

AFTER 40 YEARS OF DEDICATION, WERNER FRANKENBERGER IS RETIRING



Like many other young boys within Rechtenbach, Germany, Werner Frankenger aspired to work at SKS. It didn't take long for him to join the company in 1981. Now, 41 years later, Frankenger is retiring from the business. In this interview, SKS's technical manager talks about his trajectory within the company and what he expects from the future.

1. What have been your career highlights?

The task and challenges that were not known in advance (laughs). For example, a client in South Africa once had a glass leakage. The customer rang me out of bed in the middle of the night. The next morning, I was on a plane on my way to South Africa to support the customer on-site.

2. What is your favourite thing about working for SKS?

I love the variety. You never know what problems you'll have to solve. I also enjoy the excellent cooperation between the SORG Group and our customers. And, of course, the opportunity to travel, even if I only see the airport and the client's manufacturing plant.

3. What drew you to start working in the glass industry?

Traditionally, many people from my home village, Rechtenbach (about 10km from Lohr), work at SORG as bricklayers. As a young boy, I was fascinated by their stories and experiences, and it became clear to me relatively quickly that I would also like to enter the glass industry.

4. Could you please describe your trajectory within the company and how SKS has supported your development?

I started as a bricklayer in 1981. My first job was a complete reconstruction of a glass melting furnace in Steinbach am Wald. After eight years as a bricklayer, I moved to the service department and expanded my knowledge and skills there. Adolf Knauer, the technical manager at that time, took me under his wing and, when he died unexpectedly in 1996, I had to take over his work.

SKS has always given me the opportunities and the confidence to develop myself, and I am very grateful.

5. Could you please describe your position? What sort of duties do you have at work?

As technical manager, I am responsible for the technical execution of projects and services. The work starts in the sales process when technical support and specifications are necessary. It involves, for instance, assessing the condition of a furnace and figuring out what kind of repair makes sense.

6. Do you have any mentors in your professional life?

Adolf Knauer, a former technical manager and my predecessor. One of his quotes has remained in my memory: "Nothing is impossible."



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7. How has the company changed over these 40 years?

Probably the most significant change within my 40 years was in the execution and realisation of furnace constructions. Today, we have lots of tools and equipment - such as electric winches, lifting equipment, mixing machines, chain saws and excavators for demolition - to do the job. When I started, everything was done by hand! I also noticed that, due to digitalisation, many things are discussed via video conferencing and e-mail. Personal contact on-site is becoming less and less frequent.

8. How do you see the glass industry in the next 40 years?

I believe the issue of emissions and energy will become even more crucial. In addition, it is becoming increasingly challenging to find skilled experts and personnel for the glass industry.

9. What has been your favourite project and why? And your greatest accomplishment?

A unique project was the first change of a complete throat in hot condition. It took a lot of preparation and consideration. I was jubilant when it all turned out well.

10. What's the most exciting part of your job?

Whenever it gets stressful (laughs).

11. What motivates you at work?

To develop and implement technical solutions together with our customers.

12. What was the biggest challenge, and how did you overcome it?

My biggest challenge was the first change of a 2.5" electrode holder while the furnace was operating. It took a lot of preparation, perfect teamwork and a plan B. At that time, an extreme challenge. Today, business as usual.

13. What do you think is going to be SKS's biggest challenge in the years ahead?

We are facing increased competition, especially in maintenance and hot repairs. The topic of a "shortage of skilled workers" is also present in our company. Therefore, preserving and transferring knowledge is one of the biggest challenges and tasks, but we are optimistic looking to the future because of our young staff.

14. How would you have handled things differently 40 years ago if you knew what you know today?

Looking back, I would do everything exactly the way I did. Of course, you're always smarter retrospectively. Back then, we began to develop today's repair methods. That could, at this time, only be done by trial and error. Today it's still sometimes trial and error, but much more evaluation and preparation with detailed analysis and simulations.

15. What advice do you have for anyone starting their career in the glass industry and at SKS?

You must be resilient and ambitious. The first years in the glass industry are not easy. Due to the heat, the work is physically demanding despite all the tools and equipment.

16. What are your plans now that you are retiring? What will you miss the most?

Hopefully, I will find more time to pursue my hobby, cycling. I will undoubtedly miss the interaction with customers and colleagues. I have known many of them since my early days at SKS.

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