



## Leading Through Disruption

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# "It's The Responsibility Of Leaders To Innovate And Try New Things"

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Georg Pölzl, CEO of Austrian Post



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***Georg Pölzl, CEO of Austrian Post, shared key leadership lessons with me and my colleague Adam Bryant, managing director of The ExCo Group, in our latest "Leading Through Disruption" interview. Subscribe [here](#) to receive future interviews.***

**Lauterbach: How have you evolved as a leader?**

Pölzl: I'm an engineer by training and education, but I shifted to McKinsey early in my career. At first, it's all about content and figuring out the right direction in those consulting roles. Later on, I focused much more on being systems- and people-oriented. More recently, I've come to appreciate that it's about people. I put much more emphasis on choosing the right people and developing people.

**Bryant: What values are most important to you as a leader?**

Pölzl: One principle is cooperation across departments and even across C-level divisions. It's setting the right direction and gaining trust from the people around you.

**Lauterbach: What are the most common themes that come up when you're giving people advice?**

Pölzl: The most common things are the behavior of the team. I sometimes take people aside to tell them not to be so aggressive in meetings, or to perhaps ask more questions rather than making

statements. When I give people feedback, it's very important to talk to them immediately after you see the behavior. It's much less effective to do it later because the person may not remember clearly what happened.

**Bryant: How do you create a culture of innovation?**

Pölzl: We make every leader in our company understand that it's not enough to just take care of your part of the business. We ask them for new ideas, for new ways of doing things, and every person on our leadership team has to be aware that doing things like we did yesterday or today is not enough.

It's the responsibility of leaders to innovate and try new things. If someone were to ask me, "Who is responsible for innovation in your organization?" I would tell them that our leaders are responsible. I also say that we should always look around to see how other companies are handling the same challenge. If somebody has already developed a solution, we should use it. There is no point reinventing the wheel.

*"Let's make mistakes, but let's  
make them fast and correct  
them."*

One reason why you ask people to do more and to always innovate is that people quickly get bored if they're doing the same thing every day. This behavior gets into your DNA sooner or later. I find it boring doing

things again. So then I don't have fun with it and I leave it to somebody else and then I'm looking for something new. You have to lead by example. Another very important thing is that you have to accept mistakes. I always say to my people, "Let's make mistakes, but let's make them fast and correct them."

**Lauterbach: How do you think about trust in the context of workplaces?**

Pölzl: Trust goes in two directions. On the one hand, I trust my people, and on the other hand, they have to trust me. So how do I get them to trust me? I think openness is the key word. You can't tell some people a different story than what you tell others. I also believe in giving trust in advance. Then there are consequences if trust is misused.

**Bryant: What advice would you share with a first-time CEO?**

Pölzl: Pick the right people and let them do their work. Don't micromanage. Every day I see people who cannot avoid micromanaging people and thinking they always know better. If you lead that way, you frustrate people, and you won't be able to lead in the long run.

**Lauterbach: What was your playbook for driving transformation at Austrian Post?**

Pölzl: I spent the first two years to get the management board right. Some people left because they figured out that they cannot work with

me. The second was then to develop a trust-based relationship with the remaining board members. I had selected those people and promoted them.

*Pick the right people and let them do their work. Don't micromanage.*

We also did regular assessments of the next levels of leadership in our organization. Every one of us evaluated all the management team members. It was a very good way to bring the board team together and to get a homogeneous view on the people you are working with.

**Bryant: Leadership required a certain comfort level in working amid all the disruption and uncertainty. Where does that come from for you?**

Pözl: I started as a petroleum engineer. Part of my motivation to pursue that field came from seeing a film with John Wayne where he had to kill these fires on the oil rigs. So adventure is part of my DNA. I do off-road motorbiking. I'm a veteran sailor. This has always been an element of my character. I always look for adventures in my personal life and my professional life. I couldn't do the same thing every day.

**Lauterbach: What do you think is the hardest part of leadership?**

Pözl: It's energy-consuming. You always have to show optimism, even

in very tough situations. You never should lose control. So you always have to bring this positive energy, and sometimes it's exhausting. Even in very tough situations, you are the one who always has to show optimism and a positive spirit.

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