



Master of discipline

03/07/2015 Management in production – a male domain? Jana Igel proves the opposite and she is only 31 years old. Now she faces new challenges.

It is four o'clock in the morning. Jana Igel has just woken up, for the fourth time that night. She does not set the alarm; she has her own body clock. For many years, she used to get up at this time to drive to work in Zuffenhausen. Now she is sitting in her living room, her newly born son in her arms and is waiting for him to fall asleep again. Her new everyday life as mother is in stark contrast to her professional life as forewoman on the car assembly line for interior fittings at Porsche.

When Jana Igel stands on the assembly line, she is filled with pride. She is proud of those special cars and being involved in their production together with her team. She is extremely meticulous, as she describes herself. Any scratch is an embarrassment. Ultimately, customers deserve only the best. "I either do my duties perfectly or not at all."

Position of forewoman with only 29 years

Jana Igel demands a lot, especially from herself. It is thanks to this that she was promoted to the position of forewoman on the car assembly line for interior fittings in May 2012 – when she was only 29 years old. There she is not only responsible for preassembly and fitting dashboards and wheels but also for fitting the logos and other interior equipment parts. "It was like winning the jackpot," she said. But was it just luck? Not exactly.

It was more something to do with her tremendous ambition. In 2005, she shortened her apprenticeship as interior vehicle fitter at Porsche to two and a half years due to her excellent results. "You're certain to go far," said her instructor prophetically at that time. Her final examination at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry confirmed this impression. The ambitious woman achieved 100 out of a possible score of 100 points. She was given a job on the assembly line and six months later she changed to the upholstery shop. However, "I wanted to see more – I wanted to understand what's inside a car like this."

Distance course and shift work

So she registered in parallel for a distance course as certified technical management expert. Shift work, evening school three times a week, classes on Saturdays. No holidays for three years – she spent all her days off learning. Admittedly, "sometimes I asked myself why I was doing this to myself." Just let yourself go and do nothing? Relax? Yes, but not on the sofa – when she did take time off, she was on her motorbike. She passed her motorcycle licence just by the way.

The car interior fitter is a fighter, a woman who grits her teeth and struggles through. Just like in 1995, when she came to Baden-Württemberg with her family from Siberia – she could not even speak a word of German. She felt like a stranger, even at the language school where people from a wide variety of cultures meet. The twelve year old practised her vocabulary and learnt to find her way in society. "Nothing comes from nothing" – that's what she already understood as a child. "My parents brought me up to take on responsibility."

As a young woman in a male domain

Later, she also received the chance for more responsibility at Porsche. A colleague from the HR department encouraged her to apply as forewoman in 2011. "At first I didn't want to. I had the greatest respect for this job." It took Jana six months to take up the recommendation. One application and two interviews later she had the job – and had to master new challenges.

"As a young woman in a male domain you first have to prove yourself in a special way." She knows this from her own experience. 36 employees work in her section. 34 of them are men. Can she really change

a wheel by herself? She often heard questions like these at the beginning. Jana Igel remains unruffled and has so far avoided any excessive demonstration of power. She relies on dialogue. She talks to every individual about their expectations and aims. When a decision must be made, she often co-opts her employees and asks their opinion.

"Every person is different and must therefore be treated differently." The only way is to be empathetic. Her guiding principle is that a foreman is only as good as his or her team. On the other hand, she doesn't exactly cosy up to them. "A superior can never please all of the people all of the time." That is what Jana Igel has learnt as well as how to set limits. Which is one of the many skills that will come in useful as a mother. She keeps on learning and making new experiences – for example not being on the move all the time.

Work and family life can be reconciled

"At times I just do not know what time it is." She admits she misses the work. But most of all she misses her team. However, for the time being, everything revolves around the baby. Her maternity leave will last a year and then she will return to Porsche at the beginning of 2016. She is convinced that thanks to the care services now offered she will be able to reconcile work and family life. "It's all just a question of organisation." Jana Igel has no fear of the double burden. Somehow that's no surprise to hear from this master of discipline.

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