



COMPANY AND
MANAGEMENT

Home game for Gast

Having a future-proof production set-up is close to Dr. Achim Gast's heart. The Chief Operating Officer is intensifying direct communication with employees in the wake of the expansion and modernization of the Wörwag headquarters.

By Thorsten Schönfeld Photos by Florian Imberger



Barely arrived at the office, Dr. Achim Gast buttons up his white lab coat. Then he holds the safety goggles up against the light, checks the visibility, and puts the goggles on. Wörwag's technical chief executive is a conscientious person. And he has his eye firmly on the future – the future that is gradually making itself felt at the Zuffenhausen headquarters. Numerous construction sites are evidence of the transition. Gast is currently pursuing more frequent dialog with the employees because the changes are being met with some skepticism by several of them. Today he is stopping by Uwe Tänzler's team at the mixing machine.

"I try to be in the production departments regularly," Gast confirms as he walks down the stairs of the administration building. He uses the hand rail. Not because the signs demand it, but because he wants to set an example in matters of safety. The 55-year-old is often on the road both at home and internationally. In 2017 alone he traveled abroad seven times, visiting the USA and China, among other places. In Germany he shuttles between Renningen, Korntal-Münchingen and Stuttgart. Being present everywhere comes at a price: his time. "A lot of employees would like to see me more often. But I have to balance my time between all of our locations." Here at headquarters he is on his home turf. Getting to the mixing machine involves crossing the courtyard.

The Tänzler team greets the boss with broad smiles. He shakes hands with each of the six colleagues. An all-male gathering. Not exactly representative, as women make up a quarter of the Wörwag workforce. The department puts together coatings for vehicle bodies and add-on parts according to customer specifications. So is it any surprise that the men promptly turn to the subject of cars? "When I walk across a parking lot, I in-

"And we have to take the people along with us on the path into the future."

spect the vehicles' coatings and look to see if the product comes from us," says color specialist Andreas Bleck, who then asks: "Do you do that, too, Mr. Gast?" "Yes, absolutely," the COO says, smiling. "It's always nice to see that the effort we make here becomes visible on the car – in a great finish." This sentiment prompts a general nodding in agreement.

The mixing machine department acts as a rapid-response crew. "We can produce a coating according to customer specifications within two hours," their head, Uwe Tänzler, explains. The paints are mixed in volumes of five to 500 kilograms. To achieve the desired shade, the machine adds tinting pastes to standardized base

coatings. The order is stored in the system, the correct amounts of paste are dispensed fully automatically. Nevertheless, it doesn't work without some manual intervention. The perfect color still requires the color specialist's experience. The same applies to the next steps: adjusting the viscosity, stirring, doing a test application, issuing filling documentation, handing off to the filling facility, done.



Technology in the details: Dr. Achim Gast and Gregor Hruby in discussion at the mixing machine.

A department to Gast's taste, as it combines craftsmanship with state-of-the-art technology. This expertise produces solutions that only Wörwag can offer. "What distinguishes us is that we can make the impossible possible to a certain extent. It's important to preserve that. That's the reason we have to make certain the production is in good shape for the future here in Zuffenhausen as well. The key word is digitalization. We are just now creating the necessary space for that with building refurbishments."

Gast looks around the group. His word carries weight. Not only because he is the COO. He also has a doctorate in chemistry and two decades of experience in the development and sales of coatings. He knows how the competition thinks. And knows that they have to part ways with some traditions they have become attached to. "It's important to me to take the people along with us on the path into the future." Ultimately, it isn't about replacing personnel with artificial intelligence. In fact, it actually facilitates work and increases productivity. ▶

Where colors come into play:
Gast looks over Andreas Bleck's shoulder
as he stirs Signal Red into the mix.

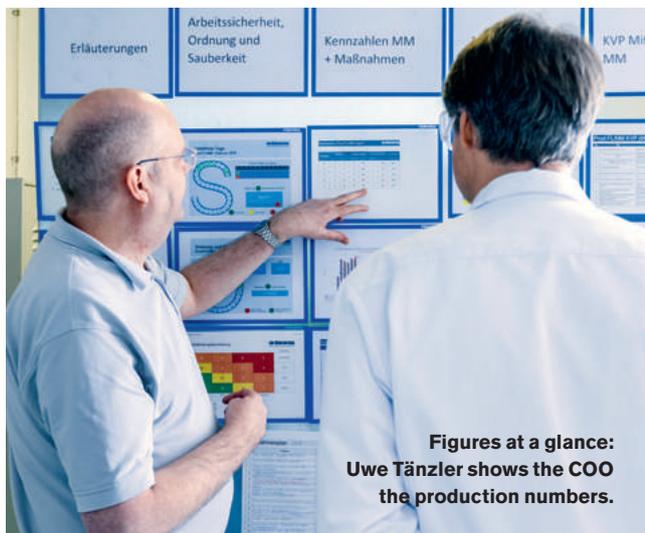


“Key figures show whether things are running well and where there might be room for improvement.”

Gregor Hruby, also a color specialist, is standing next to Gast at the mixing machine. He agrees with his boss. “The online support is a great thing, alright. I only have to enter the order number, and the computer does the rest,” he explains, pointing to the monitor and entering a series of numbers.



Scoring a goal: a round of foosball is next on the agenda before the end of the visit to the department.



**Figures at a glance:
Uwe Tänzler shows the COO
the production numbers.**

Gast likes to take considerable time with those figures himself. “From the key figures, we can determine how things are running in a department and where there might be room for improvement.” Meanwhile, the COO and department head have walked over to the visualization board. Tänzler and team confer here every morning, measuring the actual status using the target status. “The shop floor management is ideally suited to quantifying work processes and to making sure all participants are on the same page,” according to Tänzler. However, behind the board, things aren’t all about leveling the playing field. It’s where the colleagues find out who the foosball champion of the day is during their breaks. “How about it, Mr. Gast?” ■