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THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

LEONARD BOXER

Interviewed by
Estelle Ellis
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A. ...F.I.T. but I just kind of (?) ... because, well I was sort of entrenched in this Mayer School (?) and I kind of liked it, and I thought it was a thing I may not do continuously...

Q. What was the Mayer school?

A. The Mayer School is a private institution that was on 36th Street and they were very... In fact, they're still in existence I understand. It's called Mayer School or (?) ... School of Fashion, or something like that. And they were very important to the industry. A lot of industrial.... People that were in the industry, pattern makers, cutters....

Q. Was it more technique and skills?

A. It was skills and technique, yeah. Teaching production and pattern making...

Q. It still exists?

A. It does, yeah.

Q. I wonder... Does Mr. Feldman know this?

A. Yes.

Q. Well, we need you very much in the whole technology side. The whole production side, and I'm going to be speaking to that point. I want to involve several people, certainly Mr. Ortenberg and you, to be involved with the college, and to set your... I mean, I don't think anyone should
ask you to be part of an evening in which you aren’t sharing a total history of what we’re all about. And six months ago... No, this is a six month study. A year and a half ago I was asked to do an overall evaluation of the college's curriculum, as well as the state of education, the state of fashion change, education change, and the impact that technology is going to have on both. And the net result was a very big important white paper, which we have synthesized in the form of a book, which I am going to give you, which brings you instantly up to date on an industry that you know better than most, but what you don’t know about it is that it has grown up and nothing tells it to you more than this.

A. Yes. President Feldman had mentioned this. He is very, very proud of what he has accomplished at the school, and he did take us around and show us some of the...

Q. Did he take you and Art around?

A. No, Art was not there. Art doesn’t get involved in this. This is strictly my personal feelings; getting our company involved in Israel.

Q. "Shankar." (?)

A. Well, not only "Shankar," but getting our company involved in manufacturing in "Israel," for a number of reasons. The first reason is, their quality is excellent. And the second and third reason (?). . .

Q. Is that an off-shore base for you now? Israel’s an off-shore base for you now. Interesting. How many countries are you in, off-shore?
I know in Hong Kong you're 130 people.

A. Well, that's our main office.

Q. That's your main office.

A. Then in Taiwan we have (?) . . . That's about it I'd say. We do manufacture in some other countries there besides...

Q. Are you manufacturing in Europe?

A. Somewhat in Portugal...

Q. Portugal. And Israel.

A. And we were doing some work in Hungary for a while, but we found them difficult to deal with. . (?) . .

Q. So really, you're a global production operation, and the logistics for... Well, let's talk a little bit about the logistics. You're an American company. What does a company have to do to be in a position to be able to operate production... From a production point of view, globally?

A. Well, first of all, you have to be big enough to enable you to hire enough quality people, people that will travel for you, so that you can have the control on whatever your product is.

Q. Here in the States...?

A. No...

Q. Wherever you are.
A. We've set up offices in...(?) made a trip recently to Israel...February 20, 21st...I had gone there officially to cut the ribbon, where we opened our own Liz Claiborne office. You hire quality people and make sure that these people work specifically for us, to maintain the standard of quality that the company is known for. So, we did that on a smaller scale when we started the company. I was...by running across the ocean. We did some work in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which are close enough that I could pick up every few weeks and check the quality. But as we grew and our product was accepted and the company grew and grew, we were able to hire people...I mean, I'm simply stating it--it was a little more complicated than that--but we hired people and made sure they understood the quality that we were looking for, through me, through Liz, per se, and made sure that it was given to us. We had problems, but until you develop....So I think a company really has to be large enough, where they do their own thing to be sure they're getting the quality. A lot of companies work with agents who couldn't care less, who work for 10-12 different accounts. They're unfortunate in the sense that...You know...Hopefully they'll get the product that they're looking for, but we had that advantage...

Q. Now, did this...As I understand this, this is different than just hiring contractors in these countries. This is setting up your own...Really your own production...

A. The factories are not owned by us.

Q. They're not owned by you, but...
A. But we own our own offices, and the people that work for us on quality control and administratively (that keep our records), the people that work for Liz Claiborne...We have set up our own offices...

