

Not visible, covered by sticker

About someone who has climbed the ladder of success



*Martin Schäfer*

# I'd Do It All Again

## About this book

As the end of one's career approaches, it's a time to ponder what the common thread was throughout that career, what provided support, strength, and motivation along the way. Of course this also applies to Martin Schäfer.

Without a doubt, it was his family and special role models, as well as his unbridled ambition and desire to be one of the best. This was coupled with a great deal of diligence, discipline, and fun, not to mention taking pleasure in what he did and just a pinch of luck. Courage, self-confidence, and optimism were his recipe for success, and he had the best teacher of his times to guide him: Prof. Dr. h. c. mult. Reinhold Würth personally, who was tremendously influential in his life.

Martin Schäfer's companions would add that he's a person with a strong will and rough edges. A diamond that passionately loved to rub shoulders with various grindstones. But he never lost sight of his humanity in the process. All of this is part of his story.

Read how Martin Schäfer, born in 1956, managed to work his way up from humble beginnings to become a managing director in a global corporation.

You will find "stars" throughout the text. They are intended to emphasize what Martin Schäfer believes to be the special characteristics and success factors of the company and what he ultimately considers the DNA of the Würth Group.



*Two people who cherish one another and are joined at the hip:  
Martin Schäfer and Prof. Dr. h. c. mult. Reinhold Würth*

## My dearest Martin Schäfer!

Really, the biography of Martin Schäfer presented here requires no further comments. It tells of the incredible success saga of an employee in the Würth Group.

Martin Schäfer worked his way up from a simple sales representative to the head of sales at the parent company and nucleus of the Würth Group, Adolf Würth GmbH & Co. KG, and has distinguished himself in his many responsibilities on a global scale within the organization with over 30,000 salaried sales representatives.

The author played a major and decisive role in shaping the corporate culture of the Würth Group: Our basic principles of reliability, honesty, modesty, and a bit of humility, combined with assertiveness, determination, and a boundless desire to win have made Martin Schäfer a role model in this company for generations. He is and will always be a role model at the Würth Group for how I envision working together in our company with more than 80,000 employees (2021).

After 72 years of working and at the age of 86, I would like to express my deepest gratitude, highest esteem, and respect to Martin Schäfer with the following words: The great quality of our products wasn't the main reason behind the success of the two-man business that I had to take over in 1954 after the death of my father, but rather the culture shaped largely by Martin Schäfer and his colleagues. Throughout Martin Schäfer's entire career, the word "THANK YOU" was incredibly important to him because he knew from experience what gratitude and recognition toward employees could inspire.

Therefore, I hope that the biography of Martin Schäfer reaches a wide audience within the company, and I wish the author from the bottom of my heart many more years with his big and wonderful family.



Reinhold Würth

# Thank you, Martin Schäfer!

*“The gods bestow everything, the immortals,  
Upon their beloved, wholly,  
Every joy, the immortals,  
Every pain, the immortals, wholly.”*

*Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe*

Dear reader, dear Martin,

A Goethe quote in a book about Martin Schäfer? Yes, after you’ve read this book, you’ll understand why. Not only because Martin Schäfer is always good for a surprise. Also because Goethe’s lines are a perfect summary of Martin Schäfer’s professional life: four decades, represented by four lines.

Even at a company that has produced so many outstanding salespeople and managers, like Würth, Martin Schäfer’s career stands out prominently from the rest! He has achieved sensational accomplishments for this company since 1977. And in these four decades, he’s endured more than one sleepless night when sales occasionally fell short of his ambitious targets.

Martin Schäfer’s unprecedented career didn’t begin with a red carpet rolled out for him by Würth, but rather with a blunt reservation: He was deemed too young for this profession. At least that was the opinion of Karl Specht, the head of sales at the time.

There is no shame in needing a second attempt to convince an old hand like Karl Specht! I shared this same experience of rejection with Martin Schäfer when I applied for the position of sales representative with Karl Specht as a young woman. “I don’t want any women on my sales team, especially not the boss’s daughter!” He left absolutely no doubt on this point. But he finally yielded to Martin Schäfer after another attempt because Kurt Müller, who would be directly responsible for the young applicant as area manager, recognized right from the start that he was hungry for success—and clearly possessed the necessary persistence to overcome the initial skepticism with hard work.

Please note: A healthy share of self-confidence is essential for survival in this profession—also to deal with the customers! That may have applied more in 1977 than today. After all, sales representatives were regarded with only slightly more esteem than “peddlers” at the time. Very unfairly of course! Nevertheless, some tradespeople didn’t shy away from letting their dogs loose on sales representatives. With their hefty catalogs and sales bags in both hands, they were easy prey...

Therefore, these pages portraying the professional life of Martin Schäfer are also part of German history from the perspective of a passionate full-blooded sales representative. In the case of Martin Schäfer, this includes brightly colored shirts, bell-bottoms, and unusual shoes, in addition to the mandatory tie, which was also an expression of respect and appreciation at every customer visit.

### WHAT CHARACTERIZES MARTIN SCHÄFER?

Since we are talking about the characteristics that make up a good sales representative and Martin Schäfer embodies them perfectly: Aside from persistence, self-confidence, and persuasiveness, I consider an optimistic, cheerful outlook on life and a positive image to be absolutely essential! How else can you motivate yourself to carry on during the hard times? How else can you recognize an equal in your counterpart if you are not forthright and friendly toward them?

Martin Schäfer calls many of his long-standing customers his friends to this day! The same holds true for countless colleagues and employees who have worked under his leadership. And I count myself among them. A true friendship can also withstand candid opinions. Some of Martin’s original quotes on the following pages could cause you to break out in a sweat if you did not know exactly how passionately he threw himself into helping his employees, for example, when they needed his support. Martin has always been a man of frank and honest words, and a man you can depend on 200 % of the time! Since he never took it easy himself, he always demanded the full commitment of his employees. In return, there is nobody who enjoys celebrating success more boisterously than Martin Schäfer!

Now managers in general are expected to be assertive, and they can choose a number of different approaches to assert themselves in this position accordingly. These approaches can range from “authoritarian” to “cooperative.” However, those who learned the ropes of selling from the ground up know that not every type of “assertion” works with the customers—they prefer to be persuaded honestly! This means, for example, knowing your products like the back of your hand. “CAB argumentation” is a magic word at Würth: characteristics, advantages, benefits. Customers who recognize the advantages of a Würth product will buy that product. And if the product meets or even exceeds their expectations, they will order other items. This iron rule of persuasion in particular is what made Martin Schäfer stunningly successful as a sales representative!

