

# GDI IMPULS

Magazine for business, society and trade, No. 1 2012

**Extract Social MeetYa by Anja Dilk**

**There's no stopping the hype surrounding social networks. But as important as digital may be: analogue is key!**

Anja Dilk

# Social MeetYa

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Even social media are simply media. Personal contact is something different. For instance at the stars Symposium in the Swiss town of Stein am Rhein. Every year the Ackermanns of tomorrow meet there with the bosses of today in an exclusive networking event. A visit to the stars.

Every year in early autumn a "state of emergency" descends upon Stein am Rhein. Robert Grötchen takes a few days holiday from his job at the police station, to act as chauffeur to the future Ackermanns of this planet. "Take a seat please," says Grötchen and opens the door to the Volvo SUV, which gleams in the sun like a black panther. The journey from Zurich airport winds through the gentle hills of north-eastern Switzerland, towards Lake Constance and down to the young part of the Rhein. It's very peaceful here, in our small town at the foot of the vineyards, explains Grötchen. A population of 3,300; strong service industry; low crime rate. "Everybody knows everybody." That's why a staff of three officers at the local police station is plenty, even in summer, when a million tourists stroll through the medieval historical centre; heavenly. And also why Stein am Rhein is so ideal for events with distinguished guests. No protests, stunning surroundings, undisturbed peace. Davos feeling. Grötchen turns into the Oehningerstrasse. "We're here." At stars.

It is evening now. Hohenklingen castle dominates the skyline, illuminated by spotlights. The first guests are meandering back to Hotel Closterhof from dinner with the mayor, Franz Hostettmann. They'll spend four days in Stein am Rhein discussing tomorrow's trends and how these will impact their organisations, as well as networking with eighty other managers from all over the world. "stars - the Symposium for the leaders of the next generation." is the name of the event, hosted for the fourth time at the end of September last year, and which always creates a stir in the small town between the Rhine and Untersee. Mayor and cantonal representatives honour the event with their presence, the "Schaffhauser Nachrichten" newspaper reports in English and German spread over two pages, and even the sky seems to be wearing its best frock in sky-blue.

**REACHING FOR THE STARS** stars is not just any kind of debating club. stars is a highly exclusive circle, which gathers the crème de la crème. In the past, Head of Deutsche Bank, Josef Ackermann, has presented here, as has Fiat boss Sergio Marchionne, CEO of Linde Wolfgang Reitzle and BASF Chairman Jürgen Hambrecht. In 2011, Hartmut Ostrowski, then still President of Bertelsmann, Obama advisor Mona Sutphen and President of Yamato Makoto Kigawa were also there. Without a doubt, anyone who's allowed to be part of this gathering, is in orbit and in a position to shoot right to the top, to be head of Groups and organisations in the corporate world and in politics. The show stopper: the participants are selected by their own CEOs. "We offer today's leaders the chance to nominate the leaders of tomorrow," says Toni Schönenberger, founder and president of the stars foundation. Anyone eligible to be in Stein am Rhein has already been made their mark. "Who do you think will make it to the management board in three or four years time?" Schönenberger asks the business leaders. Prerequisite: the candidates are aged between 35 and 40 and are mostly already pretty high up in middle management. Schönenberger: "There's Davos for the seniors and a few elite conferences for the more junior ones. There's nothing for the inbetweens."

But for this group in particular, says Schönenberger, catapulting to the seat of power, it's essential on the one hand to, "discuss topics which will be key to their businesses in three or four years time and which they don't normally have time to get to grips with." And on the other hand, and much more importantly: making contacts, networking, establishing business relationships, preferably with leaders from all over the world; today's and tomorrow's. Those from one's own sector and those from completely other areas and cultures. This is why the guest list is so diverse: 75

percent are from business, 25 percent from science, politics and NGOs; half come from Europe and the USA, the rest from India, China, South America and Eastern Europe. "Top managers have a global responsibility," says Schönenberger. "So they need a contact network, to help them think outside the box." Net-based networks such as Facebook are not enough. On the contrary, says Schönenberger. "Social media make personal meetings that much more meaningful."

