



Hans und Christa Leuenberger

More Women in Management Positions Would Do Our Industry Good

Muller Martini is not just a traditional family business. For decades, members of the same family have also worked at the Swiss machine manufacturer time and again. In some cases across generations – such as father Hans Leuenberger (63), Regional Manager Germany/Switzerland/Direct Markets, and daughter Christa Leuenberger (35), Head of Human Resources.

They describe the fact that they both work for the same company today as a coincidence. It is also a coincidence that they both used to work for [Ringier/Swissprinters](#), an internationally renowned graphic arts company with its own publishing house and, like Muller Martini, its headquarters in Zofingen, Switzerland. Nevertheless, they have the printing industry in their blood, so to speak. Hans Leuenberger's grandfather and father worked as printers at Ringier. And his son did an apprenticeship as a polymechanic at Muller Martini.

40 Years at Muller Martini

However, Hans Leuenberger found his way into the graphic arts industry in a roundabout way. He learned the trade of a telecommunications, electrical and equipment fitter, then took various further training courses and became a service technician. His daughter, in turn, found her way to HR manager via an apprenticeship as a businesswoman, followed by various further training courses.

This coming fall, it will be 40 years since Hans Leuenberger began his career at Muller Martini

– and he wouldn't want to miss a single day. „Muller Martini is an exciting company with a high level of innovation. I have had the opportunity to take on new tasks and functions time and time again, and I consider my career in a company with regional roots and international operations to be extremely varied and fulfilling. For me, it has – as they say – always been a good fit.“

270,000 saddle stitched products – per hour!

He found the times when the graphic arts industry still demanded high-performance machines such as the Supra saddle stitcher with 30,000 cycles per hour or log formers such as the Maximo, which produced 1.2-meter-long signature logs within 20 seconds, particularly exciting. „That was already unique. The biggest project I was allowed to plan was at the Bauer company in Poland. There we placed nine Supras and three Avanti log stackers and numerous PrintRoll units in one hall. Imagine that: That meant a saddle stitching capacity of 270,000 cycles per hour – unimaginable today!“

According to Hans Leuenberger, the systems and machines brought to market by Muller Martini have always fit in with the times. „Whereas in the past it was more systems to produce large volumes in the shortest possible time, today it is solutions for book-of-one production, where we are leading the way and unique with our Finishing 4.0 philosophy and smart machines for this.“

What's still missing? – The egg-laying wool milk sow!

And what machine that doesn't yet exist should Muller Martini definitely invent? „The machine that has very low manufacturing costs, brings in an extremely high price on the market and can do everything on top of that – in short, an egg-laying wool milk sow. But all joking aside, every machine that is yet to be invented must meet the current market requirements at the time, but also future customer needs. Our customers must be able to make a profit with these systems. And they must be easy to operate. After all, our customers are also struggling with a shortage of skilled personnel. I am convinced that we are well on the way in this respect, because our company has always recognized the requirements of its customers in good time. I am therefore optimistic about the future for Muller Martini.“

On the other hand, the company's necessary adjustments to the changing market situation were less pleasant. „Change also always triggers a lot of emotions – not always only positive ones. And it always affects people, colleagues, employees.“

In demand today: customized production of print products

Of course, this change has been brought about primarily by the new digital media. „They have led to changes that we see in our own private environment and behavior every day.“ According to Hans Leuenberger, digital change for the graphic arts industry means: „Moving away from mass production – towards customized production of print products.“

For example, you can order a book from large online retailers today and have it in your mailbox tomorrow. „That means: the order to be produced consists of one piece. For our customers, this also means that if one piece is waste, the order has 100 percent waste. That places great demands on our systems so that our customers can operate successfully.“

There will always be print products

Many graphic arts companies recognized the signs of the times in good time and made the necessary decisions for the future. Hans Leuenberger is therefore positive about the future of the graphic arts industry in general and of print products in particular. „What the print product will look like in the future is difficult to say. Perhaps it will have to offer certain yearnings for more deceleration and relaxation, for time out from the increasingly technology-driven daily

routine. But I'm convinced: there will always be print products, but they have to fit the respective time." He therefore advises printers and bookbinders to do their homework in good time – „otherwise the train will pull out of the station and they'll still be standing on the platform."