Persuading others based on your own intuition: Even as a boss, Martin Schäfer consistently practiced this secret to success. For example, during his time as area manager, all of the sales reps in his Area 611 managed to obtain Würth Top or Success Club status for a while, despite the fact that the performance requirements were considered unachievable when the Top Club was first created! For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that Martin Schäfer himself was one of the first sales representatives to demonstrate that time after time you can surpass yourself and climb beyond the performance benchmarks that my father Reinhold Würth set.

Another commonality shared by Martin Schäfer and myself is that my father Reinhold Würth has always been a great role model for us as a brilliant sales representative! The following principle applies in the armed forces and in the sales force: Only trust those with whom you have fought on the front (sales) lines.

Often described as facing your counterpart in modern coaching, a classic sales virtue that both my father and Martin Schäfer have practiced relentlessly their entire lives is attentiveness, combined with a consistent solution-oriented approach and honesty. Never talk customers into buying something they do not want, but rather look closely and offer them something they really need. “Being able to sell starts with wanting to sell!” This is how we have managed to improve the image of the sales representative persistently over the decades.

In today's sales league, our sales representatives are playing on equal footing with our demanding customers. We are doing everything in our power to ensure that this remains the case in the future!

### **BUT HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE VIRTUES AND STILL REINVENT THE WHEEL?**

Whoever works successfully with these convictions for decades naturally trusts that they will also work in the future. But therein lies the danger: You risk turning a blind eye to change and regarding new ideas with a great deal of skepticism. But it is precisely these shifts that have provided for powerful new growth spurts at Würth over the last eight decades. One of the first principles of success at Würth was developing territories based on the model of cell division: this meant splitting well-developed sales territories so that two or more sales representatives could address the needs of their customers more closely and still find the time to acquire new customers. What some sales reps only accepted grudgingly served to spur on Martin Schäfer.

Incidentally, he helped push the next step in evolution himself: As area manager of the Metal division, he was one of the first to have some of his sales reps concentrate specifically on electricians, thus contributing to the advancement of the systematic focus on subdivisions. This specialization made it possible to develop sectors individually.

Our guiding principle has been "Close. Closer. Würth." for several years now. Customer segmentation and multi-channel sales are the keys to providing our diverse customers with truly individualized service. On the one hand, this leads to a highly differentiated sales structure. On the other hand, the sales force lost the unique selling point it had enjoyed for decades at Würth as a result. After all, customers can now choose to be advised by a sales rep in their own workshop, to cover their immediate needs in the closest Würth pick-up shop, or to order their products digitally through the Würth app.

In retrospect, it might seem like this evolutionary process was an almost inevitable occurrence. But that is not the case. We spontaneously tried out many of these changes based on intuition without writing any lengthy strategy papers beforehand or consulting any external experts. “Doing” has always been a magic word, even today! However, that also means that strong characters and opinions sometimes clash within our own company.

For example, decades of experience taught Martin Schäfer that it was always the same selling “basics” that provided for success and further growth, such as using sample boards and hand samples with the customers and checking orders and prices in the evenings (“price validation”) to make sure that unreasonable discounts did not cancel out the success of a sale rep’s own work. He and his team always focused on these basics, and occasionally he reacted skeptically to new suggestions.

Consequently, sometimes a great deal of persuasion was required to try out alternatives, to reinvent the wheel in a manner of speaking, even though things were running pretty well. It was often necessary to play hardball. And yet: Even if the fight over the right approach became quite intense, it was always clear that Martin Schäfer was never concerned with personal vanity or power and instead always had the growth of the company and mutual success at heart. Sparks could really fly in these cases!

Therefore, it was even more important to know that he supported and assumed responsibility for every decision with impressive loyalty, even if it ultimately turned out that he had been right to have reservations. And of course also when a change unleashed new growth potential and sales exceeded all expectations. That was the case when customer segmentation and multi-channel sales were initiated in the 2000s: For both decisions, we had to do a great deal of convincing together for many years.

His human greatness—his extraordinary directness and loyalty and his willingness to contribute wholeheartedly to meaningful changes—is also the reason why Martin Schäfer was always sure to enjoy the respect of his employees and

colleagues. Everyone always knew that only the good and success of the company mattered to him. Even when he was promoted from the employee to the colleague and finally to the supervisor of his former mentor Kurt Müller. With this unreserved hire, he had determined his own successor for sales manager.

## A FRIEND

For me, this unconditional loyalty to Würth was always the key to working together so closely and trustingly with Martin Schäfer for such a long time, even in the years when we headed different divisions and regions and thus stood in direct competition with one another. Of course we wanted to outdo each other every month when it was time to report our growth and plan fulfillment! It is similar to soccer: Nobody gets any special treatment on the playing field. But afterward, both teams go out for a drink together as friends and share the same passion. In our case: We love selling! Although I am also proud of the fact that we are connected by a real friendship outside of our professional relationship. The poet Friedrich Klopstock once described friends as people to whom you'd only have to say half a word and they would already understand what you mean. Very few people have this gift!

On the other hand, whoever believes that amicable cooperation is the universal remedy for bringing differing views together may have underestimated this task seeing as the core disciplines of selling include, first and foremost, taking full responsibility for your sales territory, your area, or your division: You are the stag, you defend your territory—against any competitor and sometimes also against greed from within your own ranks. The life-size figure of a stag in front of Martin Schäfer's office clearly symbolized this aspiration for years. If you have become accustomed to marking your territory with your scent for so many years and decades, then you not only need good arguments for sharing responsibility, but also the ability to let go and trust others. In any case, I do not know many long-serving and successful salespeople who could hold a candle to Martin Schäfer in this regard.

## SHIFTING DOWN A GEAR ALSO REQUIRES SKILL!

Martin Schäfer has relinquished responsibility for sales to younger hands—in exemplary fashion by the way, proving his stature. After living and breathing sales like no other for decades, he was able to hand over his responsibilities neatly.

Those who have been part of Martin Schäfer's professional life, for decades in some cases, may be asking themselves if it is possible for him to have a life after retirement. Considering his unparalleled and successful career path and the enormous workload he took on over four decades, this question is not without reason.

