Why did you choose your career?
Charlotte Pipe and Foundry is a fourth generation family-run enterprise, started by my great grandfather in 1901. While it was natural that I enter the business, I felt strongly that I should get my education and gain some life experience outside the company before I came to work at Charlotte Pipe, which I eventually did in 1984.

Who or what has been the major influence on your career?
Getting a law degree and an MBA taught me how to think and understand the fundamentals of how to run a business. But, my experience with Outward Bound taught me determination. After three trips and serving on their board for many years, I've taken their motto to heart, "To serve, to strive and not to yield." Those are positive and inspiring words that I try to live by. Also, I would be remiss if I did not mention the tremendous influence the directors of our company have had on me, namely my dad, my uncle and our former president Ned Hardison.

Do you think managers are born or made?
I think it's a little of both. Someone once said that extraordinary people are simply ordinary people with an extraordinary determination. I think anybody can be a manager. But not every manager is a great leader. The trap leaders sometimes fall into is getting too far out in front of whom they're trying to lead. After all, a leader without followers is just a person going for a walk.

What career advice do you have for those aiming for the top?
Hard work, dedication and integrity are common qualities in successful people — but they're only half the equation. To reach the pinnacle, surround yourself with good, smart, talented people and let them do their job. Create an environment of teamwork and reward success. Strive to minimize company politics. Most importantly, embrace change. Jack Welch said that if the rate of change inside your organization is slower than the rate of change outside your organization, then your organization is near an end. I think that's pretty good career advice.

From which job did you learn the most, and what did you learn?
I grew up on a farm outside Charlotte, N.C., so I'm no stranger to hard work. In the summers when I was in high school, I worked at the Charlotte Pipe foundry. Just before my freshman year in college, a union had voted in by the workers at the foundry — an event that caused tremendous turmoil for the company. It was through that experience that I learned how important it is to take care of your employees. After all, you can never get an employee to treat a customer better than they are treated themselves.

What are the crucial issues your industry must face in the coming decade?
The greatest threat we face is unfair trade from China. We have many tough, but fair foreign competitors, particularly on the plastics side of the business. But the state-owned Chinese foundries don't have to worry about the high cost of capital or shipping, making it difficult for private domestic foundries to compete. Their environmental and safety regulations can be lax, or in some cases, non-existent. While American manufacturers can compete with anyone in the world on a level playing field, the advantages enjoyed by subsidized Chinese foundries cross the boundary of fairness.

What has been the key to your success?
Jack Kay has joined Axsun Technologies, Billerica, Mass., maker of advanced photonic components and subsystems, as president and chief executive officer, taking over for company founder Dr. Dale Flanders, who will become the chief technology officer while retaining his role as chairman of the Board of Directors.

Aan Risk Services, Inc., of Southfield, Mich., has designated Michael Stanford national practice group leader, heavy industry, from executive-in-charge, risk services group. LeAnne McCorry has been named president managing director for the retail insurance brokerage and risk management organization and James Webb will take the responsibility of office chairman from sales originator.

Edward B. Caudill has been appointed president and chief executive officer of Fleetwood Enterprises, producers of recreational vehicles and manufactured housing. Caudill has 25 years' management experience with leading manufacturers and distributors.

Thurma-Tru Doors of Maumee, Ohio, manufacturer of fiberglass and steel residential entry doors, has appointed Bob Doyle to a newly created position of senior vice president and general manager, residential door business. He will oversee sales, product and market management, resident customer service, engineering and manufacturing. Jerry Oleshansky has been named vice president of marketing and business development, focusing on the development of Therm-Tru's long-term growth strategies while leading strategic marketing efforts for the company. Frank Glover has joined the company as vice president and general manager of OEM and supply chain, responsible for Therm-Tru's manufacturing facility in Matamoros, Mexico.

Brass Craft Manufacturers of Novi, Mich., pluming products maker, has named Todd Talbot company president. Prior, Talbot was president of Ainsco Corporation; both companies are divisions of Masco Corporation, manufacturer of home improvement and building products.