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Consultant in São Paulo – My Dream Job Come True

As a rule, applicants for a consultant position at Porsche Consulting are expected to have had an average of eight years' work experience at a commercial enterprise. And it can't hurt to have gone through and overcome critical phases. However, the CEO and head of human resources made an exception in the case of Renate Fuchs (27). At the time that the founding team was recruited for the new Porsche Consulting Brasil subsidiary in São Paulo, the young engineer's unusual résumé persuaded them to make an offer. In addition to the required professional expertise and complete mastery of both Portuguese and German, she brought a special gift: what could be described as an innate, deep appreciation of both cultures: that of Brazil and that of Germany. And no wonder: Her mother is a native of São Paulo; her father is originally from Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance.

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□_HEINER VON DER LADEN

📷_CHRISTOPH BAUER, LEANDRO BRANDÃO

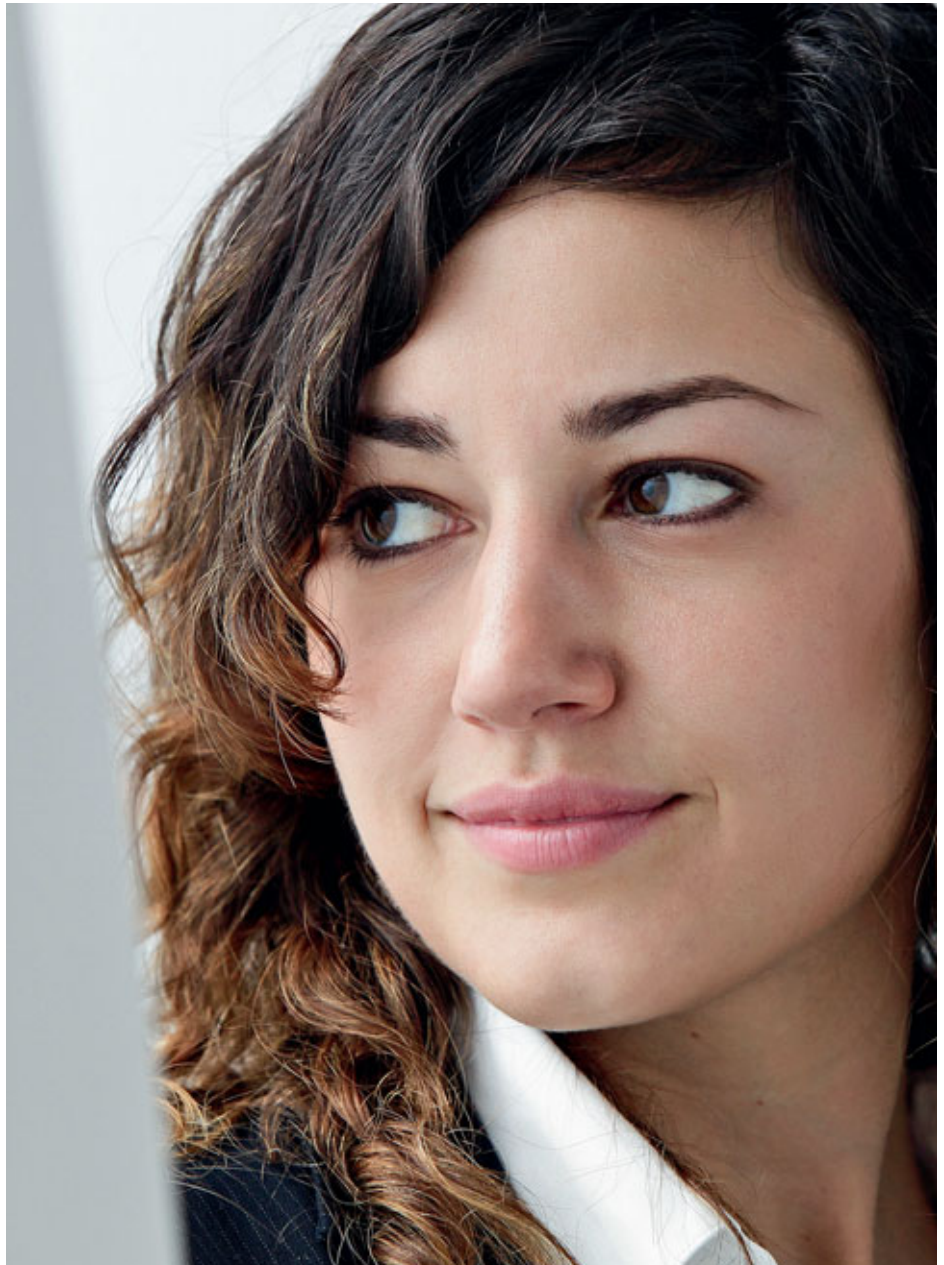
Rush hour in Brooklin Novo. This district of southern São Paulo is a popular office quarter, rather reminiscent of New York City, although the skyscrapers are just a bit closer to earth. Traffic has come to a halt on Avenida das Nações Unidas, which locals refer to as Marginal Pinheiros (because it runs near the Pinheiros River). Nothing is moving. Only the undaunted women and men traveling by scooter or motorbike blaze a trail at break-neck speeds through the endless convoys of morning rush-hour traffic. Braking gets you nowhere; quickly dodging, zigzagging, and not letting go of the horn are the recipe for success. But at least street hawkers can take advantage of the situation. Drivers stuck in traffic are eager customers: soft drinks in dazzling shades, snacks in plastic wrap, and 12-volt spiral cables for the cigarette lighter.