On the other hand: Those who have had the pleasure of knowing Martin Schäfer as a family man know that he pulls out all the stops here as well: he always finds a task to be done and a motive to use his time wisely. Just like the stag that once stood in front of his office and now pulls Santa's sleigh atop the roof of his garage during the Christmas season, a man like Martin Schäfer always finds a challenge in any new role.

Those of us who have worked in our profession for a long period of time likely share the experience of having an abundance of strength in our younger years and hardly having to take care of our health. This changes as the years pass by. Therefore, dear Martin, my wish for you is that your strength never leaves you and that you remain in good health for everything that you still have planned.

Dear Martin, thank you for everything that you have done for Würth and for your decades of friendship!



Bettina Würth

## Respect, Martin Schäfer!

As a matter of fact, Martin Schäfer and I had a close connection right from the start. I had already been working at Würth for a few years when Martin Schäfer started at the company, and one of my jobs at the time was to enter all of the necessary KPIs for each individual sales representative into their profiles. In 1977, we had approx. 300 sales representatives and it was still quite easy to handle these dimensions without digital support. Back then, there was not as much transparency with regard to the daily sales figures of the individual sales representative, just a central daily list that I managed. And so Martin called me almost every day and wanted to know how high his invoiced sales were and whether or not he was at the top of the ranking. This is how our close bond began, growing into a unique friendship today.

After Martin was appointed area manager, we were in contact with one another even more frequently because it was all the more important for him to know exactly how the sales reps in his area were doing. As a result, Martin often invited me to his conferences, and I was also allowed to take part in organizing excursions with the sales representatives or the families, during which we exemplified the Würth culture at its finest. Being able to experience and foster the Würth culture in this context was without a doubt something special. Two highlights are worth telling. At the end of the 1970s, we organized a celebration with the sales representatives and their families at the Gasthaus Pflug tavern in Gaisbach. It was apple schnapps season, and it flowed freely on that evening. As we moved on to Hotel Frankenbach in Künzelsau at midnight, we had to convince our wives to drive. Nevertheless, we arrived in Künzelsau without a hitch and were still in such high spirits that we continued our celebration on the roof of the adjoining building, much to the chagrin of all the other hotel guests.

Every year, the men organized a getaway to the Stuttgarter Hütte lodge in Kleinwalsertal, Austria. There were no service personnel there, and we had to take care of our own meals. Everyone had their own task, and everything ran like clockwork. Of course, the nights were short here because there was no shortage of beer in the evening, no matter the time.

Today you can think what you like about these times and the copious revelries. But that led to a tight-knit fellowship, extending into our families, that was beyond compare. Our children basically grew up together, and we supported and helped each other a great deal in this regard, including whenever there was a personal problem. Martin knew exactly how much power there was in these types of interactions and has made sure that they are not lost. Naturally, he also benefited from this. As a result, his troops were always among the top performers in the company, and this principle of maintaining close personal contact with his employees paved the way for his own career.

This allowed us to become part of the company together and to follow the success of the company with one another in various positions up to the management. Our relationship was always characterized by mutual respect, even though we certainly had critical phases at the business level. That was simply one of the challenges of our different areas of responsibility: Martin, the big boss of our sales organization, and I, the manager of sales operations with tasks such as territory structures of the sales force, sales planning, and customer segmentation. Whenever we met at the "border" of our two sovereign territories, there were heated debates in which our divergent points of view clashed. In my opinion, we also learned from this that it is necessary to fight constructively in such situations. It is always important to be aware that you are battling for the best decision for the company and not playing any power games. What distinguishes Martin is that he fights hard but never hurts anyone. That is why any waves that formed always dissipated quickly.

When I think back on the many years of our time together at the company, I am grateful that I had the honor of getting to know Martin. Essentially, we both come from humble beginnings and were raised to believe that if you want to achieve something, then you have to fight hard for it yourself. This basic character also means being honest and straightforward with others. This is undoubtedly the reason why we were able to maintain a close, trusting friendship and work together for 45 years. For me, the fact that this also led to us spending virtually

our entire careers together in this amazing company Würth has to do with how Reinhold Würth and the entire Würth family introduced this understanding and this culture into the company—we felt comfortable there. To maintain this culture and carry it on into the future despite any changes will be the great responsibility of the next generations. Martin contributed enormously to this with his work.

You have my greatest respect, dear Martin, for leading and taking responsibility for an entire generation of sales reps in this manner. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for our marvelous friendship, and I wish you the best of health and a wonderful time with your dear Ursel and family in the future.



Volker Retz



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# Preface

If you work for the Würth Group, then you are probably thinking: What is this exactly? Did Schäfer guzzle down some ink or take some expired medication?

Many of you surely recognize these expressions of mine and have a smirk on your face. But there are undoubtedly also people who associate this with rather uncomfortable yet important subjects, ones that have accompanied me and maybe even them along their entire career. For example, new and zero customer development.

Then again, others might be expecting a selection of quotes from letters that I have sent to various recipients or received in my more than four decades at Würth. Yes, these letters will have accompanied many of you, and they certainly made up a significant part of my work. I have sent thousands upon thousands of them, thus documenting what was relevant at the time and which topics were of interest, but also which great accomplishments were praised or what had been botched. Thus, they constitute a unique kind of historical sources.

In this book, dear ladies and gentlemen, dear readers, I would like to tell you a little about my story at Würth, but also about my personal life, and give you a glimpse of what counted in my life and still counts to this day.

This book was made because I was asked repeatedly to write down my stories as a book so that others could benefit from my methods and way of thinking. Thus, it was a combination of motivating words and my own ambition that encouraged me to disclose a great deal of my life.

Sure, some may think that Schäfer already has everything that others only dream of in their lifetimes: a decent salary, a Ferrari in the garage, a house in Majorca, a great many children and grandchildren, and a wife who looks after the house so that he feels as comfortable as possible there. But that would be too easy and superficial. Besides, that would not be me either. Nevertheless, I am infinitely grateful to have my dear wife and for the fact that she has supported me and looked after me in every conceivable situation.

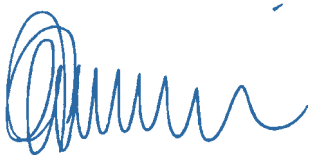
You can now draw your own conclusions about who I am and what I stand for.

