

Helden für den Mittelstand

– weltweit

Business Heroes

in SMBs – worldwide

dielmann

Edited by

Herausgegeben von

Herbert Vogel & Dieter Schoon

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Wir weisen gerne auf den vorhergehenden Band

Helden für den Mittelstand/Business Heroes in SMBs

hin (176 Seiten, 18 Euro, ISBN 978-3-86638-145-2), der

zehn IT-Berater im deutschen Mittelstand zu Wort kommen

lässt - ein begeisternder Band mit liebevoll erzählten

Lebensläufen und Karrieren, welcher neben der

zweisprachig deutschenglischen Ausgabe auch ins

Japanische übersetzt wurde.

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Kommanditgesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main

Kranichsteinerstraße 23
D - 60598 Frankfurt am Main
neugier@dielmann-verlag.de
0(049 -) 69-9435 9000

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The editors

*This book has been gathered
from the employees of itelligence AG
and is dedicated to all go-betweens
amongst the cultures of our world.*

Preface by Dieter Schoon

Head of Human Resources intelligence
AG

Business Heroes Worldwide - The Story So Far

Communication does play such a major role for all of us in everyday life as well as in business life – since we take this fact for granted, we tend to forget about it:

But communication will not work well, unless we have thoroughly understood our business partners' attitude.

Only if we are willing to understand each other more and more while communicating, we will truly be able to talk to each other.

Communication can neither be dealt with on the surface only – nor superficially.

Only if communication is applied with intensity, it will lead everyone concerned towards the same path and reach a certain depth and lasting effect.

IT-consultants strive daily to fulfil this goal – in more than one way. On the one hand we are craftsmen and know the techniques and instruments of communication by heart –

that is, hardware and software. AND on the other hand we have to be able to understand our business partners' values and attitudes - otherwise we will not be able to suit their structures of communication, their data flow, their systems of information to their actual needs to keep everything moving smoothly.

If you will not cooperate right from the start, you will talk nonsense. If you do not listen to each other, you will not be able to hear the truth. Itelligence and our staff therefore provide a real treasure chest of communication. We can communicate with very different people and business cultures, we at itelligence are masters of this art!

That was our reason for publishing our first book „Helden für den Mittelstand“ in 2010. In this book we cast an image of ourselves. It was a real presentation of the exceptionable culture of itelligence and their staff - experts in the matter of exchange and communication.

People who know how to listen to others and who are used to express their opinion as consultants, made contributions to this book, writing about their work and their lives, they constructed a human frame for the business of consulting. That was a lot of work, but also a pleasant task for everyone who participated.

While we were working on this first book, we were already wondering about questions like: What is it like in all the other countries? What is business life like, what kind of life

do the employees lead abroad – wherever intelligence is working on new and foreign ground? How do we deal with these tasks: listening and comparing, emphasizing and responding, if we have to work as consultants with international colleagues and clients?

On top of these questions we were faced with the keen interest of the colleagues and branches abroad, who had received our bilingual book with a certain amount of curiosity.

Finally our business associates from Japan showed their interest in paying for the right to download the English parts of our book. They wanted to make it available to their employees – and even more than that: they were planning to publish the stories in a special Japanese edition. This was the moment when we realised that we had started a much bigger project than we had bargained for originally. All of a sudden we had to collect those stories from different countries and different cultures, which for the first volume we had recorded for Germany only.

Now we felt more and more that it would be a great idea to capture the whole range of consultants' worlds – ranging from Malaysia to France, from Holland to China, from the USA to Czech. We wanted to show the wide range of the different worlds of consulting and forms of communication, the approach and the attitudes towards life, the values and goals. For this was the reason why the Japanese colleagues

thought our book so intriguing and this was the matter that does reveal so much about our entire business life.

The Japanese wanted to see how intelligence deals with issues of integration, how we build bridges between different cultures, how we connect (and use these connections) between company cultures and philosophies which at first might seem peculiar. In a nutshell, they wanted to learn about and understand our basis of communication. Our book provided a sort of manual of cooperation for many readers.

The „Business Heroes“ book was a little primer of working together, of consulting in general. From this primer one could gain information about integration and cooperation – and first and foremost about emotions and motivation behind the networking.

At the same time our first book showed that in consulting we had developed a new formula and extended it so that we would be able to adapt to the future.

