

From fried chicken to **mindset-change**

THE INTERVIEW WITH INSA KLASING WAS CONDUCTED BY EVELINE METZEN, AMCHAM GERMANY GENERAL MANAGER

Insa Klasing

Insa Klasing is CEO and Co-Founder of TheNextWe. She was CEO of KFC Germany, the restaurant chain opened almost as many new locations within five years as it had done in 40 years before.

Insa, as the German CEO of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) you doubled the size of the fast-food chain. Then last year you founded your own start-up, TheNextWe, a digital coaching company. What made you decide to start again from scratch right in the middle of your career?

Actually you were there when the ball got rolling: It was when we were in Silicon Valley in 2016 with a delegation of the Atlantik-Brücke. I was inspired by just how big people think over there. How they just get on with it and make things happen. And by what you can achieve with digital means. That's really when I caught the "start-up virus."

Most start their companies while either still at university or at the beginning of their professional lives. They usually haven't gotten used to the conveniences of being in a company environment. What was it like to come from a corporation with many employees and an ideal infrastructure and then suddenly trade in your corner office in Düsseldorf for a coworking space in Kreuzberg?

With 4,000 employees you can delegate a lot and get plenty done simultaneously. Plus you have a large budget and the occasional "shot" that doesn't have to be "on target." Of course, no one ever plans on a project failing, but a large corporation doesn't cease to exist if this does end up happening. This "corporate abundance" is something I only came

to appreciate in retrospect. In a start-up you're in a permanent state of scarcity, i.e., you have few resources and correspondingly little time. This results in an entirely different type of intensity that's both challenging and rewarding at the same time. You also have a greater degree of creative freedom and execute much faster; you're always experimenting, correcting and learning.

Speaking of why: Why go from fried chicken to mindset-change, the core concept of your start-up? What does the one have to do with the other?

The idea to found TheNextWe and to specialize in mindset-change was in fact born during my time at KFC. In my five years at KFC in Germany, we built nearly as many new restaurants as in the preceding 40-plus years. In the end, what brought about that success was not a new strategy or a new partner, but a shift in our collective thinking. Everyone in Germany is always quick to turn to strategy consultants and set up new processes. But if some of the stakeholders still have reservations, even the best strategy won't work because it won't get implemented.

Back then I wished for someone who could have helped me as CEO to quickly transform the prevailing mindset across the entire company. I was in dialogue with my brother, who had already founded a start-up. I asked him how to go about scaling a mindset-change program. "Digitalization" was his answer. And that's what kicked off our incubation of TheNextWe. Today he is Co-Founder and CTO.

Before you thought of developing your own digital coaching system, you yourself learned how to coach. What exactly did you end up creating? What's behind TheNextWe?

We developed a 12-week program that enables hundreds of employees to be coached at the same time and at all levels of hierarchy. To do that, we combined management experience with technology and cognitive methods. For the latter we brought in cognitive expert Anke Kaupp as Co-Founder. Together we created an entirely new product out of these three disciplines. Coaching is typically a black box that employees get placed in and you

never truly know what the result will be at the end. We've made coaching scalable and predictable, and we can demonstrate a clear return on investment.

How exactly does digitalized coaching work?

Each participating employee gets accompanied by his personal coach digitally for 12 weeks. Throughout that time, the coach and employee are in contact over the phone and through chat, which cuts travel costs and time.

During the first month, they focus on working out a goal and on resolving any mental barriers that are in the way. Then they develop an individual action plan for the remaining two months, which aims to anchor a more functional mindset into their daily work until it becomes a matter of habit.

Because we maintain such intensive contact and because communicating through chat is so easy to integrate into everyday work life, we're sort of a "coach in your pocket" who's always there.

Because the coaching is digitalized, it likely makes no difference for you whether you're helping a small-sized business with just a handful of employees or a publicly traded company?

Exactly. It makes no difference whether a company sends us five or 100 employees at any one time. Thanks to our automated processes all of this is entirely manageable. The issues we work on are applicable to all shapes and sizes of companies. We live in a time when digitalization is pushing us to the very edge of our comfort zones, and that's something that SMEs and publicly traded companies are experiencing alike. Whether it's topics such as "how do I bring about a mindset-change among my staff?" or "how do I deal with the fear of digitalization?" or that ever-popular topic "agile working" — these pop up in organisations of any size today.

We often accompany managers in the first 100 days of a new job. It's during this time that the failure rate is particularly high. Support from a coach who isn't visible but always available on-demand is therefore a valuable investment for companies.

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