I would like to encourage you to set personal goals for yourself and to pursue those goals passionately and vehemently. Then you are sure to get where you want to go.

On this note, I hope that you find my experiences interesting enough to tell. I hope that I can explain to some extent the principles and values that I always held dear.

In the end, we will all probably draw the same conclusion: It is important to be satisfied, it is good to even be happy sometimes. Each one of us will have to decide for ourselves what this means for us.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Schäfer', with a stylized, cursive script.

Martin Schäfer

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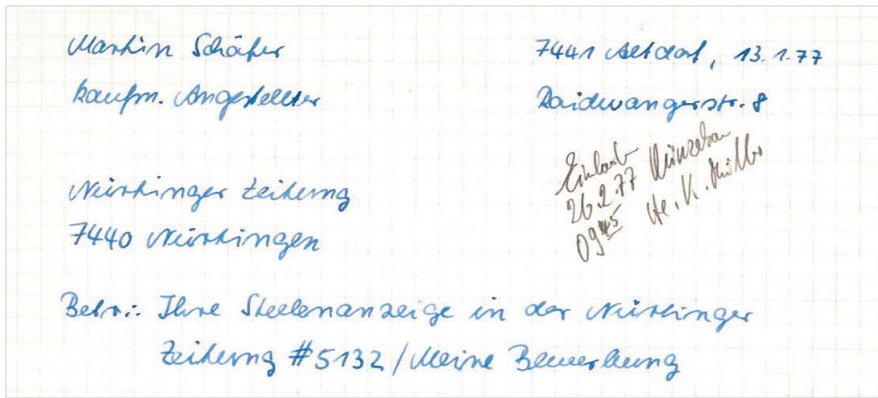
TRUST IS  
EVERYTHING:  
THE BEGINNING

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

1977

Altdorf, the district of Reutlingen, 1977: On 26 February 1977 at 7:00 a.m., a lanky twenty year old with blond hair took a seat in his rickety 20-year-old orange Ford Escort.

For the first time in his life, he drove this clunker to Künzelsau-Gaisbach, where he had an interview at Adolf Würth GmbH & Co. KG at 9:45 a.m. His intention was to become a sales representative at Würth. He had applied for this position.



Martin Schäfer's handwritten application for a position at Würth

*"I was always an early bird, and of course I hit the road early on that day."*  
So begins the story of Martin Schäfer.

*"When I arrived in Gaisbach, I had enough time to look around. I was genuinely impressed by the four-story administration building at the time with its prominent entrance, large windows, and bright, clear lines. So this is where Würth was headquartered: I liked it straight away. I climbed the entrance steps two at a time, walked through the shiny glass doors that opened in front of me, and reported to the woman at the reception desk. I didn't have to wait long until someone came to pick me up.*

*The head of sales was on the first floor. The former head of HR Jürgen Röhrig and Kurt Müller interviewed me. Jürgen Röhrig explained that Kurt Müller would be my future regional sales manager (RSM) if I were to get the job.*

*But it was not so easy in the end.*



*Regional Sales Manager Kurt Müller*

*Both of them hesitated. They thought I was too young at 20 years old. They told me that bluntly, asked me for a short break, and left the room.*

*Even back then, the sales manager had to approve every hire. His name was Karl Specht, and he was rather conservative when it came to the age of his employees. In the 70s, most sales representatives that started at Würth were over 25 years old. The job of sales representative was hard work. Not just because every customer was different and, depending on their temperament, could be extremely provocative. A sales*

*representative also required extensive expertise, the ability to quickly grasp complex situations, and above all deductive skills."*

*"As I sat across from this thin, barely 20-year-old boy for the first time at the beginning of 1977, he did not meet the prerequisites for the position by a long shot," recalls Kurt Müller, the RSM at the time. "Not just the fact that he turned out to be quite cheeky in the interview. As the sales manager asked me what I wanted with such a young boy in the first place, that really unnerved me."*

Martin Schäfer still remembers what the in-house staff told him after he was hired:

*"In the office of the former head of sales, things got heated. Like Scrooge McDuck, he ruffled his feathers and yelled: 'We're not running a kindergarten here!' To top it all off, he wrote in all caps the following note on my application folder:*

*'He's still just a kid'"*



Kurt Müller disagreed: *“My gut told me he had something! Which is why I asked Jürgen Röhrig to continue interviewing this young man with me.”*

*“All the while, I sat there and thought about how I could convince these two men to hire me. So I was too young in their eyes. That was unacceptable. I’d made up my mind: I wanted to be a sales representative at all costs. And now more than ever! I wanted to become better and had already decided on Würth. So it made no difference to me if they wanted me or not. I wanted to work there. That’s what mattered. As the two men came back in to continue the interview, I started to fight and argue with them.”*

*“The more resistance he felt in the conversation, the more he fought,”* explains Kurt Müller.

At any rate, it must have been a fairly intense interview, which at the same time revealed what Martin Schäfer was made of: his ability to persuade others, to win them over, and to assert himself. For his part, Kurt Müller noted below Martin Schäfer’s CV: *“Good at selling himself. After proper training, Martin Schäfer could become a great sales rep, and later on a good area manager.”*

That was the start of a career that is an outstanding example of the opportunities that Würth offers its employees. There was no further mention of “he’s still just a kid” from that moment on.

Of course, the story of Martin Schäfer begins before his interview at Würth. He took his first steps in the idyllic town of Großbettingen at the foot of the Swabian Alps, a region that most people today associate with hiking outdoors and recreation. Life there left an impact on people most of all through hard work on bumpy pastures and fields. Maybe that is one of the reasons for which the people there are accustomed to tackling challenges with vigor.

In Großbettingen, Martin was the third child of Hilde and Erich Schäfer, brought into the world on 22 November 1956 on a farm. Seven further siblings followed, building a family of eight boys and two girls. Marlies was the oldest, followed by Willi, Martin, Anita, Bernd, Lothar, Frank, Andreas, Markus, and Steffen.

In those days, it was considered absurd to throw money away on rent in Swabia. Everyone there worked and saved for their own home, and his father Erich was no exception. That is likely where the Swabian saying “schaffe, schaffe, Häusle baue” comes from (“work, work, and build your own home” in English).