Positive and negative consequences of the corona pandemic

For Hans Leuenberger, as for many other players in our industry, the last 16 months have been dominated by the corona pandemic. But he sees not only negative, but definitely also positive influences of the current crisis. „A positive factor is the greater demand for reading material – as also evidenced by our sales successes in the perfect binding sector. People currently have more time to devote to reading. On the negative side, the demand for advertising supplements has fallen because, in Germany for example, the large specialist stores were closed for weeks. This naturally has an impact on our customers – keyword: weekly newspapers – and therefore also on Muller Martini. The situation is also difficult with the limited international travel options for our service personnel and sales team – but also for our customers, who cannot visit us as they would like, for example, to see demos of equipment.

In his area of responsibility, the corona crisis primarily affected the sales team's travel activities. „From one day to the next, machine demos, sales meetings and negotiations had to be done via Skype, Teams or Zoom. But it worked quite well very quickly. I expect much of this way of working to remain after the corona crisis."

Of course, Hans Leuenberger now also communicates frequently via Skype or other electronic channels – saving his employer travel costs. „But for larger projects, it's much more efficient to have the entire team sitting at the same table. As a front man, I prefer face-to-face meetings anyway, because you can feel the other person better than on a screen."

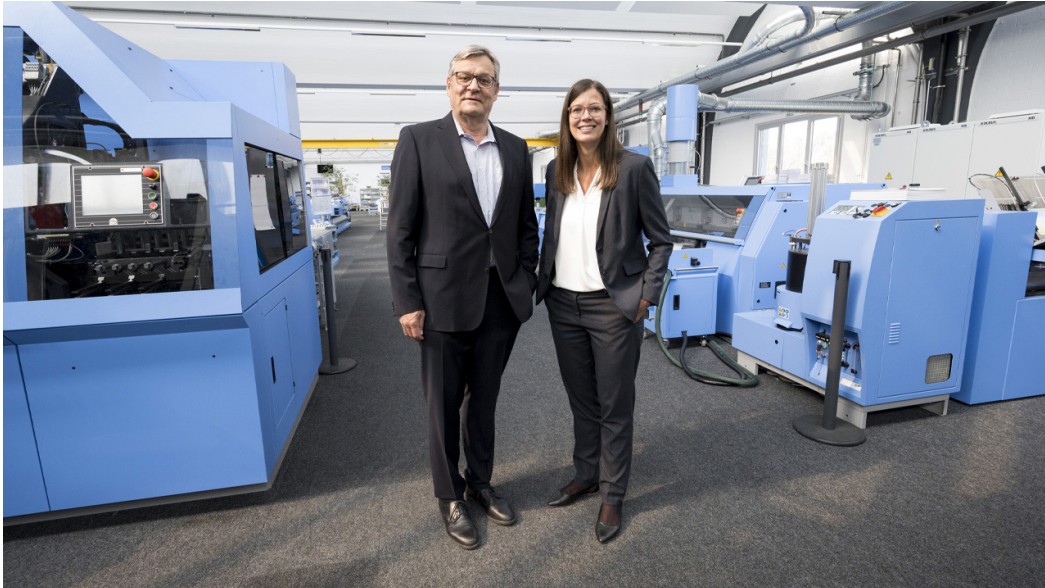
The next drupa visit as a retiree

That's why he also regretted extraordinarily that drupa 2020 was canceled. He has already been to the graphic arts industry's most important trade show in Düsseldorf seven times – twice for Ringier, five times for Muller Martini. „drupe is important for suppliers as well as customers. It acts like a showcase, and it is a presentation as much as a consumption of information. From my point of view, it's like a bring and fetch principle. However, I doubt whether drupa will continue in its familiar form after the corona crisis. I'm curious about that. Maybe I'll drop in as a retiree then..."

In his view, a virtual drupa can never replace the real trade show. „Manufacturers want to show not only machines, but also (for graphic arts companies as well as agencies) new business models – as Muller Martini did in 2016 with its Finishing 4.0 solutions, which met with a great response. This underlines the fact that our industry is alive and well. And you can't underestimate the many personal contacts at a trade show. It's important for a salesperson to know a lot of people – although in the end, profitability is more decisive than personal contacts when it comes to closing a deal."