Q. And they're positioned in those factories?

A. Not in the factories but they're positioned close enough where they could travel to the factories on a daily basis and come back to the head office, the Claiborne office, and write out their report, monitor whatever is happening in these factories, to a point where even...Making sure that buttons or trims or fabrics or whatever it is that has to go into these factories in order to give us a delivery date...All of this has to be monitored over there, you know. From the inception we were aware of what we were doing and tried to make it happen.

Q. Well, let's start from the beginning, now that you have taken me up to this moment....Obviously you're still operating as a consultant to them.

A. Yes.

Q. Are you involved in the Chinatown operation?

A. I have been. I guess if I chose to be I could be. I'm not (?)...

Q. Okay. So your real investment and time now is in terms of setting up this liaison with Israel.
A. And I will be making some trips as the founder of the company and as, you know, one of the people that made our relationships, years ago ...It's still important that I come "aboard," the "father"(?) you might say, etc., etc., and promote good will for the company....

Q. Well. Take me back to the beginning. I don't need too much historical stuff, because between Art and Jerry, I got an idea that you answered a small ad and the rest is history. But you were the third, so-called, investor. You did invest in the company, right from the beginning.

A. Yeah. Well, that was one of the things...They were looking for a production partner, and I saw a little ad in Women's Wear...At that time I was working for another company, and I felt it was time to start again looking for an opportunity to get into my own business. As you get older you feel you want to do something on your own and achieve some kind of recognition, for yourself really, and I felt I had a lot to offer. And I read this ad and it turned out to be Art and Liz, and it was love at first sight, and I guess I came through as having a feeling of equality, that Liz projects. You know, the styling that Liz projects. And I felt that she certainly had class, as far as product goes...

Q. And credibility.

A. That...I believed in and I think it has proven over the years...

Q. But even though the early history...The story that I heard about the people who, right from the beginning, in the fabric industry, who backed you and who were ready to work with you, and Saks coming in so quickly on that
first line. And the man...Ken Roberts...Not Ken...Ed Roberts, coming in from "Hudsons"(?), even though he didn't have "DNN"(?)... All of that said to me, you know...She started out with a reputation and fulfilled, obviously, what everybody's confidence in her was. But that you did have that at the start...

A. Well...Liz was known. She wasn't a very well known top name designer, like a Calvin Klein. But she was in the industry for 16-17 years, designing for "Youth Guild"(?) and...You know...In very small print, it was "Youth Guild," by Liz Claiborne, etc., and it was not...In those days there were not designer names that were as popular as they are today. But I guess they saw the future, the potential of what can be done. Liz's feeling...

At that point there was a lot of polyester clothing, and Liz had a feeling for natural fibres. And we felt that there was a market for women...The group of business women was getting larger and larger, and they felt there was a market for her type of product. And because of the (?)...the working woman type of things--sophisticated, smart...

Q. That was the thought practically from the beginning... That was the market right from the beginning.

A. It was geared to that particular person.

Q. And that was important to you too, in terms of your confidence..?

A. Yes...

Q. How aware were you of the demographics of change at that time?
A. I was very aware of it. I worked for a very low priced house who manufactured things in Taiwan, and it just bothered me to see the low quality, the low end type of things, and I worked very hard to upgrade. And the person I worked for just couldn't see it. He was into the J.C. Penney thing and getting $3-4...As cheap as possible, regardless of what was coming in. And it bothered me. I felt I just couldn't...It was a good paying job and it gave me the opportunity to travel, which was comparatively new in those days, and I felt I was learning a lot about an area where I could manufacture better quality goods, if you wanted to pay for it. So that was another thing that made me want to leave that and go into my own plant.

Q. Now, in the beginning, did you go offshore?

A. Well...

Q. How soon after you guys...started...

A. The first season we worked domestically. We were too small at that time. Then the second season we met some people that represented a company in Hong Kong that were doing blouses, and that was more or less the beginning. We started doing blouses and the blouses were successful—based on design and based on quality, how they were made—we grew bigger and blouses grew into the bottoms, coordinated with bottoms. Then the next thing, we started looking for manufacturers where we could make bottoms offshore. And...

Q. Hong Kong was the first exploratory base for most companies, wasn't it?
A. Yes, it was.

Q. And after Hong Kong, what developed?

A. Taiwan. And Taiwan was, at one point, considered very low end, but we started developing... I used to go over there and work with them extensively, in the factories, and try to teach them our standards of quality.