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**DAVOS FOR POTENTIAL HIGH-FLYERS** Schönenberger himself is a perfect example of the added value of effective networking. In his job as CEO of the Wolfsberg Conference Centre, a training platform for boards and management, daily contact with top managers is run-of-the-mill. When he was in the planning stages of realising his idea to create a Davos for potential high-flyers from the world of business about five years ago, he was quick to find allies. The Jakob-und-Emma-Windler-Stiftung (Jakob and Emma Windler Foundation) in Stein am Rhein supported the Symposium. Sponsors such as Roland Berger, UBS or Volvo joined up. Ex-BASF boss Jürgen Hambrecht held the opening speech. The Symposium blended into the region between Lake Constance and Schaffhausen as if tailor-made. Wealthy, educated, peaceful and eager for a touch of international flair to add a pinch of excitement to its dreamy idyllic nature. "Stein am Rhein forces us to remain small," notes Schönenberger. The stars should have the chance to meet in a campus atmosphere and not in the flurry of photographer's flashbulbs at a mega event. The stars spin-off in China in summer has also chosen a small-scale format. Penglai instead of Beijing. Stars? For heaven's sake. Susanne Schorsch brushes the notion aside. She finds it a touch embarrassing to be put on a pedestal. Of course, the manager was very pleased to receive an invitation letter from Hambrecht, CEO of BASF, shortly before he handed over the reins to his successor Kurt Bock: Wouldn't you fancy representing BASF at an event in the Autumn for tomorrow's top managers? She did. After all Schorsch is set on making it to the top. Not with doggedness. But with a certain enjoyment.

## "It's great to see that we are all concerned about similar topics."

**RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOCIETY** The industrial engineer had always had a desire to lead. She wanted to shape and manage. And found the ideal environment at the gigantic chemical Group BASF. "At BASF I can gain experience in many different business sectors, which I need to be a good manager." She climbed the career ladder at a rapid pace. Firstly in business development, then in marketing. Today the 36 year old is Vice-President for Strategical Management, responsible for a staff of approximately one hundred and a budget in the hundreds of millions. She's long been a true pro and speaks clearly in PowerPoint-type sentences peppered with sector jargon to talk about managing staff, company visions and profit and loss accounts. And yet, she has retained a youthful openness. Maybe it is something to do with her friendly smile, not in any way diminished by her neatly pinned-back hair, or perhaps the focused yet warm look in her eyes which signals to her counterparts that they have her undivided attention.

The fact that Schorsch is one of the only women at stars doesn't bother her at all; a mere one fifth of the participants are female. Schorsch came here without any specific expectations, just with a sense of curiosity and a desire for impetus, new horizons, contacts. Take a look at what the others are up to, those who are part of the business elite. "For instance, it is great to see that we are all concerned about similar topics." At the moment that means: how can we live up to our social responsibility as leaders? How can we handle today's rapid pace of life and business? How can we collaborate on solving global problems across national boundaries? "We are a kind of corporate global population. Great at analysing but still searching for common visions and values for the future," says Schorsch. But ssh! the next session is starting: "The media and its changing influence."

**DIGITAL COMPETENCIES** In the "Bürgerasyl" meeting centre, a stone's throw away from Hotel Closterhof, all the seats are taken. In the conference room of the old half-timbered building, the spotlights illuminate the speaker's desk in bright white. "Which are the most important internet communities?" asks Nico Luchsinger, founder of Sandbox, a network platform for talented under-thirties. "Xing," shouts one participant. "Yes, but that's not particularly big," says Luchsinger. "Who knows Ted?" Lots of hands go up. "Who's on Facebook?" Most of the hands stay down. "Who's got a personal blog?" Two. Doesn't matter.