It was simply awesome

The former mayor of the municipality of Bottenwil, former member of the board of directors of Spital Zofingen AG and active hunter for nearly three decades is therefore somewhat sad that the last drupa of his professional career has been canceled. „In my view, drupa 2016 was the best trade show at which I was able to represent Muller Martini. We gave a perfect presentation of our company and our capabilities. The customers were enthusiastic, and this enthusiasm was transferred to the entire Muller Martini team. It was simply awesome."



Home office, short-time work, early retirements

Compared to her father's soon-to-be 40 years, Christa Leuenberger, who has been working at Muller Martini since September 2020, is still almost a „rookie.“ The start of her new position as Head of Human Resources was special, as it coincided with the corona pandemic.

Instead of business as usual, challenging issues such as home office, short-time work and early retirement suddenly came to the fore for the HR department. „Many of these topics trigger emotions. You have to have a certain sensorium there and seek discussions with the individual employees and the teams in good time.“

According to Christa Leuenberger, Muller Martini as a company is now more flexible and open to new forms of work. „For supervisors, however, the job has become more demanding. And interaction among employees is noticeably lacking.“ And what will be left behind from corona? „Probably some new habits like home office or virtual meetings to reduce travel will stay. That said, I also think we'll fall back into old patterns of behavior in some cases. In any case, I'm excited to see what time will bring.“

An HR team made up of women

Christa Leuenberger is an HR manager with heart and soul. The fact that she now works in an international company makes her job even more interesting. „I come into contact with topics that I was previously unfamiliar with. Because it's important to provide optimum support for our employees, who are deployed around the world. This is the only way they can do their job in a customer-oriented way and thus represent our company in the best possible way. However, I find it a shame that there will be employees who I can hardly get to know personally, who are often on the road and who I therefore only know by name.“

The HR department at Muller Martini is made up of four female employees – so the women are among themselves. „The proportion of women in HR teams is generally high – not just in management positions. I suspect this is due to soft skills topics and dealing with people – similar to professions in the social sector, where the proportion of women is, after all, quite a bit higher.“

Family businesses lead the way

Otherwise, however, the graphic arts industry – including Muller Martini – tends to be seen as a male bastion, in which women are used less in management positions, but all the more in prepress and as sheet feeders. According to Christa Leuenberger, who holds the highest

female position in the Muller Martini world, there are several reasons for this. „Young women rarely choose a technical profession. However, this would form a good basis for them to later work in management positions in the graphic arts industry with the appropriate further training. Family businesses are a good example, where it is not uncommon to find women at the top of the company – such as Marina Bucher, a member of the management team at Schär Druckverarbeitung AG in Wikon, who recently wrote an interesting [blog](#) about this on the Muller Martini website.“

According to Christa Leuenberger, one shortcoming is also „that unfortunately only a few companies really exemplify openness and flexibility and offer part-time work in management positions to help balance work and family life. We at Muller Martini have this openness. We take the families of our employees into consideration and offer training and further education. We have this openness and are constantly working to expand our part-time offerings. This fits into the family environment of our company, where we place a high level of trust in our employees.“ However, she doesn't think much of women's quotas as a fixed requirement: „It looks like a token exercise and gnaws away at a management's credibility.“

Two bookworms

Her father also brings up the lack of affinity women have for technology: „Entry into the printing industry is often through engineering studies. And unfortunately, only a few women are interested in that. I think that's a shame, because it would do the graphic arts industry good if more women were represented in management positions.“

Keyword conversation: When Christa and Hans Leuenberger meet privately, they hardly ever talk about business. „We generally don't talk about job internals.“ That's why there's no friction, because she's the HR boss. There is one thing, however, that Christa Leuenberger will bring up next time, as she adds with a touch of mischievousness: „I'm going to bring the pension issue closer to my father...“

Obligatory final question: How do the two of them deal with print? „My wife and I subscribe to two newspapers and a magazine,“ says Hans Leuenberger. „In addition, we read a lot of books and trade magazines at home. Online media I use mainly to quickly get to the latest sports news.“ His daughter also describes herself as a „book worm – and only in printed form. In addition, I'm a good newsstand customer for various magazines and journals.“

Yours,

Christa Leuenberger, Head of Human Resources Muller Martini

Hans Leuenberger, Regional Manager Germany/Switzerland/Direct Markets Muller Martini