



INTERVIEW

# “Sustainability starts with the employees”

**The new Managing Director for technology Dr. Achim Gast explains why sustainable corporate policies are vital for commercial success in new markets.**

Interview: Michael Thiem; photo: Jos Schmid

## We want “made in China” to mean the same quality as “made in Germany”.

Dr. Achim Gast

*Dr. Gast, you decided to leave a large corporation to join a family business. What do you feel is the biggest difference between the two?*

**Dr. Gast:** Definitely the corporate climate. Here at Wörwag, I felt from the very first minute that people are central.

*Did you expect that?*

I knew that holding each individual in high esteem was one of the key corporate values but it is important to experience values being lived out. At Wörwag that happens every day. That made settling in easy for me.

*Do you have an example of that esteem?*

During the first work week, we celebrated the ten-year anniversary of one of our colleagues. All of the employees and management were invited. Although this is only a small gesture, we celebrated together and that highlights the culture of personal esteem that Wörwag fosters. You should know that Wörwag has a comparatively high number of long-term employees and a growing workforce. Sustainability begins with the employees. Wörwag wants to encourage employees to stick with the company by offering both individual development opportunities and long-term prospects with the company. This applies to all of our locations, including China.

*Does that work in a market like China where qualified employees are highly sought after?*

Yes, even in China, we have a large number of colleagues who have been working for us for a very long time by Chinese standards. Some have even been with us since the establishment of the subsidiary. For long-term success in this market, you need a good and stable local team.

*To develop new markets, knowledge transfer is necessary. Isn't that one of the biggest challenges?*

It is indeed. We have to have a well-trained team if we want to be successful in the long term. Wörwag will continue to rely on intensive training of colleagues at the various locations. We want “made in China” to mean the same quality as “made in Germany,” which is why we have many employees coming to Stuttgart for training. That is the only way to ensure consistent Wörwag quality in the application of special technologies in China or other countries.

*What role does innovation play?*

Innovation helps us and our customers to be more competitive in the long term. Therefore, it is crucial that we keep asking ourselves how we can maintain and increase our leadership in our strategic business fields. Recent innovations in film coatings are just one example.

*Are innovative products the main factor for sustainable development?*

No, although such products matter, they are only one part of our overall concept. Another element would be, for example, sustainably optimized manufacturing processes for

customer plants that we offer via specially tailored services.

*Wörwag's market entry in China was rather unusual. Why did you decide on a subsidiary and not the usual joint venture?*

To establish a wholly-owned subsidiary is probably the most difficult way for a firm to get a foothold in China. But the point is that Wörwag is not looking for the easiest route, but rather for the one that leads us reliably and consistently to our goal. That is the Wörwag way.

*Are there any other examples of sustainable development opportunities?*

The trend towards electric mobility springs to mind. An associated increase in the use of plastics for auto body parts will certainly mean that more environmentally friendly film technologies will be needed. Perhaps the delivery of ready-coated modules will make paintshops redundant. Our management and our engineers will be working with experts from car manufacturers and their suppliers to understand these future technologies.

*Are customers also looking for sustainable behavior when selecting suppliers?*

Sustainability is not a marketing gimmick. It is a serious requirement for our customers and for society. For our work in the field of paints and coatings, this means we have to keep finding more environmentally friendly and resource-efficient products and processes. Sustainable solutions are usually also cheaper in the long run. Our sustainability may, however, also support customers in their competitive context, and ideally this will help us to develop lasting customer relationships. So you see, sustainability is always important at Wörwag throughout the company. ■

---

### DR. ACHIM GAST

Born in 1962, married with two sons.

**Career:** Chemist. Prior to joining Wörwag as Managing Director for technology in July 2013 he worked for BASF Coatings for more than 20 years in various managerial positions in the automotive OEM and industrial coatings fields.