

Two Ways to Be Right

The pages of *MODERN CASTING* are filled each month with ways metalcasters can improve their efficiency and bottom line. As is regularly cited on this editorial page, automation often is key to enhancing productivity, increasing consistency and reducing labor.

The statement seems to be a given. In today's bigger, better, faster world, the emphasis always is on growth and how we can achieve more. Growth equates to success.

But for some metalcasters, the "art of metalcasting" is paramount over efficiencies in production. The skills and practices required to design a gating system that will quiescently fill a nobake mold for an aerospace component that must pass x-ray inspection are the focus rather than the number of molds or castings produced per hour. Our industry has two faces—80% must learn to thrive in the bigger, better, faster world while the other 20% must focus on every casting (and every inch of every casting). Each must thrive for the industry as a whole to succeed.

Our 2008 Metalcaster of the Year, Signicast, exemplifies the latest in automation and technological innovation. Look to the article on p. 18 and see the use of robotics in wax injection, ceramic shell build and pouring. Survey the automated systems that transport wax trees, ceramic molds and castings, and check out the driverless fork trucks. Read about the process advancements in wax production, automated pouring and lead times. Signicast has taken manufacturing engineering and casting production to a new level, defining what *most* (the 80%) of today's job shop manufactures must aspire to become.

Over the years, opinions and mindsets change. In fact, several years ago, I would have argued that Signicast is what all metalcasters must aspire to become. I would have stated that continual technological breakthroughs were the only true way to thrive

in this global marketplace. But today, my thoughts have changed, in part because of a recent visit to a metalcaster in the other 20%.

AlumAlloy Co. in Ontario, Calif., re-opened my eyes to the craftsman portion of our industry. From the engineered methods used to time the pouring

of a mold to the way chills and parting lines were employed to ensure defect-free components, this metalcaster employed process ingenuity to produce quality castings. While none of the tools or technology AlumAlloy employs would be considered advanced (not even close), the firm is engineering its castings to its customers' satisfaction. Its customer base doesn't need high production. It needs short runs of large, x-ray quality aluminum components, and this niche will be protected in the global manu-



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facturing environment.

Can the art of metalcasting coexist with production-intensive technology? Sure it can. We just need to make sure our customers realize that two solutions might exist for their engineered component needs.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alfred T. Spada".

Alfred T. Spada, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

If you have any comments about this editorial or any other item that appears in MODERN CASTING, email me at aspada@afsinc.org.