



EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL

The department of Franz Schön works hand in hand and under the most precise planning. The individual processes are precisely coordinated and clocked perfectly in order to ensure that everything runs smoothly – from planning to final completion.

The art of communication

“Great things in business are never done by one person. They’re done by a team of people.”

Steve Jobs

The interface, the link, or to put it succinctly, „the key to success“ lies in making communication with our customers easy. Order management ensures organised order handling within the company. As well as making sure that internal processes are followed, the aim of order management is to satisfy the customer by delivering the products they have ordered on time, in compliance with the contract and without any errors. Franz Schön manages this essential and highly efficient department – which takes care of everything from planning through to processing individual customer orders. WFL order management aims to process orders more quickly, more efficiently and ultimately to deliver greater customer satisfaction. We paid a visit to the heart of the action and managed to catch up with head of department and order processing expert Franz Schön for a fascinating interview.

Mr Schön, please tell us a bit about yourself and your educational and professional milestones to date.

My schooling followed the conventional route: primary school, secondary school and then a polytechnic course. After this I

did an apprenticeship as a machine fitter, which I successfully completed in 1983. My career then began in the same year in machine tool construction at VOEST Alpine, where I was able to gain some initial experience with the assembly of machine tools and associated field service. As part of my professional activities, I graduated from the vocational school for foremen in machine building and technical school for industrial engineering/machine building as a second educational path. During this part-time education, I became one of the office staff and worked in purchase planning. Once I had gained several years of experience in purchasing, I was given the opportunity to switch to order management. Here, alongside project management, I was able to gain knowledge about company processes and organisational matters, and implement appropriate solutions.

In January 1994, I was appointed head of order management at WFL. Due to the size of the company at that time, I was heavily involved in interdepartmental tasks, which gave me a greater real-life understanding of commercial matters, for example. In recent years, I completed a range of advanced training courses, such as training as a safety specialist, contract law

and training as an export manager in regard to export control, to name just a few. In 2014, I took on additional responsibilities as I was appointed an authorised officer, or „Prokurist“ as we say in German. I believe that all this experience and training are key elements in efficiently and successfully handling projects at WFL.

Could you describe a typical working day at WFL in and around your department?

I like to start my working day early in the morning. This gives me a chance to focus on scheduled tasks with as few interruptions as possible. As soon as our customers and colleagues in other departments arrive at work, it is important that those tasks are prioritised and processed based on their urgency. To do this, you need a certain level of flexibility, which must not, or ought not, descend into chaos. Tasks such as checking contracts, drawing up schedules and order confirmations or creating progress reports and so on often have to be temporarily put on the back burner and re-scheduled based on their level of urgency. This means it can sometimes be stressful during the day, especially if there are customer acceptances on the agenda and not everything is going



IN THE MIDST OF EVENTS
Regular meetings and agreements are the nuts and bolts.



according to plan yet here. Tasks that can't be scheduled often make things a little hectic. In order management we also want to give 'spontaneous matters' our full attention and assist in delivering constructive solutions (both in-house at WFL and also for our customers). There's usually a lot of meetings scheduled throughout the working day as well to ensure that ongoing projects and processes are handled optimally. One of our department's main tasks is to act as a communication interface between internal departments and our customers and thus ensure interaction with one another runs smoothly, both internally and externally.

What strengths does your team or your department possess and what does your department stand for?

Without a doubt, our strengths are flex-

ibility, commitment, team spirit and our solution-driven approach. To ensure orders are processed and the associated challenges are tackled in the best possible way, each and every person and department must be motivated and this must be evident to our customers. As well as motivation, ensuring that everything runs smoothly is another of our many strengths. Successfully completed orders and satisfied customers – that's our goal and the mission for our department.

If you could choose any career, what would you want to be?

This question doesn't apply to me. I chose this career and try to give it my all every day. I enjoy my work, as I have enthusiastically learned all about my role and have already gained a lot of experience. So I will continue to use my expertise here at WFL and play my part in achieving

the goals that we have set for ourselves as WFL, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

If you imagine your job satisfaction as a curve, how would this curve change over time?

Like any stage in life, it has its ups and downs. However, the main thing is that you are enthusiastic about your work and dedicated to it. In one sense, I have grown up with WFL and have already learnt a great deal. For me, the 'downs' are the problems, but I see these as challenges. Overall, it is like a sine curve that's moving upwards, where you grow and develop with each challenge.

