Q & A: Stefan Dräger, Chairman of the Executive Board

125 years of heartfelt dedication

You’ve decided to celebrate the 125th anniversary with a bang. What does this anniversary mean to you?
It means taking a moment to pause and reflect on how we became who we are, what we are and what makes this company, whose anniversary we’re celebrating, so special.

Which moment in the company’s history impresses you most?
What impresses me most is that my forefathers, more than 100 years ago, were inspired by newspaper reports about a mining accident in far-off America to develop a device that made the profession of mine rescue workers possible – people who are still called Drägermen there to this very day.

You have been at the helm of Dräger for eight years. What has been your lasting mark on the company?
None whatsoever! It's not about building a monument to myself and leaving a lasting mark. I am solely the company’s highest servant.

You have often said that you would like to pass on the company to the next generation in better shape than before. What do you want to have achieved by then?
It’s as if someone has entrusted me to drive an armored car for a certain route. I’ll have done my job well if I’m able to get the valuable cargo to its destination and hand the car over to the next shift without an accident or hold-up – and pick up a few bags of money on the way.

Dräger is a family-run company. This has had a major influence on corporate culture at the company’s headquarters. What influence does this have on the culture at the global sites and subsidiaries?
It has a major influence. First of all, our global network is constantly growing stronger. Secondly, family-run companies are also highly regarded in other countries, sometimes even more so than here.

Looking back, what would you say was your greatest success?
The greatest success was restoring independence from Siemens without getting bogged down by becoming dependent on banks. This was mainly the
result of the efforts by our employees, who managed a tremendous turnaround during the 2009 crisis.

You have three children. How are you preparing them to – maybe – become your successor one day?
I don’t yet know if one or more of my children would like to lead the company one day – or will be able to. The kids don’t know that yet either. I encourage them to see things this way and tell them that I didn’t know what I wanted to be when I was 18. It was this freedom that made it possible for me to go down this path of my own free will. Making this first major decision for myself may very well have qualified me to make other decisions. If my children decide otherwise, there will be a different solution for the company. That’s the great thing in life: There are an infinite number of roads that lead to happiness and success in business.

Was it clear to you as a child that you would one day take over the reins of the company?
My parents’ house is in Lübeck, but it’s on the other side of town. Back when we were kids, we didn’t even know there was a company with our name on it. The children of the first generation probably still played on the company grounds, but by the fifth generation – my generation – the company was already too grown-up and professional for that.

What would you like to see from your employees this anniversary year?
I would like our employees to embody every day the enthusiasm we have devoted to technology for life for 125 years. They should be in it with their hearts.

In your opinion, what makes Dräger special?
Dräger has unbelievably many sides to it, an enormous potential and fantastic employees. We may often be complex and complicated, but these many large and small aspects make us special. What counts here at the company is the better argument. It doesn’t matter one bit whether it comes from our customers, employees, family members, suppliers or specialized consultants.
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Have you ever had to rely on one of your products?
I had my tonsils taken out at a German military hospital during my time in the armed forces. The hospital used a Dräger anesthesia device. That was a great feeling for me.