



COMPANY AND
MANAGEMENT

Wörwag is Anders



Everyone has to pass by Bettina Anders. The 52-year-old is the assistant to Wörwag's managing directors Georg Saint-Denis and Dr. Achim Gast. She is the good-natured gatekeeper outside the chambers of power. But above all: she is an all-rounder. That's because Anders combines several jobs in one.

By Michael Thiem Photos by Rafael Krötz



Bettina Anders has a drawer in her desk that is especially popular with everyone. Chocolate bars, cookies, glasses cleaning cloths, and lozenges for “men’s coughs” are stored in the mobile file cabinet. Her bosses can depend on her, and not just when they have a scratchy throat.

In 2001, the then managing director Jochen Schwemmler brought Anders into the team. She could provide a lot of insider knowledge, he thought – about conversations, strategies, plans and developments. She could. Yet this remains a mere hypothetical possibility for the trained business correspondent – and, with

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instinctive certainty, she confirms that it will stay this way. She has access to the managing directors’ correspondence, takes the minutes at important meetings, knows when important decisions are pending, and is always up to date on strategic topics. She could say a lot. But she doesn’t. And smiles so that her silence is not taken the wrong way. “When colleagues ask me for my opinion, I do give them an honest answer. If they don’t like that, then they shouldn’t ask me,” she emphasizes, knowing full well that her evaluations are listened to. “Ms. Anders is a loyal confidant for me,” says managing director Dr. Achim Gast by way of praise. “What has to stay in my office, stays in my office. For such confidence to develop in someone there has to be the right chemistry.”

Anders is also a mind reader. Knowing which documents the managing directors might need in a meeting and having the right files at hand is something you can’t really learn. Only experience helps here. And an instinct for the right moment. Addressing a sensitive topic or pressing someone to make a decision also requires psychological expertise. Anders also needs these skills in her role as the point of contact for everyone who would prefer to rush directly into the executive office. With her calm manner, she cools raised tempers down to a normal temperature. Even on the phone. “I am totally convinced that if

you smile when you are on the phone your tone of voice changes. Remain calm. Then you can forward most inquiries to the specialist department or on to colleagues. Not everything needs to go straight to the boss,” she says, revealing the secret of her diplomacy.

Equipped with political acumen, Anders is often away on special assignments. When someone has been in the company for so long, they have contacts in all departments and beyond hierarchical levels: Wörwag is Anders. “I notice a lot. Sometimes different things than the bosses do,” she reports. She knows how important this kind of information can be. Routine and common sense help her navigate the numerous mishaps that arise during everyday office life.

Anders is something of a circus performer. At any rate, sometimes she seems to be doing a circus act. Coordinating appointments, managing time, setting priorities, while always being in a good mood. “I think I have my department under control. The art lies in keeping several balls in the air at the same time,” she says. She rejects the usual secretary stereotypes: “making coffee, polishing your nails, tottering down the hallway in high heels – clichés like these annoy me no end.” The vast majority of secretaries don’t conform to this image. Nevertheless, she likes making coffee for her colleagues.

Anders is very perceptive and thus notices exactly what is occupying the bosses. “When you work so closely with someone, you get to know them quite well.” The atmosphere is balanced, pleasant, not everything always has to be taken so seriously, apart from the things that do have to be. I have never witnessed Dr. Gast raising his voice. Even when a particular incident at the company is making him angry, he doesn’t react emotionally.” She is especially pleased to receive honest appreciation. “The boss gives praise. Sometimes that’s exactly what you need.”

Anders coordinates projects. In the role of sales assistant, she provides support to the automotive sales managers and the key account managers. Furthermore, her tasks include writing sales reports and preparing presentations. She organizes the extensive business travel that goes hand-in-hand with the internationalization of Wörwag. As the holder of the company credit card, she can book almost all flights and hotels for her colleagues directly or indirectly. The story of her once having reserved a rental car in Birmingham, Alabama instead of in Birmingham, England, is one of the anecdotes that she can heartily laugh about today.

Anders is part of Wörwag's history. The company has been a fixture in her life for the last 22 years. She has had some good fortune along the way. She almost missed her job interview by a whisker – the train company was on strike. Anders wanted to turn back, arrived too late, but left a good impression with the then sales manager Kurt Braun. "I didn't think for a moment that they would take me," she recalls.

Anders has a talent for languages. She speaks English and French fluently. Her love of the neighboring countries is also reflected in her choice of holidays. This year she is going to the ochre quarries in Provence. And Italy is always an attractive destination for her. Dolce Vita. Last year she visited Venice for the first time in years. She still raves about the famous sunsets today. However, she doesn't speak Italian as well as she would like to: "That is still an ongoing project. I once started a course but unfortunately it didn't fit in with my work hours well." Why does she love Italy so much? They know how to take a relaxed approach to life. I am often aware that I'm not so good at that." She plans her holidays right down to the last detail. And she has a plan B for all eventualities. "Even I get a bit annoyed about that sometimes," she laughs. "But that's just how I am."

Anders loves paintings by Gerhard Richter, and has treated herself to an annual subscription to the Kleines Haus at the Stuttgart State Theatre. She enjoys readings at Stuttgart's Literaturhaus cultural institution and her favorite color to paint with is purple: "I bought all the remaining stock of the Pelikan color 115, since it is no longer being produced." The only thing that constrains the diversity of her interests is her limited free time. To compensate for time spent sitting in the office, she regularly goes to the gym. "Strengthening my shoulders, so that others can lean on them," she muses, with her characteristic dry humor. And that's exactly what she means. Wörwag is indeed Anders. ■

The end of the in-tray

The classic mailing routes are also being used less and less at Wörwag. "I no longer dedicate much time to the in-tray," Bettina Anders says. There are still in-trays for internal mail distribution in her office. The same goes for the rarely used fax machine. The last typewriter on the premises – ready to become a museum exhibit. Today, almost all correspondence is done via email. On average, Anders sends about 50 messages a day. Presentation documents are no longer printed out and bound; instead they are displayed on screen. Modern times, fast times. Anders likes this. She just has one wish: "That people pay a bit more attention to spelling and etiquette in their written communications."



Secretaries to the managing directors through the years: Heide Class (above), in the 1970s at Wörwag, and Bettina Anders (left).