

# With experience comes perspective

## With a big heart come many friends

There are few people who know Vaisala as Jorma Herkonheimo does. After 38 years with the company, as energetic and passionate as ever, this old-timer retires with fond and colorful memories. Thanks to his last position in the Human Resources team, most Vaisala employees had the pleasure of experiencing a little bit of that captivating "Jorma-spirit". We asked Jorma a few questions about his experiences at Vaisala.

### When and what position did you start in at Vaisala?

I started on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1969. The company was looking for an Electronics Production Technician. My first task was to transfer the newly developed weather satellite image receiving technology to production. It was a rather complex system. It was also the first product where integrated circuits of the TTL (Transistor-Transistor Logic) series were used. The most demanding component for fine mechanics was a 35 mm camera, which was also manufactured in-house.

### What was Vaisala like when you started in 1969?

There were 94 personnel. Everything was done in-house. There was no subcontracting culture back in those days in Finland. Self-efficiency was also promoted by founder Vilho Väisälä, who said that "Everything that is done elsewhere can also be done at Vaisala - only better."

### Vaisala invested heavily in research and development in the 70s (and continues to do so today). How was this visible inside the company?

The number of development personnel was greatly increased. Computers and microprocessors were taken into use in both production equipment and Vaisala products, and this introduced a new group of professionals -the software developers. Sensors based on the thin film technique enabled new technologies and professions such as laboratory assistants and physicists.

### Have you been involved in the development of any new products or innovations?

I worked as a Production Manager in the 70s and 80s, so I was involved in the process whenever something was transferred from development into production. This is when the value of teamwork really crystallized for me. Great things happen when people take the time to discuss matters together, and, most importantly, hear what their customers have to say.

### How has work at Vaisala changed through the years?

The introduction of computers was a great change at Vaisala like everywhere. Vaisala was one of the pioneers in this, as we introduced computers in production processes in 1970, and in Vaisala products in -75.

Production has also changed in that the company has now outsourced those functions that can be carried out more efficiently elsewhere, concentrating its core competencies in-house. One of Vaisala's core competencies is the development and production of sensors. Investments in this know-how become obvious to all those who visit our leading edge clean room, for example.

The orientation towards customers has also changed through the years, so that Vaisala is increasingly moving away from selling ready products and towards solving customer problems and providing services.

### How would you characterize the different decades in Vaisala's past?

Each Managing Director has left their own unique mark on the company's history. Vilho Väisälä's time was very product development oriented, he sought to provide the best instruments for meteorological use. He was also a scientist to the bone. Yrjö Toivola paid special attention to

creativity and innovative product development. Pekka Ketonen concentrated on systematic strategic planning and process-thinking to enhance efficiency and profitable growth. Vaisala's listing as a publicly traded company in 1994 also changed the company in that every action was now under tight scrutiny. Kjell Forsén only joined Vaisala at the end of 2006, so it's too early to say much about what his mark on the company's history will be. My first impression is that his leadership style is very interactive.

### What is today's Vaisala like?

Vaisala is a successful international technology company that has gained a significant position worldwide. This has been achieved through a strong commitment to customers; technically superior products that contain that "little extra", which makes them better than the competition; and global presence.

I will now concentrate on my favorite "hobby" - farming. After 38 years of motivating and meaningful service, I would like to wish all our customers, the company and my colleagues the best of success in the future. ■

*Jorma Herkonheimo owns a plot of land where he can carry out his farming hobby.*

