

# Today we will reach \$20 million, and Tukatech has helped me at every turn



Looking up the word "entrepreneur" in the dictionary, you might just find "Lucien Salama" as one of the definitions. This energetic, creative octogenarian has ridden a dizzying rollercoaster of occupations from the bottom to the top in his lifetime, crafting along the way a resume that appears fascinatingly random but always ultimately successful. From a young immigrant needing a student visa who reluctantly went to hairdressing school, Salama became a celebrated stylist with a string of salons in Manhattan and Spain, went on to open the largest oriental rug business in Belgium, and then became a respected antiques auctioneer.

Today, Salama is the founder and CEO of NewChef Fashion Inc., purveyor of high-style yet affordable culinary uniforms for kitchen and front of the house, as well as all types of custom uniforms. The fact that Salama is neither a chef nor a fashion designer nor even someone with great apparel experience testifies to his ability to build any business he chooses to pursue.

As with the rest of his career, Salama fell into the chef apparel industry serendipitously. After selling some chef coats for a friend, Salama and his wife, Chantal, a fashion designer, realized they could create a more stylish and affordable product "and still make money," Salama explains. Starting in 1989 with three yards of fabric purchased downtown, Salama built this new endeavor steadily, and then explosively, through a combination of high-quality product and sales smarts. "The style, the quality, the embroidery—everything we do is top," he says.

And that has won NewChef a stellar coterie of clients. To name but a few: the mega Compass Group and its clientele, including Wolfgang Puck Catering; Disney; the Bravo TV hit "Top Chef"; the Patina Group; a string of Las Vegas casinos and resorts, including the MGM Grand, the Venetian, Caesars Palace, and Club Med; cruise lines Royal Caribbean, Crystal Cruises, and Carnival; culinary schools and several American culinary federations; and various restaurant groups, including Red Lobster and the Olive Garden. NewChef, which produces 40 percent of its product entirely in the U.S., also outfits the culinary staff of every branch of the American military as well as the White House kitchen staff. "We are growing every day new customers; we are connecting with new customers. This is what I like," Salama says. From \$25,000 in gross sales his first year, he reports, "Today, we will reach \$20 million."

A stickler when it comes to his product, Salama does all his cutting and sewing in-house, whether at a facility in China overseen by his wife or at their 30,000-square-foot factory in Vernon, which Salama rebuilt in 2005 and

which houses the firm's design and embroidery departments. Back then, with large orders skyrocketing, Salama needed to find a way to efficiently handle NewChef's increasingly diverse and complex production needs. He went shopping for apparel software, and he met with Ram Sareen, founder and CEO of Tukatech, the apparel industry's leading provider of fashion technology solutions through advanced software and hardware. **Salama liked what he saw: a system so easy and intuitive, "I could do it myself," he says. More than that, he liked Sareen.** "Ram is a charming guy," Salama says. "The personal attention, the friendship I have with him was more what I wanted. He and I are on the same wavelength—we take care of our customers, worry about their problems, and we try to help."

Salama's first investment was in Tukatech's TUKAcad patternmaking CAD/CAM software, with his designers easily adapting to it for his increasing inventory of designs. Last year, Salama went on to purchase **Tukatech's Smartmark, the automatic marking program, which, he says, has made a world of difference. "It is worth every penny I spent for it," Salama says. "There are no more delays in getting my markers out, no more human errors, no more forgetting to put in a collar or a pocket.** You call up the style, put in the quantity and the sizes, and the marker program calculates and pulls everything needed to automatically print it in a way that saves the most fabric. Some of the fabric we are doing is not just culinary—the casinos really want expensive fabric, sometimes \$60 a yard, and we can't afford to waste."

Now, Salama is taking the next step. He is awaiting February delivery of his next Tukatech purchase—the automatic cutter. "The new cutting machine will save a lot of waiting time, giving us more flexible operations and faster," he says. With this tandem system in place, markers and grading will be transmitted directly from the Smartmark system to the Tukatech cutting machine. **A job that used to take six workers now will only require two or three. "It's a saving of manpower,"** Salama says, "but mostly a saving of time. My clients, they will wait six months before giving you the order, but when they give you an order, they want it the next day. Now, once they have approved the sample, I can go right into production automatically."

NewChef's clients also are busy coming up with new products for Salama to develop for them—tablecloths with embroidered logo centers, seat covers for the Navy with logos. "We never say no to anything," says Salama. "But I'm 80 years old. I don't want to go crazy, don't want to take chances. Tukatech has helped me at every turn."



Lucien Salama, right, founder and CEO of NewChef, with wife and fashion designer Chantal