*Martin Schäfer (back, fourth from left) with his parents and nine siblings*

When Martin Schäfer was four years old, the time had come. The entire family moved into their own house in Altdorf. Father Erich had built the new house for his growing family mostly himself. He was employed as a plasterer, earned a few marks on the side as a freelancer, and was an active member of the fruit growers' association in his scant free time.

*"Erich was a calming influence in the family," recalls Walter Zeeb, the later husband of Martin Schäfer's sister Marlies. "Only if there was really no alternative and the horde of children was out of control, then he would sometimes threaten to bring out the cider hose. In those days, that was typical in many families and was the equivalent of a spanking in other regions. The children knew from cleaning the barrels how hard such a rubber hose was. They became quiet as a mouse as soon as they heard the threat.*

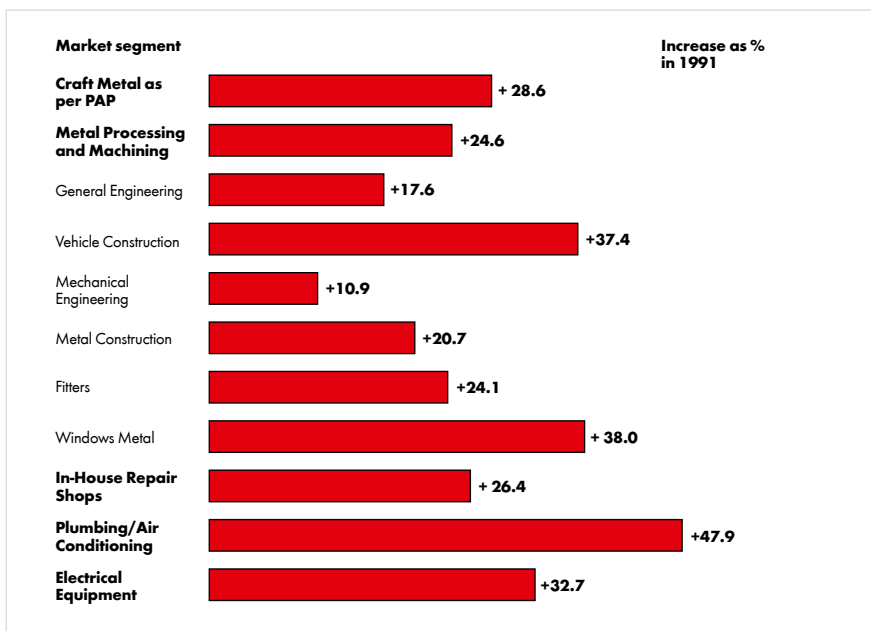
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TIME FOR  
CHANGE:  
CLIMBING  
THE LADDER

Munich, 2 January 1991: On his first day as regional sales manager in Bavaria, Martin Schäfer could already feel that his reputation as the “killer of Saarbrücken” had preceded him. That was bitter! *“Every morning, I told myself that I’d chosen to accept this challenge myself, and no one else had forced it on me. This was an attempt to motivate myself. After all, there was nothing I could do but tackle the situation head-on.”*

*I started to fight against this reputation by talking a great deal with the colleagues and by organizing various activities aimed at gaining their trust. It took four long months for the first colleagues to start interacting openly with each other, and especially with me. At this of all times, four of the most successful sales representatives from the Munich area quit—they wanted to start their own business. So I had to make sure that the sales development didn’t get entirely out of hand. It was already December by the time I’d gotten the area back on its feet. But this also had a positive side effect: Thanks to the painstaking groundwork, we all got to know one another better and I was able to get the colleagues on board with shared targets, which allowed us to achieve our targets in 1991 in addition to the East Metal district. Moreover, it was particularly pleasing for me to see that the Electrical Equipment and Plumbing/Air Conditioning subdivisions were reporting above-average growth. Once again, being courageous and standing up for my convictions had paid off.”*



Branch office development 1991

*“During this time, I learned that my ability to motivate myself didn’t let me down even in the most difficult of situations.”*

For Ursel Schäfer, the saying “bad weeds grow tall” exemplifies this ability of Martin Schäfer’s best. With a laugh, she adds: *“He’d learned how to motivate himself like this back home. After Martin’s family had moved relatively quickly into their self-built home, his father Erich had to fix up one room after the other. Maybe Martin translated that to his work. Whenever he had a problem that he couldn’t solve in the moment, he came home, sat down at his desk, and ruminated on it. Back then he even had an A4 notebook in which he wrote down his notes and thoughts. He organized it neatly and added any ideas to it. Usually he was already quite relaxed at this stage. Sometimes he’d show me what he was planning, which is why I had a pretty good understanding of his work. When he came home from Munich the first several weeks, he usually went straight to his desk. But he was also able to put a pin in a task. Then he’d close the notebook loudly. That was the sign for Natalie and Yvonne that they had their dad all to themselves, and they practically pounced on him at once.”*

## A FAILED MUSEUM VISIT

Because culture was a top priority at Würth even in those days, a visit to St. Emmeram Palace was organized for after a conference near Regensburg. That was quite a special occasion.

After said conference, the colleagues made a pit stop at a bar and were therefore all in a boisterous mood already. While the museum guide was answering a few questions, Martin Schäfer and several participants headed into the dining hall. Someone had hung up ropes between the armrests, but they knew what to do: They were gone in the blink of an eye, and Martin Schäfer took a seat with several other colleagues. But the glasses and pitchers were empty. Their attempts to test the sturdiness of the silverware and tableware were not well received. The museum guide was speechless as she hurried over to them, but then she let loose a barrage of swear words unlike anything that has ever been heard in Bavaria even to this day.

*“At any rate, it was quite challenging for me to explain to the woman that the colleagues simply wanted to follow as closely as possible in the footsteps of the princely family. Even though we left her a fat tip, we were banned from entering the museum again. News of the ‘area conference at the prince’s table’ spread not only across the entire Bavarian Würth world, but also beyond the borders of Bavaria,”* recounts Willi Obermaier, area manager from Munich, telling of the aftermath of this conference. Oh well, if the colleagues had taken the time to think, they’d have realized that you have to play by the rules elsewhere, too, not just at Würth.

Celebrating was as much a part of the company as concentrating on Prof. Reinhold Würth’s vision of generating DM 10 billion in Group sales for the year 2000.

