

Julia Uth on leading with patience, fairness



As head of design and research and development at Uth GmbH, a German machine manufacturing firm, Julia Uth prides herself on leading with fairness and responsibility.

That these tenets mimic the overall mission for Uth is no coincidence.

Uth has been out front in the extrusion industry in its use of recycled materials, as well as solar power. The company has applications in tire manufacturing, mechanical rubber goods, silicone compounding, threads for wire and cable goods, and adhesives and sealants.

What is the one key to getting Uth employees to “buy in” on a new process or change in the status quo?

Communication, communication, communication. Honestly, like so many different businesses and models, you have to include the team in a new change process. In today’s fast-paced digital age, we are constantly confronted with change—perhaps even more often than we would like. The job as a manager is to communicate changes to employees and take them along on the journey. There are many different ways in which employees can react to changes. Some simply accept them, and some resist them. ... So it is also important to be a role model.

As a woman in a leadership position, what advice would you impart to other women seeking to move up? What hurdles have you faced in the rubber industry, if any?

It’s true, women are under-represented in management levels, especially in traditional sectors such as the rubber industry or in mechanical engineering. Of course, this also is due to the fact that generally fewer women than men take up careers in these sectors. I am convinced that this will change in the

next few years, because the traditional role models have long since been broken and there will also be further change in the traditional industries—it will just take a little longer.

In general, I think you can only give similar tips to all young managers (whether female or male); be self-confident, focus on your strengths and take advantage of the opportunities that come your way. Sometimes you just have to jump in at the deep end and try new ways. Of course, sometimes women need a little more perseverance, because there are always situations in which women encounter prejudice, but here in particular you should simply react quickly and confidently instead of getting annoyed.

All women who hear the saying, “A coffee please” in the male world, because they are perceived as a secretary, should not be annoyed ... but simply say “feel free to bring me one.”

I think these prejudices are shaped by role models—not meant in a bad way, so you are welcome to govern in a quick-witted manner—but still with respect and humor.

Leadership also is outside of the human resource realm, i.e. the dealings with your own employees and customers. How would you describe your “macro” leadership at Uth in pushing sustainability initiatives?

Based on our corporate values: trust, fairness, innovation and sustainability—we value treating each other respectfully and fairly for long-term partnerships, internally as externally with partners and customers. Our mission is to develop sustainable and excellent technologies for rubber processing. With a focus on this goal, we try to keep on track with all our actions.

—Andrew Schunk

Chris Bitsakakis: Let people learn from their mistakes

Chris Bitsakakis joined AirBoss of America in November 2015 as president and chief operating officer. He was made president and co-CEO in July, along with Gren Schoch, who also serves as chairman.

As AirBoss is both a custom mixer and producer of finished rubber goods and products for defense applications, Bitsakakis oversees a diverse group of businesses and leaders within the company.

What would be your message in trying to recruit someone into a leadership role in the rubber industry?

My message would be to focus on understanding all the technical details related to the manufacturing of rubber compounds and then becoming very strong on the technical nuances of molding and/or extruding rubber compounds into finished goods. Before you take a leadership role in any business, you need to have a strong base understanding of the technology related to creating the product you sell. This is an important skill to acquire in any business but absolutely critical in the rubber business. Once you have this level of technical knowledge then working your way up in your organization through any discipline (sales, operations, engineering etc.) becomes super charged by your technical competence.

What parts of your leadership style have you learned from others, either inside or outside of your organization?

The most formidable years of my development took place working for decentralized organizations run by leaders who held their people accountable but allowed them to learn from their mistakes. I learned early on that a climate of fear in any organization stifles all risk-taking, which ultimately prevents the accomplishment of great things. As such, I learned from other leaders before me that a balance of accountability, trust and acceptance of mistakes are the key building blocks of all great companies.



How important is mentoring others as you look to prepare them for potential leadership roles at AirBoss?

It’s extremely important. It’s always a great joy for me to be able to mentor younger colleagues as they work their way up the ranks. In fact, for years I have hired young well-educated and hard working people to work directly for me in roles that give them great exposure across the entire breadth of the company. They take on critical and normally high stress projects while going back to school to get their Six Sigma black belts and other lean manufacturing training.

It’s very demanding work but their learning curve becomes quite accelerated. Inevitably these young people get noticed by divisional leadership who then recruit them away from me for key roles in their plants. I feel extremely pleased when that happens and I start the process over again with the next high potential AirBoss employee who is willing to pay their dues and put up with the short-term pain (and long-term gain) related to the frying pan and the fire.

—Bruce Meyer



Joe Moran: Leaders focus on people

was *Rubber News*’ 2023 Best Place to Work is evidence of that.

As a leader, what is the key to getting a “buy-in” from employees on a major process change or other disruption/change?

I’ve found that the key to gaining buy-in from employees during major changes lies in fostering open communication and collaboration. Rather than imposing changes from the top down, I engage my team in discussions, allowing them to express their thoughts and concerns. This approach creates a more relaxed and inclusive atmosphere, where team members feel heard and valued. By involving them in the decision-making process, I’ve seen a greater willingness to embrace change, as they understand the reasons behind it and feel a sense of ownership in the transi-

tion. This approach not only eases the tension that can come with change but also cultivates a positive and adaptable team culture.

Specifically in the chemical distribution business, what advice would you impart to someone striving for such a position or transitioning in to your industry/orbit?

One thing I’ve learned is that success often hinges on the people side of things. It’s not just about the chemicals; it’s about the relationships. Make it a point to genuinely connect with your suppliers. Understand their needs and how you can bring value to their operations. The same goes for your customers—go beyond the transaction and focus on providing solutions that genuinely make a difference for them.

In a world of technicalities,

don’t get bogged down. Take an attentive approach to learning the ins and outs. Stay informed about the industry shifts, but don’t lose sight of the human element. Networking isn’t just a formality; it’s about building relationships that matter. Approach challenges with a calm and composed mindset, fostering creativity and innovative problem solving.

Remember, it’s not just about being a player in the industry, it’s about being a valued partner. In the chemical distribution business, the right suppliers are key, and bringing value to them and your customers is what truly counts.

What is the key to closing a deal? What are the tenets to remember, or the “guardrails” that you use?

Closing a deal, in my book, is

like orchestrating a conversation rather than a transaction. The real key lies in understanding that it’s not just about sealing the deal but about building a relationship that lasts. I’ve found that being genuine is the magic ingredient. Listen actively to what your potential partners or customers are saying, and tailor your pitch to genuinely address their needs.

I think that a more collaborative style works best. It’s not about pushing; it’s about pulling everyone into a shared vision. Transparency is crucial—be upfront about what you can deliver and how it aligns with their goals. Trust is the foundation, and once you’ve got that, the deal isn’t just closed. It’s the beginning of a partnership.

—Andrew Schunk