Q. Are you thinking about China now?

A. We are in China, yes.

Q. You are in China.

A. Yes.

Q. How long have you been in China?

A. About two years?

Q. Do you find that satisfactory?

A. Yes we do.

Q. Was that an easy in?

A. Actually, it was something that was done by our dress division. The person who works for us as a production guide, who was very instrumental in setting it up... I had gone over there... Again, I thought there was potential there... He spent some time, pretty much the way I had done at the very beginning, in developing China....
Q. How do you set up your production operation? Do you have a production person for each division?

A. We do now.

Q. And now that you're in partnership with everything from an accessory company to a cosmetic company, will there be a production liaison with each of these companies, or...that are stationed...

A. I don't need production...I think more a design liaison: colorations...from the Claiborne sportswear, dresses, whatever...You know. It filters down to the shoes and accessories, where they can coordinate together.

Q. The only reason I'm asking that is because such a critical part of your beginning was your perception that the quality control was essential. Particularly where you begin to licensee out, and where you begin to develop going partnerships, don't you need as much control over quality control as you do over design control?

A. Yes we do. That is one of the reasons...We were getting that and we were monitoring it very closely...We have people that are liaison between design and the type of product that is being made for us, and if there is something that we're not too happy with, we will just...I've gotten very involved, since I'm in "Grove" (?) company, we're doing loungewear...

Q. I remember that. That was a disaster.

A. Yes, it was. We were not happy with the quality that they had
done for us and we cut them out immediately. Liz especially—it's her name—and we always "expect" (?) that and we fight for it, to make sure that it isn't "Bastardized" (?) in any way. And so far we've been successful in dealing with (?)..

Q. Well, then, within the structure of the Liz Claiborne operation, here—not the licensees; I'm talking about the apparel end of it and now the menswear end of it—Do you have key production people?

A. Yes.

Q. How big a staff do you have?

A. Well, each division works independently of each other, but we do have one top person that you would call, I guess, "production scheduler." (?) They do nothing but assign to different factories and talk to the production people in each division and decide how and where it should go. But each one works individually of the other. The men's division has very little to do with the ladies' and it's a completely different concept. And Liz then, on the overall, has been, up until....or I guess she still is....is involved with or will have meetings with design people in each division—of the dress division, trying to tell them what she likes. They'll review both design and then review it with Liz, and if there's anything she has great objections to she will let them know.

Q. After you left, who took over for you?

A. Mr. John "Concilinni" (?) is the gentleman...
Q. And how long did he work for you?

A. A few months.

Q. Just a few months? In other words, he wasn't someone you trained up?

A. Well, a few people replaced me.

Q. That's okay. You don't have to be humble.

A. It got to be a tremendous company and...Yeah. As I hired people to do production and report to me, one of the people there—a fellow by the name of 'Valon'—who is now sort of...Well, he heads up the Liz...Sport Liz Wear Division, but he does have assistants reporting to him. So it's kind of 'Brown.' It's hard to say, you know...John 'Concilini' is really the guy who's on the Executive Board and is kind of...

Q. Uh huh. But the reason I asked you this is because Art made such a point about bringing up young people. And I wondered if in preparation for your retirement, you were bringing along some young people?

A. I tried very hard to bring along a couple of people, but we found...For years I knew I was going to retire at age 63, which was five years after we went public, and I felt that being the older member of the group I would be the first to retire. And I tried very hard to think about people that I hired as a replacement...But things change continuously. You know, you plan A and then suddenly you turn to Plan B, and at one point it was small enough where you had one person to supervise and try to...
Today it's not so. John "Concillini" will and does have the overall...

Q. Production responsibility. And you say he's on the board. He's Vice President?

A. Yes. He's a Senior Vice President.

Q. Tell me...You saw this company over a span of ten years. What do you think now, in terms of...One of the things we're going to do in this program, which as you can see, I've started to bring it in...is going to be about this size and there's going to be a page for each of you...And under each I really want to have a dialogue in which you're telling everybody who reads this how you feel about production, as far as the total development of a successful corporation. Because on the back what I want to do is indicate education for this profession, within the industry, which is production. So I'd like very much for you to talk to me as if you were talking to a group of people who are your peer professionals, which you will be talking to in a sense, about how...what you feel is the role...was the role in which you found yourself, and the role in which you shaped to make this a quartet of successful people, creating a company from scratch. How did production...In other words, what was essential to give you the lift off you needed to do the job you had to do, and how do you see, knowing what's going on in this industry, production's role in the development of a successful company?

