

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ALPHASENSE'S TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, DR RONAN BARON

Ronan Baron has been head of Alphasense's Technical Department since January 2020. In the following article, in his own words, he offers an insight into a typical working day.

Today sits in between tomorrow, where success has to be re-invented, and yesterday, where it all started. It is the hard work done yesterday that leads to today's success, and there is a reference to the past in every moment.



'One day at a time'

There is something that sounds specifically appealing to me about the theme of this article: The way I experience my role is very much one day at a time. Each day, I start with the need to bring a clear direction. In that sense, it is a recurrent repetition - but one that is more a necessary connection - of revisiting what I wish to bring about during the day. I look forward to the working day. The role is varied and exciting; in a nutshell it is people management, project management, scientific analysis, business analysis, strategy, executive communication, networking and more - all in one job.

'Our priority is to ensure the quality of our products'

It is a glorious day. Upon entering the main company building, I get the undeniable impression of a manufacturing entity. The faint sound of the machines gives a rhythm to the place. In fact, in terms of the company identity, Alphasense is very much a sensor manufacturer. All of our sensors are being produced in the UK factory and we operate in a controlled and efficient environment. This is supported by the ISO 9001 Quality system, and we are currently working towards the Environmental ISO 14001 and the Health and safety ISO 45001 certifications. We are aware that things can fail sometimes and that de-risking is important. This awareness is reflected in the way we choose to operate. At Alphasense every single sensor we make is fully gas-tested. Paramount is our priority to ensure the quality of our products. We need to ensure that all sensors that leave the site each day are fully operational. I receive a call from one of our customer- who needs advice for a demanding application – direct contact with our customers constantly reminds me of the constant demand for higher quality.

'Alphasense is very much a Technology company; hence we are proud of our team of outstanding Technicians, Engineers and Scientists'

Besides being grounded in its manufacturing capability, Alphasense is very much a Technology company; hence we are proud of our team of outstanding Technicians, Engineers and Scientists. Nothing can be achieved without the team, and I find it important to work on positive management in everyday practice. I see, sometimes, the temptation to focus on future promise delivery, rather than on what is required today. As far as people management is concerned, in my experience, purely focusing on tomorrow doesn't work. It is specifically the quality of the present moment that can be shared and appreciated. Working as a Director is working with a crew. What are the best conditions for people to give the best of themselves? How can it be sustainable? How can I help? And, on a different level, how can I, myself, contribute to the collective effort of the management team? Regular management meetings allow decisions to be fully scrutinised before being validated. Teamwork goes well beyond working with others. It can develop into something that none of us could have achieved individually, and leads to a sense of belonging.

'It is the next generation of products that will ensure that we maintain our strong position in the years to come'

Planning for the future is a fundamental feature of the role. There is an understanding amongst the management team that Alphasense's success has to be re-invented and we are constantly working on a shared vision. On the Technical side, producing new products is an important mission. One or two R&D projects meetings will typically mark the day. Where are we with this project? Is everything in place? What is the next step? Is our strategy sound? Can we do even better? The immediate proximity to manufacturing and to our numerous customers keeps us focused on achieving practical and realistic new designs. Prototypes will need to be duly tested before they are released. It is the next generation of products that will ensure that we maintain our strong position in the years to come.

'Success is something that has been constructed collectively over the last 25 years'

If preparing for tomorrow is essential, my day is also very much grounded in what has been achieved in the past. On the scale of the whole organisation, success is something that has been constructed collectively over the last 25 years. In fact, there is a reference to the past in every moment. It is quite clear to me that I can only operate as I do because of all the efforts leading to today. Every employee on every level brings their contribution. On a more individual level, I realise that dealing with preparing for the role was, in fact, a process that started long before I reached the next stage in my career.

'What a whole day in the role really looks like?'

Can I bring a realistic picture of what a whole day in the role really looks like? How am I living the experience? During the day, I will meet various people from different backgrounds, whether internal or external to the organisation. I will attempt to be efficient and to communicate in a style which is as direct as possible. Technical and Scientific challenges will inevitably create stimulating conditions. Decisions will have to be taken. In fact, the day is nothing like a smooth ride. It can resonate with my need to explore, learn and progress. On another level, it can also feed into the company's commitment to continuous improvement; an engagement that is currently being reinforced.

'Tomorrow will be another day'

At the end of the day, I will ask myself: can I stretch the day a bit more? It was long ago that I have realised that long working hours would become my necessary companion. Challenges will have appeared. Progress has been made. Work doesn't cease there - there is an opportunity for more - tomorrow will be another day.

Alphasense:

Alphasense is a gas sensor manufacturer based in Great Notley UK. The product range includes electrochemical gas sensors for toxic gases, oxygen electrochemical sensors, NDIR sensors, PIDs, pellistors, particle monitors and more. Besides serving the traditional safety and process control market, Alphasense has also notably pioneered the development of sensors for air quality and pollution control. Through delivering its products and services the company contributes to a world that is safer, cleaner and more energy efficient.

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