Everyone knew, broken down to their level, what their job was, and every sales representative fought for each customer order and each DM. Everyone also knew that solid growth would pave the way for great success, even in a faltering economy. This knowledge gave everyone the necessary certainty to continue enjoying their conquest of the market.

Absolute reliability and honesty at all hierarchical levels toward both employees and customers were crucial in this case. Everyone had to be able to trust fully in any promises that were made. In the future, the customers would pick their suppliers from among multiple competitors with the same high-quality product and services—the winner would be the one who managed to impress them with their reliability, kindness, courtesy, and quality.

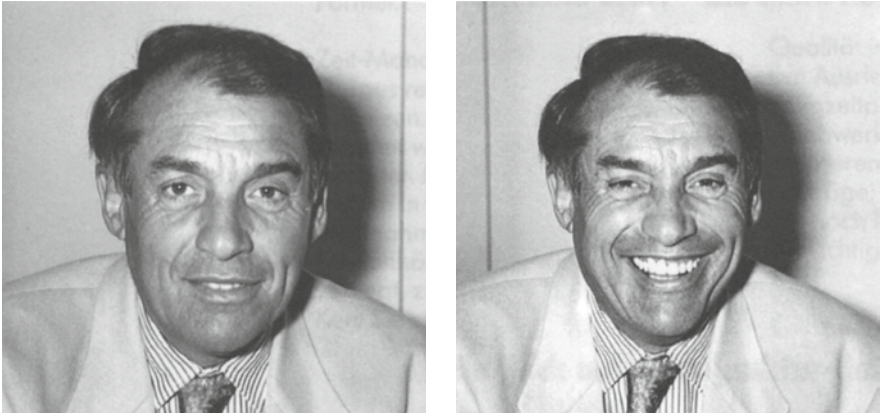
## GROUNDWORK FOR THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

1992

In order to be optimally equipped for his work, Martin Schäfer regularly read the company magazines word for word. He filed them on his shelves in chronological order, where they can still be found today. The “Würth Intern Handwerk”, an internal magazine for the sales force, was published by the head of sales, Karl Specht, back then.

If you flip through the different issues, you will quickly notice that the topics have remained the same by and large. *“There’s no need to change good things,”* explains Martin Schäfer. The topics were presented clearly and kept short and sweet.

In contrast, Karl Specht's photo somehow kept changing mysteriously from one issue to the next.



Two photos of Karl Specht from the "Würth Intern Handwerk" company magazine

The main topics from 1992 were as follows:

**Your "choice of partner" should bear fruit!**

"Problematic" sales representatives are an opportunity to learn!

Your management responsibilities include, to a large extent, dealing with sales reps who do not manage to meet their targets even after two years. These "problem children" are people who made a good impression during the application process. Therefore, brushing them off cannot be the right answer to the question of what is standing in their way. If we look at the results from last year's sales rep survey, it is striking that the conditions at the workplace were cited as their primary motivation to work: the relationship between employees, the sense of purpose, your support.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the factors that bog down your team can be found there as well. What it does mean is that you are in an ideal position to identify the causes and find solutions. This is where you need to show true leadership skills! Please bear in mind: Every problematic sales rep who "gets their act together" lowers our potential staff turnover rate and, ultimately, represents less work on your part than a new sales rep who needs to learn the ropes from scratch.

The overall economic trend is good, and we are doing everything we can as a company to foster a positive work environment with the appropriate measures. One-on-one talks and ride-alongs in particular are a good place to start. By the way: If you repeatedly find that there are general measures we can take to support your efforts from Künzelsau, please let us know. We appreciate your feedback!

**MANAGEMENT TEAM**

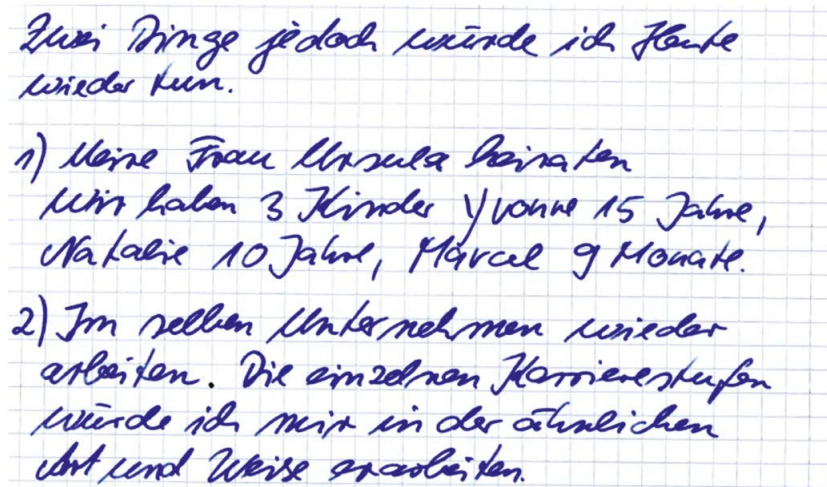
*From low-performers to obstacles*

If you can believe the statistics, most people take stock of their lives for the first time at the age of 40. I was 36 when I took stock of my life for the first time. I wondered what I could have done better and when. The town of Mittelstadt, where I was living with my family, had a population of 3,000 back then. Six sales representatives were living there, all of whom I'd recruited for the company one by one.

In addition, there was my brother-in-law Walter Zeeb, area manager in the Wood division, my brother Lothar, sales rep for heating and plumbing, and my brother Markus, specialist in the Electrical Equipment subdivision. Not one of them had ever benefited from the fact that they were related to me. On the contrary, I demanded more of them than anyone else, and they were glad about that. They weren't looking for any preferential treatment. They wanted to be proud of the success they'd earned by themselves.

That was alright for me since I knew they were respectable, hard workers. I had now been at Würth for 16 years and had met my targets every year, no matter my position. Of course I'd made my share of mistakes, and I would do some things differently today. Thus, the most important revelation from taking stock of my life was my willingness to learn from my mistakes."

At Würth, it is conventional for managers to document their work in a company history. Martin Schäfer did this as well.



Zwei Dinge jedoch würde ich heute wieder tun.

- 1) Meine Frau Ursula heiraten  
Wir haben 3 Kinder Yvonne 15 Jahre,  
Natalie 10 Jahre, Marcel 9 Monate.
- 2) Im selben Unternehmen wieder arbeiten. Die einzelnen Karriere-stufen würde ich mir in der ähnlichen Art und Weise erleben.