What has happened in the past ten years has happened very rapidly as far as production and technology goes. I consider myself one of the old time technicians that made it my business to learn pattern making, to learn
about sewing, to learn about factories--different types of equipment. And over the years things have become a lot more technical. We've started... There's the "Camsco"(?). . . seeing that we got a computerized grading, computerized marking, computerized cutting, sewing... All this is the up and coming trend today. Even as far as design goes, there are computers that... Designers just sit there and do their sketch and they have the thing come out beautifully. F.I.T. is very involved in it..

Q. How much computerization do you have over at Liz Claiborne now?

A. Well, when I left I was very... I would say about two or three years prior to my leaving, I was very much involved in trying to get our patternmakers to do patterns on the computer. We were so involved in (?)... we just didn't have the time. We had sent one of two people to F.I.T. to learn about computer...

... Pattern making. So I felt that those were important. I feel that today there is a lack of a combination of people... Which is why we had to separate this job, of production person. Today it is very administrative and it's also very technical. There are a lot of bright...

Q. Within production.

A. Within production, yes. There are a lot of bright people that are great administrators but they either lack the knowledge of being technical or the ability of hiring a technical person that is also able to relate to the...
Q. But what is the sourcing today of...Talking about sourcing not just being finding someone to make your products; sourcing, finding people...So few schools are turning out technologically aware technicians, production technicians, for the fashion industry, that...How do you get people for those jobs? And also, you don't discard the people you have who grew up on a different time table. What do you do to educate them?

A. Well, we train them. We feel that that's very important. We have hired people that were not completely right for the job, where we've taken...We do have some training programs, not...They're not officially instituted training programs. We give...We may send them to F.I.T. to train them. And we do that. People do have the ability to apply to F.I.T. and the company will pay for their education in order to enhance their knowledge for doing their job better.

Q. Have you done this in the production area a great deal?

A. Oh, absolutely.

Q. You have.

A. Absolutely. We have...Again...I mentioned we sent two people to the F.I.T. for the grading...

Q. Pattern making. Computerization...

A. For pattern making. And we've sent other people...Other people have gone there for production courses and pattern making courses, etc.

Q. So, do you feel that knowing how fast it has changed, even in the ten years that you've been there...You came as a seasoned person in
production. So what you're saying to me...in these ten years, you came and you were the epitome...You were the best, really, that the Claiborne people could have found, in terms of seasoning and an understanding of your profession, and in ten years you already felt that there were changes going on that made your knowledge obsolete.

A. Uh huh.

Q. And the need, then, for education, updating of education, based on the changes needed to make production more efficient, became apparent.

A. Absolutely.

Q. And so you're telling me, I think (and I don't want to put words in your mouth, so you correct me; I'm just trying to understand it), are you telling me, then, that the real urgent need now is to have a formal education process for people in production throughout the industry?

A. Yes.

Q. People who may have been in the profession for ten years, but who are know less than the kids who are getting out of school now.

A. That's right.

Q. Now we know this is happening in the engineering fields. You are now saying this is happening in the fashion industry.

A. Yes, it is. The fashion industry is becoming so technical, and all the equipment that is being used today is, number one, out of necessity,
I guess. And number two, that it is there and it's a great thing to have. And it enables companies like ours, that have grown to the extent that we have, we just couldn't do it by hand. We would have had to have maybe hundreds of people doing it, which is impossible (?) . . even if you could. We could be looking for production people for six months before we'd find Mr. Right, quote unquote, who turned out later not to be the right person. It's a continuous hassle finding people who are qualified or even right to be trained into that type of position.

Q. Do the companies who are making the new equipment...Don't they do training?

A. Ah, yes...They'll train the people how to operate the equipment, but they don't teach them the technical background, the eye to understand the product. I think it's a combination of things, where the designer, who designs something—Say Liz designs something, and I could look at it and say, "Gee, that's great," and interpret it for her on a pattern so that she likes what she sees in production. Other people can take something and just make a box and it will lack a certain...Well, what the designer really puts into her product. . (?) . . You have to understand product, you have to understand fashion, you have to be a technician, you have to be an administrator...