Just as she does every day, Renate Fuchs has gotten up in plenty of time to beat the traffic: Just before 8 am, she heads onto Rua Flórida, Porsche Consulting Brasil's headquarters—and into a new work day. "Reducing traffic jams on São Paulo's main roads—now that would be a great project for us. Particularly in terms of the infrastructure, improved processes would enable us to achieve a great deal. After all, a global metropolis needs a traffic network that works well 24 hours a day," says the junior consultant. She smiles and wishes the security guard at the building entrance a good morning: "Bom dia."

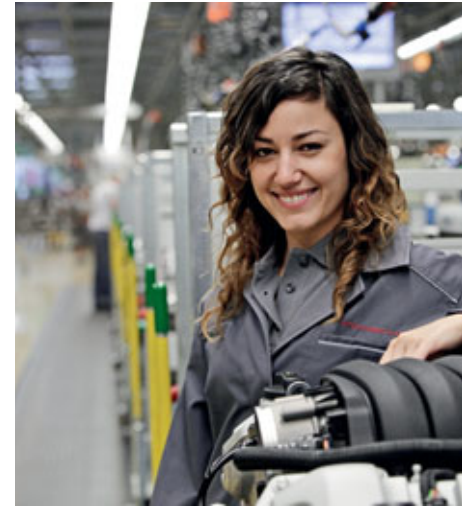
The enormous city must also cope with the side effects of the sustained economic boom: for instance, the streets that are overcrowded due to an inefficient rail traffic system. And Cumbica International Airport, where, following a long-haul overnight flight, countless business travelers often wait two hours in the labyrinth leading to passport control. Improvements here would unquestionably be applauded.

"I love this city like no other," says Renate Fuchs. What many a sensitive European might view as chaos is for her an integral part of her identity. This doesn't mean that Brazilians aren't bothered by bottlenecks. But their solution to the problem is: adapt. Life simply goes on around the traffic jam. Just as is done with

Born in São Paulo, at the age of 15 she emigrated to Germany, where she completed her Abitur and engineering studies—and now she is back in her native land as a consultant for Porsche Consulting Brasil: 27-year-old Renate Fuchs has found the job of her dreams



“My studies were an excellent preparation for my current job—the combination of technical knowledge and business administration is an ideal foundation”



invitations to events: By not actually beginning until approximately an hour after an event is officially scheduled to commence, guests have plenty of time to arrive—and to be relaxed when they do so.

Renate Fuchs was born in São Paulo. “My father was working as a quality engineer for the ZF Friedrichshafen auto parts maker, and came here from Lake Constance in 1975. He was only intending to stay for three years, but then he met my mother...” says the daughter.

At the age of 15, she moved to Germany with her parents and brother, one year older than she. “What a shock—I had to leave all of my friends behind. At first, I was woefully unhappy, but then I simply rebelled,” says Renate Fuchs. “I was used to life in a metropolis with 18 million inhabitants, and now I was in a small south German town with just 60,000 residents. That was too cramped for a 15-year-old who in Bra-

zil had already gone out alone in the evening without her parents.” The teen’s knowledge of German was strictly from German class. “My German father speaks excellent Portuguese. In Brazil, unfortunately, he never used his native language with us,” says Renate Fuchs, for whom the move also meant a difficult first year in a German *Gymnasium* [secondary school]. “In the evenings, my father had to sit down and explain complicated texts from my school books.”

