

Q&A /// INTERVIEW WITH AN INDUSTRY INSIDER

STEVE MUELLER /// ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT /// PRAXAIR, INC.

“The best way that we could help a customer with a challenge is to understand their needs and use our gas application expertise to evaluate their gas system and suggest options for improvement.”

What does Praxair do for the heat-treat industry?

Praxair produces and sells industrial gases, such as nitrogen, argon, hydrogen, and helium. Our main focus for the heat-treat industry is on atmospheres, but our gases are used in several applications including annealing, brazing, carburizing, sintering, and quenching. We also offer services, such as heat-treatment process evaluations, furnace audits, and technical assistance to help improve furnace performance. We have been working in this industry for a long time and have partners that can provide additional resources around gas controls, sensors and meters. Our goal is to provide the ultimate measure of customer service and support to the heat-treat industry.

What's a typical day like for you at Praxair?

My job is really kind of fascinating in that I work with a lot of different people and with various teams throughout the company. We have application engineers in the field that help our customers with their heat-treatment issues and look for new opportunities. This team has years of experience and they have become valuable resources for our customers. They provide a good perspective on what is happening in the heat treatment field.

I also work with our research and development group to design new types of heat-treatment products that serve the industry. Together, we evaluate the market to identify new improvements in existing heat treatment applications and look at new applications to bring a better understanding to the heat treat customers, from an industrial gas standpoint. I also visit them to see first-hand what things they are working on. I enjoy that part of my job very much, because it gives me an opportunity to see where our gases are applied and determine where improvements can be made. I also work closely with our marketing and communications group to develop plans and reach our heat-treat audience. Any one of these or all of them can be part of my typical day here at Praxair.

How do you work with a customer who comes to you with a challenge?

The first thing we generally do is try to get a good understanding of what their process is and what their challenges are. We have experienced people in the field who can help them and provide a new or maybe different approach to their issues. There may also be a situation where we work with some of our partners to bring a customized full-service package and help them overcome whatever



is hindering their progress.

So, my feeling on this is, the best way that we could help a customer with a challenge is to understand their needs and use our gas application expertise to evaluate their gas system and suggest options for improvement.

What do you think has changed the most about the heat-treat world, and how has Praxair adapted to that?

I think the largest changes in the heat-treat world come in two different areas. When I first started in this role five years ago, there

wasn't as much reliance on automation and there was more reluctance to change. I see the heat-treatment industry now adapting newer technologies, looking at more modern ways of approaching issues, and getting better performances out of their heat-treatment equipment.

Some applications have grown more than others over the last few years. Vacuum carburizing and hot isostatic pressing have seen decent growth numbers. It will be interesting to see how 3-D metal printing affects the heat-treatment market in general.

What would you consider some of Praxair's proudest achievements?

We're an industrial gas company that's been around for over 100 years. We have a large footprint here in the United States, and now globally as we merge with Linde. In heat-treatment, we bring resources and knowledge into the industry in an effort to help our customers. I'm most proud when we are approached by our customers with an issue, and we can help them resolve it and improve their process. I'm proud of our team's expertise and their ability to connect with the heat-treatment industry. Our team has maintained many good relationships over the years and those relationships have allowed us to partner with our customers to better understand their processes and business objectives.

Where do you see the heat-treat industry in the next, say, 10-20 years, and Praxair's place in that future?

I think the heat-treat industry is going to continue to evolve and become more modern. It will also continue to adapt newer controls and other types of monitoring systems that will provide better performance for heat-treatment applications. 🌟



MORE INFO www.praxair.com/heattreating