For capturing a story, one has to listen to others – to others telling their stories, which someone else will be writing down – someone, who is willing to hand them on, who talks about these stories as about his very own experiences and journeys through life. Here, only those who do basic consulting will succeed; those people who will connect the personal to the general in a confidential sort of atmosphere.

Of all people, the secluded, allegedly introverted IT consultants, who frequently had been ridiculed as „nerds“, were supposed to reveal their innermost secrets and personal experiences? This would never have worked but for the fact that they were working in a company culture based on exchange. Probably we understood some basic truth about the consulting job while working on the first volume of „Business Heroes“: As a consultant you want to be self-relying, yet at the same time you are dependent on your clients and mixed up in their schedules and needs. Therefore one is always under the obligation to watch and to listen, to play a rather more passive part, yet at the same time to give directions and to steer the affairs of others, to work for the mutual success.

This image of a consultant as someone who delves deeply into matter, who keeps an eye on the whole picture, who will move between restraint and impulse - this image was something special which we wanted to explore.

So we went for the international league. By publishing another volume, we wanted to produce a sequel, but at the same time, leaving borders of country and culture behind, we wanted to explore how to overcome boundaries and differences in general.

„The conquest of America“, written from the view of Herbert Vogel, the managing director of intelligence himself, presented one of those stories - a riveting story about

intelligence's first journey into a seemingly well-known, yet very different sort of business culture. This of course would make a great story for the second volume.

But never mind, we are not talking about hierarchy, but about story-telling! And telling stories means more than anything: to be curious while exploring the world and regarding connections, to be interested in interfering here and there, in optimising; it means to give directions, to be willing to work - and that is the perfect job description for every consultant.

It applies to the managing director of a consulting company as well as to the „newbie“ on the consulting team. This rule applies to all topics concerned, it applies to the mega-university that has been conjured up out of nothing as a highesttech-location in the Saudi-Arabian desert. There we implemented SAP software, so already over the next ten years several tens of thousands of students and professors will be able to study and teach there. The rule also applies to the boss of a medium-sized company employing a few hundreds of employees in a quiet little town in the Swiss Alps. It applies to the old hand who has worked for intelligence in different countries for about fifteen years as to the newbie on the worldwide team who has been working for six months in cosy Austria (though having had more than twenty years of wide-awake experience in other IT areas.)

When we started our work on the second volume, we would never have dreamed that Hans Schlegel, the former managing director of SAP and our great co-founder and forerunner of intelligence Switzerland Armin Frei contributed to our book with great retrospectives and visions of the future.

In this second volume we were able to show that „consultant“ is a mental image of the global player: everyone who believes himself a global player has to learn all the features of cooperation, of building bridges, of crossing borders and merging cultures by heart. For „global“ does not just mean „as big as the globe“. It means that one has to be trans-continental, metacultural and able to connect one's mind to others - on a professional level. „Global“ then does not have to mean big and confusing. It should stand for an open approach. A „global“ approach should be open-minded about various ways of living and working and curious about ways of communicating and thinking - and yet at the same time it should stay alert and active, able to transfer information and to interfere.

With this in mind, crossing the borderlines of IT consulting, we would like to rephrase the old saying „Think global, act local“ in our second book. On one hand to bear in mind the big picture with all the different aspects - but on the other hand to stay alert and prepared for exchange with your local partners while remaining ready to act.

In my view the portmanteau „glocal“ contains it all: the *global* big picture, the *lo-cal* exchange and consulting cooperation.

With this in mind, I would like to add my „glocal“ regards and best wishes to this book.

Herbert Vogel

Chairman of the Board of Intelligence

AG

The rediscovery of America

When Columbus lost his way in the year of 1492 and landed not in India but on the American continent, disappointment at first was huge. The man from the Old World didn't sense yet how powerfully and independently his discovery would develop itself.

Columbus fought all his life against the realization that he didn't discover a sea route to the *Indians*, as he called them, with their fabled treasures of spices and silk, but instead just added another unknown white spot to the globe. But it did not take long for his false discovery to pay off. American gold became the most important source of European wealth and formed the basis of the influence of European thinking. Following this, some centuries later, another enormous chapter in the economic, scientific and cultural history began with the United States.

Several gold miner sentiments have since then repeatedly made their way from Europe to America, full of promise.