But the leaders are well advised not to underestimate the potential of social networks, says Luchsinger and explains how to organise an experts' conference in 32 hours, how to improve "weak ties" in companies and be the source of inspiration or facilitate collegial cooperation via internal "curated innovation communities". Network professional Marc van der Chijs, Co-Founder of the Chinese video page tudou.com, talks about the influence of online-media on companies' business models.

Managerial staff need to address this, advises van der Chijs, just as they must deal with the fact that companies are becoming increasingly vulnerable. Security risks are growing, the private sphere is shrinking beyond recognition and in companies too, of all places, warns Martin Bosshardt, CEO of Open Systems in Zurich. "Everything in the digital world remains permanently available, copiable and traceable," says Bosshardt. "This is why the first consideration has to be: what should be public and what not. The risks of digital life are not a question of technology and they can't be delegated. Don't leave these decisions to your IT guys."

## **"We are a kind of corporate global population in search of a common vision."**

**MEDITATIVE SABBATICAL** It is topics such as these which really fire up networking. During the break the sunny interior courtyard of the Bürgerasyl centre buzzes with the voices of the guests. Here and there laughter erupts, debates become louder. Do we really use sentences such as, "Sorry, I'm not a technical person," when faced with important management tasks, as Bosshardt suggested? How can we get a grip on IT risks? How can we still use the digital world in any kind of logical way? Susanne Schorsch has grabbed Nico Luchsinger. She is impressed by his idea of, "curated innovation communities." A great tool which could be used as a driver for innovation at BASF. "Mr. Luchsinger, how can I get staff on board with that?"

Martin Bosshardt loves this opportunity to open up the topic to tomorrow's corporate movers and shakers. A topic which he believes is chronically underestimated: IT security. Maybe the CEO of Open Systems can really push forward on something here. "At least the right people are in the audience." Bosshardt is here for the second time, as a speaker. He uses the opportunity, "to contact representatives of some customer firms." But it's not about doing business here, rather: pleasure. "It's almost like a meditative sabbatical," says Bosshardt and laughs. Inspirational discussions, international participants, a prime example for the importance of "weak ties." Where else would he have had the chance for such a wonderfully open discussion with a North Korean manager about day-to-day business in the socialist country? Even so, doesn't the experienced CEO have an eye out for first-class future managers for his company? Bosshardt shakes his head. "If this was a closet recruiting fair, then nobody would send his or her best people."

The scent of salmon, pasta and fresh salad wafts through the air. The view from the sun terrace of Hotel Closterhof stretches across the Rhine and up to the deep green backdrop of the Schaffhausen canton. Pleasure boats hoot, ducks quack. "On the other hand," says Stephan and takes a fork of pasta, "if a useful contact is made with a future employer – why not?" Currently the black South African is working on his doctorate in Geneva. Afterwards he would, of course, like to work in a cutting-edge company. Stephan is pleased with his booty so far: a bulging bundle of business cards. "I've never been to such a lively networking event." Maybe it's due to the fact that Stephan is one of those buddy types with an infectious presence, and the ability to collect new contacts at the drop of a hat. Stephan intercedes gladly when a storm breaks out around his table as Indians, Canadians and his South African buddy Saul talk about the future of the internet in various corners of the earth. If someone is looking for a seat at lunchtime, he politely invites that person to his table. "Please sit down. Tell me what you do."

**«if this was a closet recruiting fair, then nobody would send his or her best people.»**

**DRUMMING UP SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABILITY** In the "Closterhof" lobby all the seats are taken. Time for quiet and for preparing the next few hours.

Sylvia Poll is there, once the first swimmer to win an Olympic medal for Costa Rica. Today, the 41 year old is the Central American country's UN Ambassador in Geneva. No stranger to the international stage, she has gained leadership experience in running a Business School for managerial staff and in a media company. Now she is here, by recommendation from her former professor, to drum up support for her country, that eternally underestimated "Switzerland of Latin America," with its well-trained personnel, political stability and the booming hightech sector with its medical technology. "We've a lot to offer investors, but we still need the CSR commitment of foreign businesses." Poll has drawn up a tight schedule after going through the list of participants with a fine tooth-comb. I still need to speak to him. The company could be of interest to us. She doesn't divulge any more details. However, tomorrow morning, there isn't even time for breakfast.