Q. But you said something else...We think of this as the optimum need in every profession, for a coming together of the expertise needed to create the holistic product. And what you're saying now is that you are a translator of Liz's vision. Liz has design visions, and by your production knowledge you can make that technically feasible as well as possible. And
that translation...I mean, it's like a photographer and a model. The photographer can't shoot a good picture unless he has a one-to-one relationship with that model, that is at the optimum. Now you're telling me that that sensitive interaction between production and design is critical...Right?

A. Well, right, but...

Q. So help me out. Articulate this....

A. What Liz and I do together...

Q. Tell me.

A. The fact that she would design a jacket or she would design a skirt or she would design a blouse, and people...would just see it as a...something flat. I could see it as something differently. There is a certain artistic view that a production man must have. It's not a cut and dried situation either, which a lot of people seem to feel that it is. I have seen people look at a blouse or a skirt, hang a certain way, and they see nothing wrong with it. I could see it, as I just said, through Liz's eyes, and try to interpret it, like the final product, come out the same way she had designed it.

Q. So that is the creative dimension to production.

A. That is the creative dimension, yes.

Q. To production. That no one ever talks about. Really, no one ever talks about.
A. Well we find it...I look forward in hiring production people to see their sense of taste, how they would look at a garment and how they could interpret it to their people or even to themselves. One of the things Liz, at the very, very beginning (and still is, I'm sure)...involved in the fittings of garments, in fit models, and I used to be very...I think I was the only one she would ever trust to do a fitting without her being there. Because she felt that through her eyes I would see certain things that were very intricate kind of, or delicate kind of... (?)... But the actual fashion of what Liz creates...Liz is not...It's not a straight...When we went into bigger blouses, there was a way that they hung, and eye for a huge...of over large...And we would discuss certain things together.

Q. Who is she able to have that kind of rapport with now? You're talking about a very rare rapport.

A. She has it now, I think, with a number of people. There are design (?)... People that she feels have a good sense of styling, that understand enough to look at things. She trusts some of the design people. But then they can go a little bit overboard in certain...

Q. Who in production is doing that for her?

A. Well...I guess Mr. "Lauren" (?) is one of the people...guess. Another production guy is Tom (?)... gets involved. Liz comes and sits in on some of these things to make sure that they see it properly. Some of our designers will come in and sit in on fittings to make sure that it's interpreted properly...
Q. What was the major break point in change? You started as four... really three very close people, then that following year Jerry joined. At what point in the ten years did you feel a real change occurring in your business?

A. I'd say after about the fifth year, we started... I forget what the volume was but it was a large amount. I had to travel so extensively at that point, in order to make sure that everything was being done properly, that I kind of lost the feeling for that small $12 million business we were looking for. We still say... We try to keep it as a family overall, but it's not there; it's a big company. There's a lot of political involvement. You know, things like that, which....

Q. Which happens in a big company.

A. Wherever you go, it's people, again... I felt after five years that that...

Q. That that was the change.

A. That that was the change.

Q. Uh huh. That it became more complex; more layered...

A. Yeah... And you know... We sort of... I didn't... I started working less closely with Liz and became more involved in the growing production department that I had to develop.

Q. Is the big responsibility for offshore orchestration now, the
logistics are the problem?

A. That's Art's problem.

Q. That's Art's problem now. But was that ever yours? That was yours?

A. Yes...

Q. So he's taking it on then.

A. See, now, Art is a person who I would say is very administrative, and the head of operations, he was responsible for putting a lot of things together in an administrative way--setting up...Well...systems, schedules, etc., etc.--And now he's gotten a little more involved...

Well...As we grew and as the factories have proven themselves...We know which factories are good at what, he can, through some of his people, work at that also. You know, being bright enough to understand and working very closely with Liz, and having a wonderful sense of fabric and...You know...He may not be as involved in the fit of the garment the way I was, but he's involved in understanding the overall. So he...It was easy for him to step into that situation. (?)

Q. Who do you think shaped the business "culture," and how do you define the business "culture?" Every company has a business "culture." What do you think is the Claiborne business "culture?"