But when in the 80's and 90's some IT-companies, experiencing their heyday and start-up boom, went to the USA, there was nothing to discover in America anymore by Going West. Or was there?

What glittered like gold in the end of the 80's and drew me to the USA on a first trip in 1992 was a totally different temptation. In January 1992 I was on holiday in the USA, and of course I wanted to meet, along the way, the American president of SAP. First contacts with SAP in Philadelphia were already made, which intensified during the meetings, and I wouldn't be an entrepreneur if in the back of my mind the question didn't arise if it would be possible to work for SAP in the land of endless possibilities. It seemed increasingly promising to sell licenses and projects here. There was also the search for an additional implementation partner in parts of the USA. Then I learned that one of our colleagues at itelligence was happy to go from Germany to the USA. Ralf Sürken was a born decision maker, one of those people that would just put on his backpack one day and go out - to enter adventurous new territory, to test his limits, to escape from the known and the ordinary, to exchange his old world for a new one. That could be a start, with him a foundation could be laid in America. And didn't I also sense this desire to explore myself?

That much was clear on my first visit: the dream of limitless freedom that we know in Europe as a myth and movie cliché is still palpable. It can be felt. The days of rising from rags to riches were gone, for sure, but someone who would bring in solid knowledge and skills into a niche of the economy could achieve something different, far higher living standards for himself than was possible in Germany after the times of the economic miracle.

It seemed courageous to us, but also completely understandable, that Ralf would go to the USA. If he could gain a foothold in the industry it would certainly make his fortune. American SAP consultants, as people were saying, were not just highly-paid people - their daily rates seemed almost astronomically high from a German perspective. Should we perhaps only support it? Wasn't there in fact a middle way?

Apart from this I was very much aware of the fact that the old tag of being „Made in Germany“ stood for the quality of German engineering since the days before the first World War, not only in Great Britain but also in the USA - where German products were, and still are, valued. Technical, but also logistical expertise is highly esteemed and valued in 21st century America. Clearly this was advantageous for the company from Walldorf when they started up SAP America. And wasn't this vicinity of SAP, and the „Made in

Germany“, or even better the „Thought and engineered in Germany“ a huge bonus for intelligence In the US?

Suddenly a fascinating potential customer moved into focus: Procter & Gamble, with its headquarters in Cincinnati! – I grabbed a stack of business cards, and was on my way! We were with 40 people at that time in Bielefeld – a solid base – but was it sufficient for the journey across the Atlantic? It cannot exactly be identified anymore, but there certainly was a mix of pioneering spirit and overconfidence at play here. But why not?

Immediately a series of very concrete questions presented themselves: What were the legal forms in this country? How much starting capital should be invested? How do we deal with a situation in which you only get a green card for 3 months? – Yes, an office with 400 people that today makes about 100 million dollars in sales in the United States was at that time a daunting prospect.

Immediately we noticed more cultural differences. A company of German origin came to America: Some of the first employees moved over from Germany in the truest sense of the word, they were proud to work there. About 10 to 15% of the German employees ended up working at the new location. This certainly was due to the fact that the net earnings were noticeably higher, but America, the land and the idea, had a completely different draw than the beautiful Switzerland, where from the then 100 German employees,

only one or two moved over. In the branch in Malaysia, almost all employees were sourced locally at the time of start-up, and hardly any German made the move with Alexander Gebhard to the South Seas to develop intelligence Malaysia. Our attraction as intelligence USA however was strong - it was the attraction of America!

This was true the other way round however; we were just as attractive for our American colleagues. They immediately saw a serious difference with US employers because we were not a hire & fire company, like so many in America, there were better social benefits, boss and employees worked side by side, and so all were directly in contact with each other. It helped that after a short time, our landmark project P & G turned out to be a first class reference in the new market. We managed a highly successful execution with a good profit. We had opened our office in downtown Cincinnati. And it went on. A second, then third, then fourth customer was added. In 1997, we received official status as an SAP partner; we became more global and then became Gold Partner of SAP. When in 1999 we announced the acquisition of Missana Co. in Chicago, we were firmly in the saddle. For a short while we dreamed the dream of a second office in Atlanta - but then came the financial crisis of 2000, and we closed again and focused on our headquarters in Cincinnati. And it was good that way. We had to deal with the two to three-year decline of the