Damodar Hegde is also there. A man from the southern Indian coastal town of Udupi, who worked his way up to become Supply Chain Manager for Unilever, Switzerland, and speaks about his career today, almost as if he can't bear to. As a child, he already spent time travelling throughout India with his father setting up cash machines, changing school like others pass the time of day, becoming fluent in seven languages by the age of twelve, building and programming computers, studying engineering and control technology. Following his first job at Procter & Gamble, he now works at Unilever tackling the question: how can we produce and deliver dumplings and mashed potato flakes in a sustainable way? Acting sparingly with resources, economising fairly – that should feature more highly in his career, says Damodar Hegdes. "I want us, in the rich countries, to do something about poverty," says Hegde. "And I want to give the world something back from the opportunities that I had." His boss at Unilever sent him to stars: "Maybe you'll find stakeholders who think in a similar way." Hegde adjusts his horn-rimmed glasses and takes a sip of coffee. "Let's see what happens."

## **"Our CEO is giving a presentation at stars this year. Wouldn't you like to accompany him?"**

**STRESS TEST PASSED** Airbus-Manager Michael Duschl is also there. His head of personnel asked him only three weeks ago: "Thomas Enders our CEO is giving a presentation at stars. Wouldn't you like to accompany him?" Duschl said yes. And he is now representing the aircraft company alone, as Enders was not able to come. Just like Frau Schorsch from BASF, he wants to know: what drives the girls and boys at the top, what type of personality will he have to contend with, when he makes it so far himself? The 32 year old has been a senior manager since January 2011 and leads a division with a staff of 180. For the first time he's the boss of other bosses. "One management level above me, one management level below me – that's a completely different leadership task," says Duschl. Juggling with differing interests and loyalties, being a boss and still maintaining contact with the staff on site, handling growing pressure and always coming up with the goods. That's a stress test which sometimes leads Duschl to ask: how do those at the top do it? How much pressure do they really have to deal with? Where do they get their energy from?

People such as Calvin Grieder, CEO of the technology Group Bühler in the Swiss town of Uzwil with its staff of 8,000. At the CEO Round Table in conference room 3, Grieder shares his top management tips. For example about decisions made alone, which have to be carried through against the storm from outside. Sales says investing in medical technology isn't worth it? If your gut feeling tells you it's right, go for it anyway. A pitfall to be avoided: don't hang on to old teams for too long.

## **"I want to give the world something back from the opportunities that I had."**

Don't let yourself become isolated. When Grieder took office and a critical tone with his management team because of excessive losses, it felt like there were "a dozen daggers being drawn". Since then he has written all mistakes down in a small red book. For learning purposes.

The three cornerstones of his leadership: develop vision, build alliances, keep on learning. For example from customers. Grieder himself visits two hundred per year: What do you think of us, what would you like to see done differently? He regularly and actively seeks dialogue with other CEOs. Every week he writes a strategy letter to the workforce. "But how do you shake off badly performing staff?" one person wants to know. "How do you motivate the good ones?" asks another. "How much time is left over for your private life?"

## **"I let myself drift through the day and see if any interesting conversations arise."**

**IMPRESSIVE DEGREE OF OPENNESS** On the boat trip in the afternoon the stars are gathered together, cocktails in hand. The Rhine glitters like a crystal carpet. Waiters dash through the crowds balancing trays with canapés. The round table discussions from the seven CEOs offer a springboard for conversation. "It is wonderfully reassuring to see that other companies value personal customer relationships as highly as we do," says Schorsch. Michael Duschl is sitting at the bow and lets the breeze caress his cheek. "The openness is unbelievable," he says. "I'm very impressed that someone such as Grieder talks so freely about controversial leadership topics or the fact that there is precious little time left for a private life." Let's see who else he'll get to know. "I let myself drift through the day and see if any interesting conversations arise."

