

Travelling light

Crossing borders, and yet never losing sight of the big picture: when Wörwag opens up new markets, our colleagues from International Project Management are needed on-site. Living out of a suitcase—between improvisation and detailed planning.

By Michael Thiem; photos by Rafael Krötz



Kaichen Li, project manager:

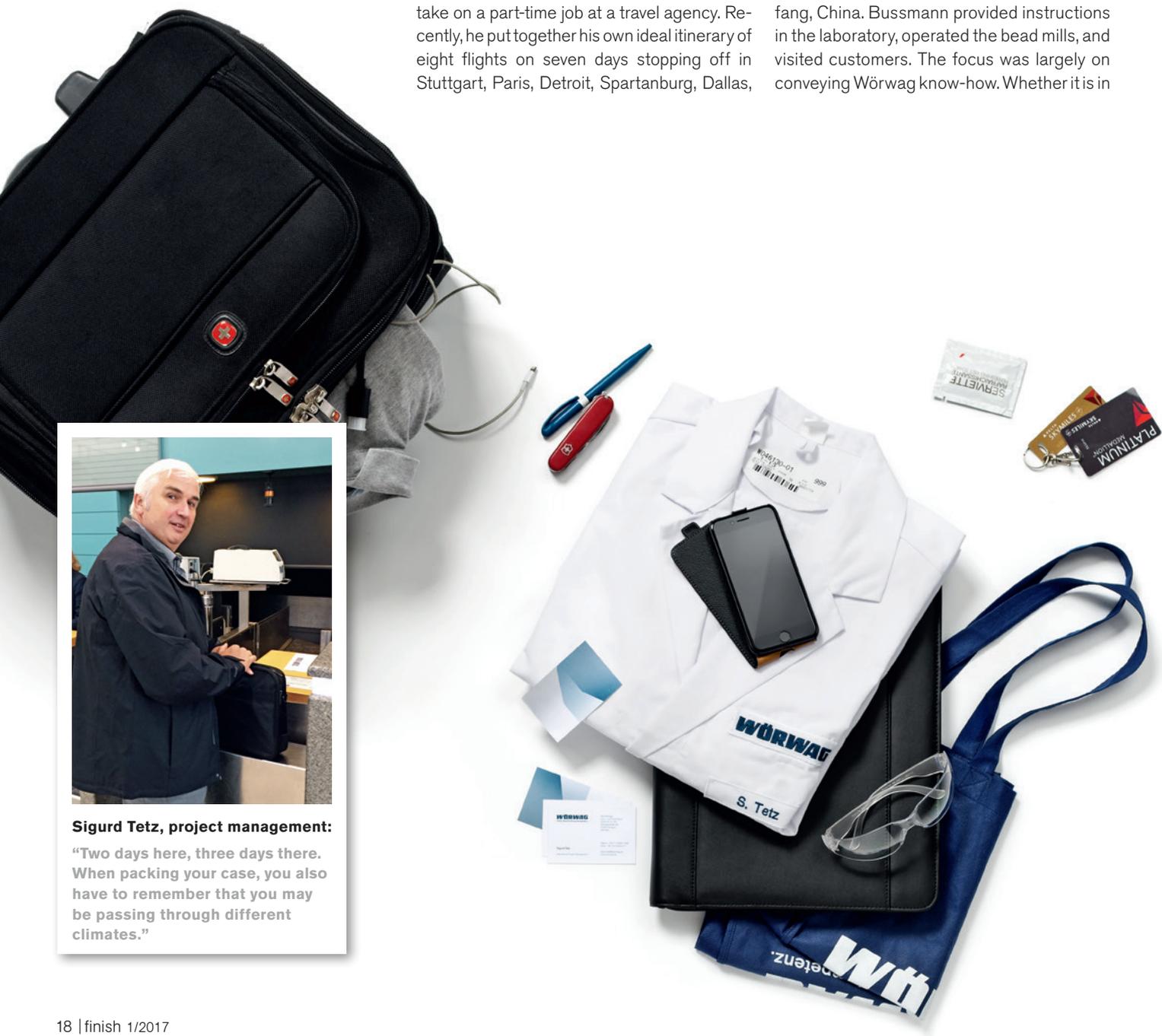
“When I travel to China, it’s more a job than a return to my homeland. I always have instant noodles and a Thermos bottle to make a snack.”

