

Interview: Fred Kline Talks About The 1994 Start of What Has Become A Nationally Known Accounting Firm



We caught up with Fred Kline, even in the midst of tax season, to discuss the company's twenty fifth year in business. We think you'll enjoy his candid responses. We'll corner him again for a second interview in April!

Editor: It must be exciting, as the founder and CEO, to see the company reach its twenty five year anniversary. Can you tell me how it feels to celebrate this milestone?

Fred Kline: Well, of course I am very proud of what we have accomplished. I am amazed at how quickly we have arrived at this milestone! It is more than I ever expected and beyond my dreams. We have not come close to achieving our company's potential and I find it very exciting to continue our growth path. I feel like, over these years, that the company has gone through three phases. First, with me as the primary accountant working with Pauline Fritz, our office manager for over 22 years now. Secondly, as this continued, my role evolved to business development and technical reviewer. Thirdly, with staff expansion and having a COO onboard, my focus has been on business development, marketing, staffing, and growing the company according to our plan. It's as exciting now to come to work now as it was on day one!

Editor: Tell us about the beginnings. How did you come to create Kline and Company, and what were your early challenges?

Fred: I gathered considerable experience in government contract accounting. While I was attending Bentley University, I first worked for my father's company. While in an accounting role in high-tech, I continued working for my dad's business on weekends, then went on to work in other government contracting firms. After my dad's sudden passing, I stepped in to run the company and subsequently we sold the family business which still runs today. I held on to the values I learned over those years, and the importance of serving those who serve our military, and ultimately save lives by their work. Initially, I was working two days a week in a spare bedroom at home. The rest is history. I grew the staff as our client base grew and discovered how much fun I was having working with companies, and in keeping my dad's memory alive by supporting companies just like the one he had started.

Editor: Say a little more about your vision for the business, going back to 1994 and how it has evolved or changed

Fred: My initial vision was to have a firm of 5-6 team members. I adjusted that vision to about 12 people. Now that we have exceeded that number, based on our trending growth, I know that we are not close to done.

Editor: *I sense there are some patriotic reasons behind the company's reason for being, or as the French would say, raison d'être. What are the driving forces that move Kline and Company forward?*

Fred: Well, we like to say that we support those who are supporting the warfighter, tailored after the DCAA's mission. You give your all to those who protect us, we give our all to your company.

Editor: *People seem to like working at, and working with your company. In all of these years, how has the culture of the company evolved? What makes it all work so well?*

Fred: I like to think we hire smart, experienced and passionate team members, and then let them do their jobs. Everyone at Kline and Company is striving to do their best work for our clients. Each team member is aware that our continued success is only possible due to the quality of their accounting work, thus they support the quality review process we have in place, conducted by another team member. Every employee is valued for their hard work and their contribution to the team. Trusting each other to do our best work has allowed me to delegate with confidence, which is key to our healthy work environment.

Editor: *With growth comes changes internally and organizationally to handle the increased demands caused by new business, as you retain clients, too. Talk a little about staffing and your recently hired Chief Operating Officer.*

Fred Kline: While watching the television show *Shark Tank* one of the sharks commented that two out of three of the following are needed for a successful business: people, processes, and products or services. We have been fortunate to find excellent team members (people), and I know we offer a high level of professional services. Although I understand the importance of a clear process, that is not my personal passion so that is managed by our Chief Operating Officer. By cross training the staff, standardizing software, and setting up standard operating procedures (SOPs) we are able to scale our business and continue to provide a consistent high quality of work, as in the past.

Editor: *With Sheree in place as the company's COO, how has this changed your day to day activities?*

Fred: Having Sheree in place allows me to focus on business development, collaborating with Sheree in bringing in new team members, and managing the office team. Knowing that I have her to handle the business of our business—serving our clients—I am able to concentrate on making our growth goals come to fruition.

Editor: *What's next for Kline and Company? You've recently expanded, essentially doubling office space. And hanging a really nice sign atop the building. What does that bode for Kline and Company?*

Fred: It feels good to see the Kline logo on our building, and being recognized by the community. We have been growing at 20% annually and that remains our goal for the next few years. Sheree and I plan to reevaluate our goals when the business has doubled from 2018 levels. We want to maintain our service quality while managing healthy growth.