"However, I would do two things all over again today.

1. Marry my wife Ursel, with whom I have 3 children:

Yvonne 15 years old, Natalie 10 years old, Marcel 9 months old.

2. Work at the same company again.

I would even go through the individual steps of my career in the same manner."

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CUSTOMER  
SEGMENTATION

*“The dynamics between cold hard facts and warm human interaction on the sales force are unparalleled. While a Bavarian colleague might still be laughing, a colleague from Hamburg would likely already be irritated,”* explains Bettina Würth. Customer segmentation had been her idea, and she was able to convince Martin Schäfer of this strategy over many conversations. Once he was on board, you could be sure he would put his heart and soul into it.

One thing was certain: With the old system, certain customer groups were no longer receiving adequate care, while others required too much effort. For this reason, Würth decided to adopt a market model with three different customer groups. Bettina Würth, Harald Unkelbach, and Martin Schäfer summarized this model under the concept of “customer segmentation” and presented it to all sales managers, business unit managers, and branch managers at a conference held at Panoramahotel in Waldenburg.

In this model, customers were first sorted according to their potential: 14% of all customers were “A” customers, but they generated more than 80 % of AWKG’s revenue. They were at the top of the revenue pyramid. The next 16 % were “B” customers. Their orders contributed 15 % to the overall revenue. These “B” customers were therefore the middle level of the pyramid. Then there was the vast majority of customers: 70 % of customers formed the base of the pyramid, comprising approximately 350,000 companies that, all together, only accounted for a modest 5 % of the sales volume. That meant that “A” and “B” customers together generated 95 % of the overall revenue. It was very clear which segment needed to be prioritized in all investment efforts.

Next, three sales channels (SC) were defined: Small trades businesses and regional customers were to be addressed by SC1, mainly via phone, fax, and—most recently—email. The regional sales representatives served as their direct contact to Würth. Conventional trades businesses continued to be advised by sales representatives in the field. They were now known as SC2, or the Craft sales channel. Quite understandably, large customers valued thorough consulting to optimize their processes. This was now the responsibility of 18 High-Potential sales reps in SC3, also known as the High-Potential sales channel, supported by a back office.

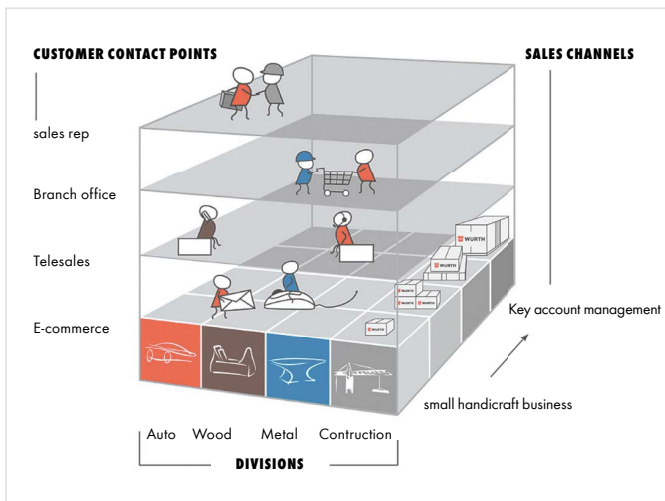
The way they worked together also changed: Customers who had been successfully purchasing from Würth for years were now termed existing customers or secured customers (S). Customers which still had untapped potential

were now referred to as high-potential customers or evolution customers (E). And finally, there were acquisition customers (A), which Würth did not have many of at that point.

A trades business with department managers, an accounting department, corporate sourcing, and the blueprint of a large company places different demands on its suppliers—and by extension the sales reps at Würth—than say a customer with three tradespeople and one accountant or a micro-business run by a single person. The latter usually bought directly in one of the stores or placed orders over the phone. As Würth wanted to cater to both large corporations and small micro-businesses, this matrix ensured that each and every customer was addressed appropriately and not one of them fell through the cracks. At the same time, this matrix provided the transparency needed to offer just the right services and products to each of the different customer groups. Customer segmentation would therefore set the scene for further investments.

On this basis, corporate management decided to increase staff by 8 to 10 %, sending a clear message that it saw a bright future ahead.

Martin Schäfer comments: *“Bettina Würth and I agreed that it was extremely important to give all employees a sense of security by ensuring dynamic and healthy corporate development. We were both convinced that customer segmentation would help achieve this. This approach to the market would firstly benefit our customers, secondly the staff, and thirdly the company.”*



Many years later, this was summarized in a cube diagram with the slogan “To each customer their own Würth.”

Right off the bat, Martin Schäfer always felt like he was part of a large family at Würth. A family that nurtured and challenged him: *"This is why I wanted to complete each task thoroughly."*

By 2002, he had been with Würth for 25 years. His fellow corporate managers and quite a few sales managers honored him by celebrating his work anniversary together with him and his family. Prof. Reinhold Würth, Marion, Bettina, and Markus Würth, as well as three members of the Central Managing Board, Walter Jäger and his wife, Harald Unkelbach, and Rolf Bauer were among the many guests.

His closest colleagues, especially Artur Herold, Kurt Müller, Karl Specht, Peter Zürn, Hans Hügel, Werner Rau, and many others also attended the celebration. That day, Martin Schäfer received many gifts, congratulations, and words of appreciation. Kurt Müller could not help but give an account of the first days of the guest of honor with the company, without failing to mention the loud Hawaiian shirts he used to wear, which today would make any onlooker cringe.



One key responsibility regional managers had was to improve the key figures. This included increasing the number of orders per sales representative. Together with Martin Schäfer, they developed a concept with a minimum goal of four orders per sales rep and day, which they introduced to the area managers in workshops. And to really get the pot boiling, the individual order target per sales representative was combined with the “7 standards.”



*The Heads of Sales at AWKG:  
Bettina Würth and Martin Schäfer*

To ensure that every manager lived up to their duty as a role model, Martin Schäfer called for two self-written orders per ride-along from each regional manager. He had them send him these figures twice a week, but success remained elusive. The scale was stuck at 3.1 orders per sales rep and business day.