A. Well, I think the three of us were very responsible. We somehow were very low key people, and when we gave our word to anybody, we kept it.
And I think Liz, in a sense, would be the person that we all respected and put on a pedestal, not that she ever wanted that. She was such a (?) .. person, but I think somehow Art and I both...Well, of course she's his wife...He loves her as his wife...But I think there's also a respect that we all had for her and her integrity and honesty, that we made sure that anybody acquainted with the company will continue to maintain that...

Q. But that word that you used--respect for each other--You know. I go back in my career and history and remember the legions of stories that came up of the difficulty between the inside man and the outside man. That's where it began for me. Seventh Avenue was not only the rag business, but it was an industry in which there was an inside man and an outside man; they never got along.

A. We never had an outside man in this...Maybe that's why it was successful.

Q. Jerry became the outside man in the sense that he became the sales...

A. Well, we say marketing...Actually, we were doing over $4 million in sales when Jerry started, officially came aboard, you know. And we never had sales people where, in the sense that it was an outside man. It was all....

Q. It was from within.

A. It was from within. Jerry understood and was very involved with what the concept of the styling was and he made sure that it would happen at the retail level, to a point where we tried to (and they probably still do)
Bring people in from various stores and educate them as to how the line should be presented. And when buyers buy the line, if they leave out a very important piece, we won't even sell it to them. So that when the consumer sees it in the store, she can put together properly...

Q. Well, you know, something that's coming through to me, from having spoken to now three of you is that education, within your company, is a critical factor in your success. Art talks about educating people to understand the principles and the credo and the culture of your business. You talk to me about educating people to understand what your criteria of quality control is. Right?

A. Absolutely.

Q. How to achieve it and how to develop what is almost an intangible, almost an indefinable way of being able to translate what the designer's creative conception is into a pattern and a production prototype. Now you're telling me that Jerry's responsibility is to educate the retailer to not only what Liz and your company's goals are in terms of thrust and focus, but how to present it in the most direct way so that it really...that from the beginning, that vision of Liz's is maintained and sustained at the point of sale.

Now...I haven't spoken to Liz yet, and that will be interesting, to have her...Because I didn't think it was going to be good to have her last. I now think it is. I think this is a critical difference. Because what I hear is education, education, education...all the way down the line, and very few
companies talk in these terms. You all must know that.

A. I'm really not... You know... Outside of personal experiences that I've had, companies that I've worked for actually, were mostly concerned with the dollar--getting it out on time and getting paid for it, etc. That was the end result. This was a different concept. We were never concerned with money. We all had a feeling about--maybe it was an ego trip or whatever--but not for money; it was to present the consumer with something that... We felt Liz was so talented that we could just... I could produce what she designed and just get it to the retailer, and get it to the retail person--the consumer--and that way be successful. And that's proven to be so. We never thought about dollars, we never thought about becoming rich, we never ever... The furtherest thing from our minds...

Q. It wasn't the end all.

A. No. Whereas most other companies...

Q. It's a "private"(?) product you're in though... And that's a very old fashioned concept.

A. It is an old fashioned concept. Most other Seventh Avenue firms... the buck is (?)... and regardless of what it is they are out to make that dollar and...

Q. Yeah. Well, Art said he never did want me to.... I think of him almost as...
A. Art's a tough guy to put a fence around.

Q. A rabbi. I think of him as an industrial rabbi! That's interesting. I mean, he is rabbinical. He has a fervor, he has a passion, he has...

A. And he's a very unreligious person!

Q. No, you know...A rabbi is a teacher. A rabbi is a teacher.

A. Sure. Well, then when I say professor, Art always wanted to be...Art has a wonderful way with words and really an extensive vocabulary, and he can speak beautifully, and I've always...Well, we've had our little differences, of course, but we're still very, very, very good friends...

Q. Well, that's the other thing. The caring that you feel. Because that was the other thing...There's so...As I said to him, you people mirror the good world out there, which only, from my point of view, says that you people have good feelings about your selves. Because the world only looks good to you if you feel good yourself. And that comes through as part of your business culture.

A. Well, I guess the fact that we all loved and respected Liz, or love and respect Liz, and she is a person that really is such a talented woman...Well, when you meet her—You've met her, I'm sure—When you talk to her...

Q. Yes, but not the way I know all of you now...

A. She's such an understated person. So down to earth, that even
after everything that's happened, we were on a plane once going to...
The four of us...And people came over and asked her for an autograph, and when they heard "Elizabeth Claiborne." But she's so unaffected by it all. And, you know, we still respect that. And, as a leader, I guess, in a sense... (?)...

