



#WeAreViskoTeepak

Sven Christiaens: A Process Engineer from ViskoTeepak Lommel

“23 years of service! As the saying goes, “time flies” I can only agree. My first working day at the former “Devro Teepak” is still fresh in my memory. It was the summer of 1998 when it all started for me in the chemical department. I was fascinated by the complexity of what was involved in making sausage casings. Undoubtedly not the only one who has felt this way during his or her first working days”, says Sven.

During Sven’s first encounter with “Teepak” (this took place before the merge between Visko & Teepak), there was construction happening within the company. This was when the company moved the shirring department to Slavkov (in the Czech Republic and later to Brno), which meant that his first stay at “Teepak” was short-lived. After this period, Sven ended up in the carousel of the Belgian labor market, where he was able to experience what it was like to work for other large chemical companies.

The following year, Teepak was again looking for temporary operators, and the company reached out to Sven. He did not hesitate to accept the position and got a half-year contract in 1999. This time not only in the chemical department but also in the packing department. Unfortunately, due to tough times in the working industry, it only lasted half a year. In 2000, during a casual meeting with Sven’s former team leader at Teepak, he learned that the search for temporary operators was again open. With the mindset of “3rd times the charm”, he returned and applied for the job. Sven’s career with the company took off.

Tricks of the trade

“This time I ended up together with five young guys in the Wienie-Pak process department between a gang of “old hands” in the profession where I was taught the tricks of the trade. In the following years, I grew from help operator to operator, full operator, and then polyvalent operator where I spent most of my time on Wienie-Pak extrusion. After about ten years, a spot became available as a coordinator, and this seemed like something for me. I applied, and was accepted for this position,” Sven explains.

“During the years as a coordinator, I delve deeper into the entire Wienie-Pak process through experiments I set up myself and smaller projects. In 2014, I intended to grow into a team leader. With my qualities of being creative, thinking innovatively, and having strong analyzation skills, and I preferred to see myself grow in this direction. After taking exams at an external agency, I ended up in the engineering department as an engineering technician. A “word of thanks” to the former plant manager Luc Van Erom and the future engineering manager Danny Schildermans, who offered me this opportunity at the time.”

“I grabbed this opportunity with both hands, and Jos Wils (former process engineer in Lommel) took me under his wings. He was a great example for me and initiated me into the world of engineering. During this period, we developed great projects with the help of the entire engineering group. In 2020 I eventually grew to the position I have now, process engineer”, Sven says.

"We all spend a large part of our lives at work, so try to make the most of it. That is possible with a team like this."



Support, follow-up, and engineering

The work consists of three parts where Sven and his team divide their time. Process support, process follow-up, and process engineering. Support means offering daily support to the Wienie-Pak process for upsets of a chemical, mechanical, and operational nature. This also consists of training, communication, organization, and administration to the shop floor.

Monitoring and controlling numerous parameters on which the Wienie-Pak process depends is also a large part of the weekly activities. Adjustments to installations and machines, as well as speed adjustments are good examples of this work. Finally, we have engineering work in which we try to make improvements in terms of safety, quality, and quantity.

"Surely, quite a challenge for the largest department in Lommel, where multitasking has become a daily routine. The complexity certainly does not make it any easier, but at the same time, it does present the greatest challenge. By helping to support numerous projects, it is always a great learning experience, where we are still learning after all these years," says Sven.

You have been around for quite some time. What are the biggest changes you have witnessed during this time?

Over time, every company undergoes a certain evolution in various areas. The biggest change during my career, was the construction of the brand-new Wienie-Pak machine some years ago.

What is your best advice to other (or to new) ViskoTeepakers?

We all spend a large part of our lives at work, so try to make the most of it. Try to let positive

thoughts dominate, and most important, live life with an open mind. If all of us would consider "Hearts & Minds" and our company values of "Trust, Ambition & Fun" to the utmost importance, I am sure the future is bright.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

My family is "numero uno." I like to spend time with my wife and two children. The smallest is full of energy, so we have our hands full with that one.

What are some of your interests outside of work?

I like spending time in the nature. Hiking, fishing, and multi-day canoe trips can all charm my heart.

Did you know?

I am a co-founder and member of a non-profit organization, called "Kwaazie," with several friends. Kwaazie is a brown bar where we honor Belgian traditions with certain political ideals because there are few brown bars left in our country anymore. At Kwaazie, you can drink a beer at reasonable prices, and we also try to work with charities.

Up for a challenge?

I am also always available for a match of darts or Pétanque. If someone feels they are up for the challenge - you know where to find me!