only be technically competent — but must also work happily in production, marketing, cost and inventory control, and sales. The ever-changing nature of these tasks is often frustrating to some engineers. Some even turn their noses up at such work. Everybody at Burleigh empties wastebaskets, but everybody has a bigger share in the glory.

One could hardly call Burleigh's quarters sumptuous. They are, to put it kindly, antique. Furniture in them was new many moons ago; air conditioning is looked on as a frill to be avoided at all costs. In fact, the only thing not skimmed on is the provisions for testing and producing company products. However, I have to admit there is a certain ancient pleasantness in the company's surroundings.

As the epitome of a small company, Burleigh reflects, indeed magnifies, the universal requirement for engineering inventiveness. Rubber bands, chewing gum, and the like can be materials used to validate product ideas. If you're small, you sometimes have to do this. There are many such ideas to be proven or disproven, and time doesn't give you an even break. Products must be developed and on the market quickly to meet rapidly changing technological demands.

In talking about Burleigh, I've been talking about the joys and sorrows of many a small company. Stack them up against your job and see where you come out.



Where Burleigh is