In the evening, laughter radiates from the Papillon bar. Music from the eighties booms down to the path below, which is hemmed in with star-lit trees. Scattered groups stand on the deck, deep in discussion. What a disappointment the conventional talk from media mogule Hartmut Ostrowski is. How exciting Emmanuel Hess von Siglo XXI's dinner speech about sustainable technology and knowledge transfer in Costa Rica is. How impressive are the comments from Professor Linda Yueh of the London School of Economics about the role of India and China in the future.

Inside the Indians are livening up the atmosphere. Beer steins chink together. Stephen, the South African, buys a round of "Jaegerbombs" – Jaegermeister herbal schnapps mixed with Redbull. A team of men decide to meet for an early dip in the Rhine. At some point, the three Latin Americans start singing. Everyone is moved onto first name terms long ago and there's a feeling of closeness which can only come from celebrating, debating and laughing together. Ultimately it is the same everywhere, when girls and boys want to let their hair down together. Except for the fact that they will soon be holding more reins in their hands than anyone else in the world.

**BUILDING TRUST** Tuesday morning. The day of departure. Trolley suitcases are being rolled down to reception. The last business cards are being swapped. Time for the final round in the Bürgerasyl centre. CEO Grieder is immersed in his iPad. The Rhine swimmers are energised and seated. All spaces are taken. Nobody wants to miss the finale: What can leaders of the future expect? What must they be able to do?

You will be in demand, as never before, reveal the Chinese. The market needs 70,000 bosses in the next ten years. "They don't grow on trees," says investment expert Essa al Ghurair. "We have to start with our children. Leadership development begins at home." The leaders of tomorrow must be better than ever before. And able to create trust in a global world of many different cultures. And they have to know, that they can't do everything. "Everyone is clever," says Geoffery Merszei, Vice-President of Dow Chemical, USA. "It is emotional capabilities that make the difference." Can you trust those at the top? How do they treat their people? Do they think we can manage it? Does he admit to mistakes? Does he reveal things about himself? Merszei: "The older I am, the more trusting and open I become myself. And I tell you: it's paid off."

## **"The older I am, the more trusting and open I become myself. And it's paid off."**

BASF woman Susanne Schorsch is packing her trolley suitcase. "It was outstanding." The ideas from the CEO round table and internet sessions, the insights into other sectors, the pervading friendly atmosphere, down-to-earthness instead of cut-throat ambition. She met former colleagues from her USA days and made contact with a Chinese professor. "Much will come" from his invitation to Shanghai. Philipp Lehner, ABB Manager even has a project in the bag. The plan is to establish joint external benchmarking for research and development.

**FOLLOW-UP** Damodar Hegde is immensely happy with the stars' wide interest in sustainability and orientation towards values. "I've got follow-up items for my own commitment." He has made appointments with bosses from a training project. And how moving the account given by Yamato boss Kigawa was. Following Fukushima, the workforce left the factory idle and went out to help. The bosses donated forty percent of the company's profits for reconstructing the country.

Bosshardt, CEO of Open-Systems would like to send his own people here. "Where else do rising stars have the opportunity to discuss leadership responsibility so intensively?"

The Shuttle to the airport is waiting. Michael Duschl heaves his bag into the car boot and sinks into the rear seat. "stars certainly exceeded my expectations." The level of the speakers. The open-hearted community of people, who all share the same experiences. Interesting people, who, sometimes, also ask critical questions. What is the price of jumping to the top? What are the different ways of getting there?

Chaffeur Grötchen puts his foot down. Bye. See you next autumn. With new stars. <

**Link to the topic**  
[www.the-stars.ch](http://www.the-stars.ch)

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