## THE HUMAN SIDE SHINES THROUGH

In the run-up to the GFKK conference in the new regional structure, Martin Schäfer was really feeling the pressure. *“With the motto ‘establishing ourselves on the market,’ I had to somehow lift the bad mood and communicate security. The fact that Peter Zürn and a couple of colleagues from AWKG’s management attended the conference at the Allgäu Stern Hotel in Sonthofen on 22 and 23 September 2003 was especially important.”*

Martin Schäfer kicked off the event by highlighting how crucial the sales force was. Even if everyone suffered under the consolidation strategy, customer segmentation had changed many things for the better. The thing is, growth cannot be enough for a company. It also has to improve.

Back then, Uwe Hohlfeld, now Managing Director of Finance and Controlling, was not particularly happy with this development either. With his statement *“The most expensive sale is the one that is lost,”* he went down in Würth history.



While 270 sales reps managed to grow their sales, 1,553 sales reps obliterated the growth those colleagues had achieved with their losses. The remaining sales reps were stagnating. It was high time for the company to pull itself together and push back against the competition. This would only be possible if each sales rep focused on the customer group that suited their strengths because only then would the area manager be able to train the sales rep according to their performance level on ride-alongs.

While one of the direct competitors had already achieved its quotas, Würth was trailing far behind. *“Have we reached a state of inertia?”* Martin Schäfer’s question resounded in the room. *“I myself consider every product sold by the competition an insult to my performance and my service. I attack every orange, blue, or anyone else’s label and try to win that customer over for Würth. I cannot simply watch while someone invades my territory in the customer’s warehouse and do nothing. Würth is strong and innovative. Do all of our customers know that? We have to show them that we can defend our territory, that we are watchful, quick, and uncompromising.”*

The conclusion of the conference was: *“There can be only one: Würth!”* The thundering applause and positive feedback from the managers confirmed that he had achieved his objective. He had rekindled the *“Würth Spirit.”* The human side had started to shine through again!

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THE CHANGING  
WORLD OF SALES

For Martin Schäfer, motivating his employees was always the key to success. For example, in 2008 he wrote: *"You can achieve great things if you leave your comfort zone. Only then can we expand our performance limits and achieve even greater success. This applies both to sports and work."*

*For that very reason, uncomfortable situations when visiting customers, in the case of an argument or a complaint, are the right moment to leave your comfort zone and intentionally increase your psychological stress. In most cases, this gives rise to something new, surprising, and innovative, thus offering the customer an added value."*

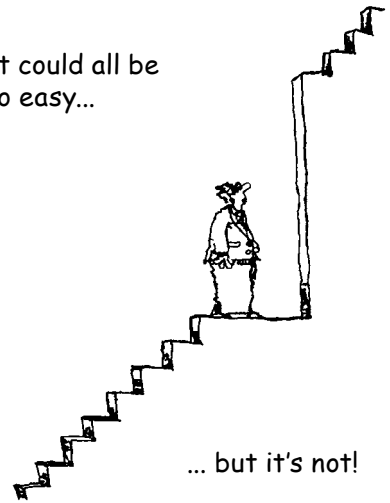
Along these lines, Torsten Elias, North regional manager, defined the motto "it could all be so easy... but it isn't!" for his area of responsibility.

Right off the bat in January, AWKG posted an enormous increase in sales, but then winter came and sales collapsed. Meanwhile, a storm was brewing on the other side of the pond in the shape of a bank and financial crisis as part of a global economic crisis. In August 2007, interest rates had already skyrocketed, thus causing the inflated housing market to pop. The rock bottom was the collapse of the large US bank Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008.

As a consequence, this crisis also crossed over to the real economy: Many companies, even large car manufacturers such as General Motors, were forced to file for bankruptcy. It came as no surprise that this would also affect the stock market and finally individual households—and nevertheless, it was still some distance from us here in Germany and even farther away from the Hohenlohe region.

## Motto 2008

It could all be so easy...



... but it's not!



Martin Schäfer had taken an interest in the stock market early on. He invested actively in stocks himself. Obviously, what was happening in the US did not leave him untouched. A strategy was needed to overcome this crisis since it was bound to arrive in Germany along with all its consequences, and likely sooner than expected!

## THE IN-HOUSE WÜRTH ECONOMY

Before the last and deciding quarter of the year 2008, AWKG had reached an accumulated sales growth of 8.3 %, corresponding to 96.8 % plan fulfillment, which meant that anything was possible. But then the drop in order volumes and the economic reporting gave our customers pause for thought. What had been prophesied came to pass: the crisis was right at our doors!

In order to turn the tides, Würth stepped up its efforts in December 2008 to score as many points as possible. In the individual subdivisions, there were products that every customer needed, and there were valuable points for every customer visit, every order, and every order line. Each sales representative was provided with a colorful bouquet of tools, including sample boards, hand samples, and a point wish list.

The media quickly reported a drastic slump in order volumes across all sectors. Tens of thousands of jobs were cut. Long-standing companies and corporations

## A SUCCINCT CONCLUSION

Martin Schäfer is often asked the question—even by new employees in various discussions—of what he would do differently today. His answer has always been the same: *“I’m not quite sure what I’d do differently, but I know what I’d do exactly the same: 1. I’d marry my wife again, and 2. I’d start working for this company again because it’s such a unique company and because it offers so many incredibly interesting prospects thanks to its diverse and multidimensional character—not only nationally, but also beyond our borders.”*

*“I’m now writing my last chapter at Würth, for my eyes alone. My time is limited, and afterward I plan to devote myself entirely to personal ventures and my loving family. I will leave the company on day X just as I joined it. I will remain the same, but ‘the power’ will remain with the company.*

*But today I can already say with happiness, pride, endless gratitude, esteem, and respect for all the great work my colleagues perform each and every day: It was an unbelievably great and emotional, but also demanding and happy time!”*

**CHRONICLE**

- 1 April 1977      Joined Adolf Würth GmbH & Co. KG as a sales representative
- 1 May 1985      Appointed area sales manager
- 1 January 1991    Appointed regional sales manager of Bavaria district
- 1 May 1993      Appointed sales manager for German Metal division
- 1 July 2000      Appointed Managing Director and Head of Sales
- 1 January 2009    Appointed Deputy Chairman of the Management of Adolf Würth GmbH & Co. KG
- 1 January 2019    Managing director of workshop and vehicle equipment

**Thank you!**