But just one year later, the student had gained a foothold in Germany. The focus of the courses that she decided on in her senior years at secondary school are characteristic of this young woman: physics for her advanced course, art for her elective. She then proceeded to garnish this rather unusual combination with an equally out-of-the-ordinary summer job: her father arranged for a temporary job at his employer, working on assembly of large

trucks and buses with 12 and 16 gears. “I not only worked there as a secondary school student, but I kept fitting bolts all the way through my university career—a total of six years,” says the consultant. And in between, she also spent semesters abroad in Vietnam and in Barcelona.

She then studied production management at Reutlingen University in Baden-Württemberg, and was awarded a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering. “My studies were an excellent preparation for my current job—the combination of technical knowledge and business administration is an ideal foundation,” says the young woman, who, as soon as she had her degree, applied for an internship position at Porsche Consulting that was posted on the Internet. The company was looking for an industrial engineer who spoke German and Portuguese, for a six-month stay in Brazil.

“The job posting fit me to a T,” says the 27-year-old. Her application was accepted, and she was able to participate in a Porsche Consulting project straightaway—for Porsche Consulting’s client Volkswagen in São Paulo. The male-dominated production environment posed no problems for the intern. She exchanged her dark blue pants suit for a polo shirt, jeans, safety shoes, and a Porsche lab coat, and was part of the group from the start. “Here it doesn’t matter that I am the youngest on the consulting team. People respect me and take me seriously. That is because most young people finish school here at 16. →

They continue their studies in the evenings, while acquiring practical experience on the job. So by your early twenties, you are already fully integrated.”

And there were no communication problems, either, as the language and culture pose no challenges to the engineer. Renate Fuchs enjoyed her internship so much that she didn't hesitate to extend her stay. And when the Porsche Consulting Brasil subsidiary was established, Renate Fuchs' position as a junior consultant was secure.

In common with Renate Fuchs herself, most of her twelve colleagues are highly familiar with both cultures. Some are Brazilians who have also lived and worked in Germany; others are Germans who have emigrated to Brazil. “We have made this type of experience a requirement when making hiring decisions,” says Porsche Consulting CEO Eberhard Weiblen, “because effective consulting here requires deep understanding of Brazil. Otherwise, we would always remain outsiders.” For that rea-

son, private life plays a part as well. Of the married consultants, some have a spouse from either Germany or from South America.

Renate Fuchs hasn't quite reached that point. But she has learned to appreciate both cultures, bringing the best of each to her work: “Germans take solid action, are disciplined, are very structured, work methodically, and have a practical bent, but are rather reserved in comparison with Brazilians. If you want my fellow Brazilians to be enthusiastic about something, your first task is to win them over.” This is something that the South American from Lake Constance achieves with perfection: “Brazilians are very open and interested, they enjoy talking, avoid distance, are polite, and are welcoming to everyone. If you respond to this environment, then that is often half the battle.”

The Brazilian mentality is a stroke of luck for Porsche Consulting. Because everyone needs to get involved if you want to optimize work processes. Being open to new ideas makes

the rethinking required so much easier. This is something that Renate Fuchs experiences every day: “I understand people here; I know how they feel, how they respond, how they work. And that is why I am accepted. And at the same time I sense a great deal of respect for the virtues associated with Germans, who have traditionally been highly regarded here.”

Her Brazilian clients like the junior consultant: “They can well understand that I was homesick. ‘It's so chilly in Germany,’ they say. And they appreciate my demonstrating successful Porsche methods from Swabia—but with Brazilian spirit.”

After work, Renate Fuchs must make a decision: get something to eat till the end of rush hour or join the throngs stuck in traffic? This time she votes for the bottleneck. But once home, she will do yoga and switch off completely. Even a lively Brazilian in a city like São Paulo with its 18 million inhabitants needs to relax. ←



“I love this city like no other.”
Renate Fuchs relishes the vibrancy of São Paulo and her job, in which she imparts German virtues with a dash of Brazilian spirit