Which animal do you think best represents WFL?

I'm not really a creative type. But if I think carefully about how I view WFL as a com-



PRECISION
WFL stands for highest precision – not only in production, but in the entire order processing.

“Successfully completed orders and satisfied customers – this is what we aim for.”

pany and what has made it a company that our customers value – namely our flexibility, our rapid, and above all solution-based approach to problems, the unbureaucratic way in which we offer and implement technical solutions quickly, the internal cohesion and so on – then I would compare it to an ant colony, that is to say, strong, great team players, highly flexible and focused on a common goal.

What – besides family, friends and career – could you not imagine your life without?

On top of those essential things, or the core components of my life, sport is important to me. My job is often very stressful, so I feel it's important to offset that in this way. When I'm cycling, I can really switch off and relax. Whenever possible, I get out on the bike once or twice during the week, but at the least at the weekend.

Some people don't like to do sport. But this always comes down to the kind of work you do. If you have a job that is mentally demanding all day long, then it is pretty much essential to balance this with some physical activity. If you carry out physically demanding work, on the other hand, it can be really relaxing to read a book and unwind, rather than taxing your body further. All in all, when I do sport, I like to do something active that I enjoy.

What are some of the key moments in your life?

The birth of my children, definitely. To date, that has been by far the most important and defining experience in my life.

What was your dream job as a child?

When I was young, it was all about sport: skiing, football, cycling and so on. I think every young sports fan dreams of turning

his hobby into a career. But your parents give you a push in the right direction so you can find a suitable job. Now I am very pleased that I have taken this path and I enjoy my work.

What barriers or obstacles do you face in your current role?

Challenges arise here and there due to interdepartmental work and the positive fact that our company structure is growing and these challenges have to be tackled. If you compare this to how it was in the past, when there were fewer structured processes, then today's processes, which cover several departments, are much more difficult to coordinate. Time is also a decisive factor here. However, these extremely important systems and organisational adjustments must not affect our day-to-day business or the proper processing of orders. Therefore, my



PROFILE

Name: Franz Schön
Age: 55
Home town: Engerwitzdorf/OÖ
Education/Career:
1970 - 1978 Primary & Secondary school
1978 - 1979 Polytechnic course
1979 - 1983 Machine fitter apprenticeship
1983 - 1989 Machine fitter at Voest-Alpine-Steinel
1985 - 1986 Foreman course
1987 - 1990 Night school for mechanical engineering and industrial installation
1989 - 1990 Purchasing department at Voest-Alpine-Steinel
1990 - 1993 Order management at Voest-Alpine-Steinel
since 1993: Head of order management at WFL
1997: Apprenticeship as a security specialist
2015: Apprenticeship as exports specialist
since 2015: vice president

aim is to handle projects to the complete satisfaction of our customers.

If you could invite three historical figures to dinner, who would you choose?

I would choose three different people from different epochs. Albert Einstein – a genius through and through. How did he think? What was he like personally? And what input could he give me? The second person would be Mahatma Gandhi, as he had a special philosophy and displayed great wisdom. Finally, I am interested in politics and its contexts. So Barack Obama might make a perfect guest as someone who has achieved a lot. I think these men would have a lot to say. One is a genius, the other an idealist and the last brought new approaches to world politics. It would be a very interesting dinner with fascinating discussions and a lively get together.

Is there anything that you still definitely want to do in your life? What are the top three things on your personal bucket list?

Spending time with my family is very important to me. The children are growing up and holidays together with the family begin to dwindle. I want to make the most of this in the coming years.

For a while now, I've been wanting to do an extended cycling tour that lasts several days with my friends; one that's also a lot of fun, of course.

Professionally, my ambition is to preserve the value of our company here at WFL and build upon our excellent reputation.

What do you think lies ahead for WFL?

As I have mentioned, we have an excellent reputation and outstanding products, top technology and fantastic people. We need to maintain our team and expand it, as this is the only way to ensure that customers can rely on us and receive top quality and service.

What personality traits do you value in other people in particular?

Reliability, honesty and trustworthiness are very important to me. These traits are also essential when interacting with customers.

What's your recipe for success at WFL?

Employees are important. A good company is nothing without good employees who are motivated and enjoy their work. This is the only way to ensure that success lies ahead and to achieve WFL's goals.



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