



Generating Value — Generational Values

Accounting accounts for costs. How does a successful multigenerational business account for value(s)?

I have attended every Horn Technology Days program since 2011. Regardless of economic or geopolitical news, every two years Horn has had new technology on display, a new cohort of apprentices and new investments and capabilities in their means of production. I asked CEO Markus Horn and Press Officer Christian Thiele if we could explore the thinking that makes this so.

Miles Free (MF): Horn continues to invest in your technology and people. I would argue that you also invest in your customers. How does this make Horn the employer of choice and enable you to attract the talent that you require?

Markus Horn (MH): Technology equals growth. We continue to invest so that we can stay aligned to our vision of the future. During the Great Recession (2009/2010) we placed on order 80 machines. Crisis provides a very good opportunity to succeed in paths where you can grow and have the flexibility to help the customer, while others are playing it safe and do not invest.

MF: This courage to invest helps you to hire talent?

MH: The question about hiring is often seen as one of quantity. How many? It is not. It is, to our way of thinking, about how many are recommended to find their success here in our manufacturing. To be a preferred employer.

MF: You are third generation of your family in the family business, I am third generation of my family in manufacturing, how many people employed at Horn do you think are similarly multigenerational, supporting your “recommended to work here” thesis?

MH: We asked our apprentices how they learned of our company — online, websites and so on. We were surprised

to find none of them came from our social media. All came because someone that they knew personally shared our company. Our first principle is that all employees must be satisfied here. They are not a number. The fact that we have so many recommendations is our indicator — showing all of our employees share our commitment and values.

MF: What do you think the number of multigenerational employees is here in Tübingen?

Christian Thiele (CT): I was prepared for this question — of our 900 employees, over 200 are multigenerational in some way. When we say that Horn is a family company, we can see that over one fifth of our employees are indeed kin as well. So, they have family bonds and shared values that align with our company goals and values.

MF: I have always believed that having work that matters — purpose, if you will — is critical in keeping performers satisfied.

CT: Purpose does matter, and as an employee, if they are responsible for their purpose and they have the package and what they need to perform, they can have confidence in the company and their colleagues, and so produce tools that lead the way.

MH: If it is something no one else has done before, if we are first, we can only win. This gives us the courage to invest. This is our purpose to use the latest science to create our own future. It gives us time to develop what is now the newest. We have a single vision over time. Many companies that are focused on price are focused on cost. We believe that if shops want to win, they actually need to focus on value. My father and grandfather would say, “I don’t have enough money to buy something cheap.” If you want to win, you need to



Christian Thiele, Markus Horn and Miles Free.

have the best tools, the latest capabilities. That is the true differentiator. It is about value, not cost. Values that people can align with.

MF: It seems to me that one of the values at Horn that is shared through the generations is the focus on the future. From the outside, it looks like pragmatic optimism. But that really understates what is going on.

MH: Technology brings us forward. That is why we call this Technology Days. It is about revealing to our customers the latest technology. Humans naturally fear not knowing the future. At Technology Days, we bring our customers to the future that we have intentionally created, the success that we want for them and ourselves. The economic cycles, the news, these come and go, but we are not necessarily a part of it. As a company, as a family, we all need to be prepared to get through these. Our preferred way to prepare is to use the latest technology.

CT: If employees have a purpose — meaningful work — they will stay aligned with this goal.

MH: Clear transparent communications — open discussion of facts — leads to confidence and honesty. With such a culture, why would one leave? Despite uncertainty, technology is the driver of sustainable growth in the future. Why should we not invest? Why should we not continue to hire, to train? As Swabians, we are never satisfied. So, everything that we do is to make the future better. **P**

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