

Interview with our member Fabian Ewald in issue 12/2021

## "I would like to feel what the honest motivation is" Fabian Ewald

More vacation may also work better than more money. Because the human brain adapts: If you get more, you spend more - and then you want more money again.

Fabian Ewald says he knows a way to break this cycle. Ewald is the managing director of Rox Hamann, which has been producing suitcases in Hofstetten for decades. He believes that people don't necessarily want more money for their work. They want more recognition.

Recognition - that quickly sounds like a pretty and at the same time cheap excuse for not paying more. But anyone who visits Ewald and gets to know him over a longer conversation will understand: He means it.

Ewald says: "In the past, when a Mercedes left the Daimler plant, the last person to work on the car stroked it with white gloves. He would like to revive this culture of identifying with one's work.

In Hofstetten, there are just a few streets, surrounded by lush meadows, and the highest building, typical of Upper Bavaria, is the parish church. Inside at Rox, seamstresses sew the loops of the suitcases, and the company's own carpentry shop makes the wooden inlays. Hardly any of the suitcases are made more than 50 times. And each one is personally inspected by an employee - almost like back then at the Daimler plant.

Ewald was brought in a year and a half ago to save the company, which was struggling at the time. Especially when you come from the outside in such a phase, the most important thing is to get employees on your side. Ewald introduced a "you culture" and, during the Corona crisis, the principle that the management's pay should shrink first before the employees' salaries.

Ewald believes that it is more motivating to negotiate small incremental increases than "one-time 30 percent for life. This keeps the salary structure in balance, and Ewald can hold out the prospect of the next small increase right away - and link it to further training or a new project. His idea: to steer motivated employees in the direction he wants the company to go without exerting pressure.

Ewald has been successful with this: he has quickly gotten his people out of short-time work and increased efficiency. Today, Rox Hamann sells more cases than ever before. And when an employee approaches him with a request for more money, he first asks back: Why? Is there really a lack of money at home? Or is it the recognition at work? Ewald says, "I'd like to 'feel' what the honest motivation is."

Wait a minute: At Ewald, employees are allowed to do what just about every salary guidebook advises against - argue for more money with private reasons? "Of course," says Ewald, "we're all human." The guides only repeat what is praised in the U.S., where people leave their private lives in the checkroom. This is no good in the German middle class, where golden pins are handed out for company anniversaries. Ewald pleads for honesty: "I'm happy if we, managing directors and employees, can spare each other the rehearsed theatre."