A man needs three things. In this case, the man is Georg Bussmann, and the things he needs are a wet razor, a credit card, and headphones that cancel out outside noise when on a plane. The head of international project management at Wörwag has often been bailed out by his hand luggage: he has been able to shave, pay for his hotel and meals, and relax—even if his checked luggage does not turn up at his desti-

nation airport. If you pack well, you can fit eight shirts, two suits, and underwear into your carry-on. At least according to Bussmann. To travel is to improvise. Almost 20 years of experience and more than a million miles flown help. “Nearly every new project is uncharted territory for us, but we can shape the territory ourselves. That makes each task unique and exciting in its own way,” according to the forty-three-year-old, who spends around ten weeks of the year flying around the world for Wörwag. By now, he could write a book on the subject, or take on a part-time job at a travel agency. Recently, he put together his own ideal itinerary of eight flights on seven days stopping off in Stuttgart, Paris, Detroit, Spartanburg, Dallas,

San Luis Potosí, Mexico City, Paris, and Stuttgart. “Travelling for work means living out of your suitcase,” Bussmann says with a smirk.

Travelling is part of his job description. Whenever Wörwag has opened up new markets in years past, Bussmann has been involved on location. And, in the last 20 years, Wörwag has grown enormously on an international level, has put down roots all over the world, but is still at home in Zuffenhausen. In 2000, Wörwag opened a U.S. location in Lafayette, Indiana, and three years later in Langfang, China. Bussmann provided instructions in the laboratory, operated the bead mills, and visited customers. The focus was largely on conveying Wörwag know-how. Whether it is in



Sigurd Tetz, project management:

“Two days here, three days there. When packing your case, you also have to remember that you may be passing through different climates.”

China, the United States, South Africa, Spain, or Poland—the subsidiaries are now fully fledged and fulfill the same standards as in Germany. Wörwag reacted to this fact at the beginning of 2016. International Technology Management became International Project Management (IPM), something of a control center for future large projects.

The background behind this change to the structure was the observation that the operative tasks had become less complex, while planning ones were becoming ever more so. “In many areas, we are entering uncharted territory for Wörwag. We can design processes that are more efficient and successful than the existing ones,” says Bussmann. Lab coats and spray

“If your family isn’t behind you, you can’t do a job like this.”

Sigurd Tetz

guns have been replaced with software tools such as Sharepoint and Excel. It was not for nothing that all department members were trained to become certified project managers. “Without these new structures and framework conditions, I am sure that we would not have been able to handle some recent projects as well.” This also applies to opening up the new

market in Mexico. The footprint, according to Bussmann, was put in place in record time with just a small squad. Now he says it is time to start detailed planning. Primarily, this consists of coordinating all customers, suppliers, and colleagues involved in implementation at the Wörwag locations. “Functioning project management is essential for the tasks that we will be faced with,” Bussmann can say from experience. “Customers are located less and less centrally, the requirements are becoming more and more complex, and we need someone in charge who can maintain an overview.”

One of these people is Giuseppe Polito. Among other tasks, the thirty-seven-year old looks after an existing customer who ex- →



Petra Holzhüter, project support:

“I always have a book and some chocolate to relax with in the evenings. And a small talisman that my daughter gave me.”

→ panded into Central America. In realizing this international project, the IPM forms the interface between the Wörwag plant in Lafayette, the automobile manufacturer in Germany and Mexico, the customer in Mexico, and the Wörwag headquarters in Zuffenhausen. "The important thing is that we get the products to the customers," according to Polito. "At IPM, therefore, we evaluate every step that goes into the implementation of the projects."

Sigurd Tetz, who has worked at Wörwag since 1989 and helped to shape the founding days of the subsidiaries, can

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Georg Bussmann

also bring his experience into play. "I was always a pioneer," the fifty-five-year-old remembers. First the USA, then Spain, China, and South Africa. "I always had to visit countries where I didn't know what to expect, either linguistically or culturally," says Tetz, who often had to fly

off at a day's notice. "If your family isn't behind you, you can't do a job like this," Tetz recalls. After all, it was not uncommon for a planned 14-day trip to the States to turn into four weeks. Planning always meant being spontaneous. When Tetz was needed, he was there.

Unlike his colleagues, Kaichen Li, who has worked at Wörwag since November 2014, needs to handle two additional challenges: understanding the Swabian dialect and learning the language of paint. Originally from China, Li is a newcomer from another sector. Now 30, he came to Germany at the age of 14 and studied economics in Essen. At the Chinese Talent Days event in Cologne, he



Georg Bussmann, head of international project management:

“Before I travel to a new country, I find out about culture, transportation, security, and tips on etiquette.”