Q. How could you give it up?

A. You know, I used to think that five years ago; that it would be impossible. You get to the age of 63...

Q. Why 63?

A. Well, that was the five year mark so to speak. Actually, I'm 64; my birthday was last month. And...

Q. Happy Birthday.

A. Thank you. And...I must tell you, traveling as extensively as I have...One day (?)... Jersey, and Art and I had a discussion and we realized that there was a problem and the next morning I was on the plane to the Orient. It was a 22 hour trip back, and 22 hours...back and forth. And with the time change...It knocks the hell out of you! Physically. And things got very big...To me it got big. Maybe more than I could personally handle, I don't know. But I kind of felt...I had seen people have heart attacks, people do this...And you get tired at age...Once you get beyond that 60...When I was 58, 59, I was still full of vim and vigor and whatever, and I never thought I would want to retire. But I guess maybe you get a little
fat, financially. You realize there are a lot of things you can do. Although, as I said before, it was the furthest thing from my mind. It took me two years to realize...And I still don't realize what financial success we've achieved also, aside from...Because it's really been on the bottom of my priority list. You suddenly realize, you know, hey there's a world out there. You know, for ten years I had been so engrossed in the growth of the company, and great as it was I felt I had to take this step...

Q. So it's a psychological "passage"(?) for you?

A. Yes. And I don't know if I'm going to be sorry...

Q. Well...You don't have to be...There's so much for you to do. You should be teaching at F.I.T., I'll tell you that. We'd love to make you a Professor in Residence...

A. Well, I might even consider that...I'll tell you...After I retired, I was down in Florida. Which is sort of a fairyland in a sense. Tennis...Continuous social kind of whirl down there. And coming back...Coming back in two weeks, may bring me back down to earth again. And maybe having made me rested up or whatever, I will say, "Hey, what is it all about?" And I will want to do...

Q. Well, I think they need you at the college. I'd like to have you think...Talk to me a little bit...Because that's the back side of this program. What kind of production education should we be giving now?

A. Well...I think the courses that the school does give is good,
Q. You've analyzed them.

A. Yeah. One of the things that I didn't care... I had gone to F.I.T. years and years ago, prior to my teaching at the other school, and I found that they get too involved in small areas, like they took the needle and started taking maybe two sessions on what the needle is, the head of the needle, etc., etc., etc., which, to people that are in the industry, adults, it can be a very boring kind of situation. Maybe to students, to the day students, it's something... But I think they should... And maybe they have... I can't say because it's been years... Maybe they...

Q. You'll have to (?) . . your observations. . (?)

A. I would have to, yes. They may have tailored their... the (?) now to the professional or the person in the industry, per se, who comes at night and wants to get as much out of it and, and get more direct education rather than getting into a kind of... So... I can understand doing that. But, again, I have been away from it...

Q. If you were setting up a production program at a college of this kind, what would you think would be the most critical thing to teach?

A. Well, the new equipment that is now...

Q. The new technology equipment.

A. In the industry. Yes.
Q. That's essential. Even though some of the companies don't have it yet?

A. Even though they don't have it, I think it's important for companies. There are some companies that are setting up now that have the equipment that smaller companies can take advantage of their services... I think even at F.I.T. they do that... That's important. I also feel that...

Q. Tell me what you think they do at F.I.T.? That they...?

A. That F.I.T. does allow companies to come in there...

Q. To look at their equipment.

A. Well, I think they may also do some of the grading and marking for them.

Q. You ought to check that out, because that's...

A. I think that could be very important. They may or may not, I'm not sure, but... it could be a....

Q. When we go down to see Shirley, today, you ought to check that out. I mean, it also would be an opportunity to call "Janice" (?) beforehand to see (?)... material on the curriculum; on the marketing and production. What else should be taught? What about this... creative production?

A. Well, I would try to give people an eye for design and concept of design; how garments are supposed to fit on people. You know. As against the very cheap (?)... kind of thing or a fashion kind of thing. It can be put into a less expensive garment also, based on our concept. I think
patternmaking is really important to production people. I've gone abroad and I've walked into a factory and they are doing something and I say, "Hey, the pattern is not quite right, we have to make a slight adjustment." Which is okay. I look for, when I hire production guys, what his background is in patternmaking. That's very important. And all the newer equipment in sewing and manufacturing...Operators....

