


INSIGHTS FROM A PIANO LESSON

 SVEN HEITKAMP

 CHRISTOPH BAUER





At the photo session for the cover of this issue, Porsche Consulting President and CEO Eberhard Weiblen met concert pianist Professor Gesa Lücker. Lücker didn't miss a beat, and proceeded to give Weiblen a piano lesson. The encounter took on a new dimension when it became a dialogue on the marked parallels between music and management.

Elton John's classic piece "Song for Guy" floats through the concert hall at Schimmel Pianos. The full tones of the shiny black grand piano fill the renowned instrument maker's wood-paneled hall in the northern German city of Braunschweig. At the keyboard sits Eberhard Weiblen, a business consultant by profession and a piano student in his free time. He beams. But the charming teacher at his side gently brings him back down to earth. "That's quite good. But it's better to play more slowly, to add pauses. People who want to play too quickly become tense." This piano lesson is also a lesson in life.

Lücker knows what she's talking about. Born in Braunschweig in 1976, she is a prize-winning concert pianist and a professor at the Musikhochschule (College of Music) in Cologne. She started to play at the age of six, and gave her first concert at nine. She has appeared throughout Germany, as well as in New York, Paris, and Shanghai. Lücker and Weiblen meet to compare notes. What does perfection consist of? How do you hit the right tone? How do you create your next masterpiece efficiently? The manager and the musician quickly realize that their very different activities nevertheless reveal astounding parallels.

Weiblen is concerned with the question of how a good company can become a top-flight one. The answer from music is clear. "Masterpieces," says Lücker, "have universal significance. They are rich in ideas and content, and can be interpreted in endless ways. You never get tired of hearing them." For this soloist, the interpretation of a great piece of piano music only becomes a masterpiece when every dramaturgical detail works, and when everything comes together. "Top musicians," she says, "inspire even their colleagues. And that doesn't happen very often."

Technical perfection alone, however, is not the measure of all things in music. It can make an interpretation predictable and boring. "You can't just concentrate on preventing errors," says Lücker. "For the result will lack spirit and musical depth, character, and expression." Her art is therefore not just a question of hard work and manual skill, but also of inspiration. She pursues new thoughts not only in her studio. Just as Weiblen learns from physicians and pilots, mountain climbers and, yes, musicians, Lücker seeks ideas beyond her grand piano—for

example from books, exhibitions, and nature. "I learn from all those who pursue their professions with passion," she says.

The starting point for Lücker's work is the end result. "When practicing for a performance," she says, "I have an ideal in my ears from the very beginning." Practicing efficiently means pursuing interim aims and concentrating on single aspects. A considerable degree of self-reflection is also required. "I'm always comparing my ideal with reality," she remarks.

Concentration is a matter of inner motivation, she says. "A flame blazes inside of me, a passion burns. If you've got this fire, then everything works—otherwise you're just not there." That's a lesson for life. "People who don't put all their energy into their talents and their ways of life won't be successful—or happy," says this teacher of master courses. Career planning is superfluous here. Weiblen agrees. Successful personnel management is also in large part a matter of finding and developing strengths. "People who do things that fit in with who they truly are will be successful," he says. In the process, Lücker asserts that it's crucial to maintain a balance between creativity and order—and this is one of Weiblen's principles too. "An orderly process is needed to put creative results on track," he says. That's why it's so important to identify and eliminate every type of waste at companies.

In music, superfluity can even destroy a piece, says the piano consultant. "Too much tinsel can make something into a horrible piece of kitsch. By contrast, a musical phrase played in simple, streamlined, and precise form has the most moving effect." Weiblen associates that with a leitmotiv from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "Perfection isn't achieved when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." The insight gained from this piano lesson is that similar factors are responsible for the success of both concerts and corporations. ←

