



“...share your dreams, goals and plans with someone else, chances increase that you will really take action to work towards it!”

Sabine Ertl - Senior Director Marketing, Osram Opto Semiconductors -Founder of Flow & Grow – Mother

- 1. What was your motivation to become an entrepreneur? How did you start?** The idea of founding my own business had long been within me, but rather unconsciously. When I went through a personal coaching process and started to reflect more intensively, the picture started to become more and more clear. I still remember very well how I literally drew a picture of what I wanted to achieve. The power of visualization is very strong! I also realized how much I was burning for this venture and that I really wanted to make a difference for our society with Flow & Grow. Then I just started step by step to make this rough idea more and more concrete and start implementation in small slices. What also helped me was that I talked to several friends about my ideas – this made it more realistic. Research has shown that if you share your dreams, goals and plans with someone else, chances increase that you will really take action to work towards it!
- 2. Please tell us something about your first failure and first success as an entrepreneur.** There were a lot of small success stories during the first period. I remember, for example, the positive feedback I received from some friends about my business idea, the feeling when my vision became more and more clear or when I had implemented my own logo, website, business cards and flyer. Each of those moments made me proud and gave me energy to continue. The first failure was probably when I started promoting and realized that it wasn't as easy as I had imagined to find paying clients.
- 3. Did you have some "break moments" in your career so far?** Yes, at the time of those break moments, it was often not clear, but looking back in time, I can definitely say that I had some break moments. One was when I decided not to do a PhD after my master, but to start a career in industry with an MBA and a parallel job at my first employer. This step gave me access to a strong network, to an advanced entry position in industry and made me aware of the topic of leadership. Another moment that immediately comes to my mind was changing my job and moving to another company. This helped me to make a major leap on the career ladder. Further, the previously mentioned coaching process has helped to become much clearer on what is really driving me, what I want to achieve, my strengths and how I can better handle challenging situations. This had huge impact on my personal and professional development. Finally, I would like to mention the moment when I became a mother – once, twice and then a third time. I do believe that this experience helped to become a better leader as well.
- 4. What life-lesson did you have to learn the hard way while being an entrepreneur?** Lesson 1: You have to find clients who are willing to pay for your product, otherwise the coolest business idea is not more than an idea. Lesson 2: do it the agile way – start with the minimum viable product and don't shoot right away for the ultimate version of the product. This way you can test and adapt on the way.
- 5. What do you think is a common mistake, new/young entrepreneurs make?** Among all the passion, new/young entrepreneurs have for their business idea, they might tend to forget about the business case. Another mistake might be that they are not able to break down their large vision/goal into small enough steps that they are able to implement, learn from and celebrate. As a consequence, they might lose momentum on the way.

6. **Do we need more female entrepreneurs? Why?** Yes, just like in corporate leadership positions, women are under-represented as entrepreneurs. There is no logical reason for this: e.g. women have same or even better education, there are lots of childcare institutions and possibilities for fathers to take care of their children as well. Further, research has shown that a more gender-balanced entrepreneurial and leadership landscape has a positive impact on business outcomes and the use of our resources. So what do we have to change to make this happen? One important fact is that we need more female role models as leaders and entrepreneurs. This again will motivate even more women to follow such a path in life – finally leading to positive reinforcement of the trend!
7. **Being an entrepreneur, having a family AND being a woman. How do you do that?** A key to success is consequent organization, management, focus and prioritization between the numerous tasks in the different areas of life. Further, I ask other people for help and don't make the mistake to think that I have to do it all on my own. At work, I am willing to delegate and cooperate. At home, I share with my husband the responsibility to raise our children and take care of household chores. A strong network, both professionally and privately, definitely helps.
8. **Which three words describe you the best?** Energy – optimism - change
9. **What has to change in Germany to stay global competitive? (Keywords: Digitalization and Entrepreneurship)** I remember when I was living abroad in Chile and China, I saw many more entrepreneurs than in Germany. One reason for this is in my opinion the German culture which is very safety oriented. Being employed in a large company – even though this has slightly changed over the past 20-30 years already – is still a very safe place. Many people don't dare or don't see a motivation to move out of this comfort zone. However, it is often the smaller companies and start-ups where disruptive innovation arises. If Germany wants to stay an innovation leader, we might need to work either on inspiring more people to take the risk to become entrepreneurs or bring more entrepreneurial mindset into the larger companies. At the same time, I notice a change in the younger generation. I notice that they are much more focused on finding a job which is really fulfilling for them than finding a job which is best paid and offering safety. This could have a positive impact on our entrepreneurial landscape.
10. **Where do you see yourself in 10 years?** In 10 years, I will only be doing things that I really enjoy and with which I make an impact on other peoples' lives - and earning a reasonable amount of money with that. Will this be in a larger company or as a full-time entrepreneur or as a combination of both? Let's see what life brings – I will follow my vision, but be open for changes along the way ... and I will always keep learning because this is what makes life so exciting for me!
11. **What is a "Entrepreneur-Mindset". Is it possible to learn it for everyone?** I like to describe this with 3 words: clarity, passion & empathy. If you know what you want to achieve and are really passionate about it and know how to connect to other people to inspire them, be inspired, partner up with them, win them as employees or customers, then big things are waiting for you! Before you think about learning, I prefer to talk about searching – searching what you are burning for. If you are really passionate about something, you will usually make a great effort to learn whatever necessary to achieve it!



Interview: Katja Würdinger

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