Q. What about dealing with people on an offshore basis?

A. I think that's important.

Q. That's a critical part of education.

A. We have people who went over there and felt that because they're Chinese or whatever they might be that they can talk down to them, and we would slap our own people down immediately for doing anything like that. Because the concept that we had...We felt these people are just as important as anybody in the United States, and as important as part of our company, as maybe Liz Claiborne and myself.

Q. And I don't know that there are too many people teaching that to production people.

A. There probably isn't. I don't know that you could say that could be a course. I think it's part of...

Q. Well, I think it is a course. The whole business of...The human factor in production, which is critical. And you see, again, historically, the industry...One of the things that I loved about the conversations that
I've had with your people is a phrase that you haven't said but I'm sure you support it, the "respect for your sources." Respect for your sources. And I think that this... In so many companies, there is that built-in attitude of, "I've given him the business." You know? He owes me.

A. Uh huh. We never felt that way. And this, again, is a very important reason for our being as successful as we are. Or, maybe it's important because people felt (and I think I mentioned that at the beginning), when we gave our word, be it here or abroad, we never reneged on anything. And if we had to get out of something we would do it in an honest way. An up front kind of way. And we'd discuss it and if we couldn't get out of it... And there were times when we paid for some of our mistakes. Rather than hurt one of our suppliers. Or, (?)... sources... And that was very important. They began to respect us, and myself as being one of the people who went abroad and set up a relationship... They realized that we were for real. That we were not the typical Seventh Avenue, or even American, quote unquote, that comes abroad sometimes and can be very, you know, loud....

Q. Well, you know, there's a chair being set up by one of the "Lauders" (?). At the University of... at Wharton School, on international business communication. And I think that one of the things that Seventh Avenue is growing up to is the need to know how to relate to all socio-economic levels not only... as well as cultural levels. And maybe that's not only an extension course but a series of seminars that would be very, very valuable.
A. I think it would be very, very helpful (?) ... if we brought people in from the Seventh Avenue companies who... In fact, one gentleman said, "I can't quite understand your approach."

They had a problem with some sample hands... You know, women sewing in our many plants which we have in New Jersey. And what happens when these are union employees, one woman is having a problem... The other people all sympathize and they all slow down. And the next thing you do is... This guy came in, you know, he's typical Seventh Avenue, and he said, "Well, we'll cut out all their overtime." And, you know, get tough with them. I said, "You know, there are other ways of approaching these people. Why don't you just have a meeting with them and discuss it with them, etc., etc. And see what you can do."

Well, the first meeting he had I sat in on so that they would realize that I was aware of the situation out there. And within three weeks he said, "You know, Mr. Boxer, I must tell you, you taught me an awful lot about people." And he really... They began to do what he wanted them to do. They started to work, they were more efficient at their work, more productive, etc. And it was a thing that he said that in all the years he had been in the industry, he never knew that you could treat people with human kindness and get something done. It was always "being tough with them." And I think that was another approach that we had that has made us...

Q. Well, the gentle strong hand.

A. It is.

Q. A hand strong enough to know where it's going, but gentle in
A. Well, not to let them take advantage. There are people that at any time will take advantage...

Q. Well, I think you have told us a great deal. Is there anything that you think we should ask Mr. Boxer? That you'd be interested in?

Q. No, I think (?) ... same approach to the questions we asked everybody, with their expertise in four different categories, and they all sort of come back with...

Q. Come back with the same thing. Exactly.

Q. (?) ... we all talk about it, and this is why it works...

A. I think it was almost a natural thing...The four of us at the very beginning...And as we started reading some books about it and understanding more and more of the concept of people running a business today. .. (?) ...

Q. Well, it was alien to Seventh Avenue. This was alien to Seventh Avenue!

A. Yeah...

Q. Apart from the fact that...I mean, if you talk about an industry's culture...This culture was savage.

A. It was savage. You must understand, in those days, the people who migrated here...It was a do or die kind of thing. It's changed a lot. You know.
People are more educated. People are more aware of what business is like and I think companies like ourselves, and "Jones, New York (?)"...

Q. Not too many. Not too many... Not too many still...

A. You're right...
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