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# MANAGERISM

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## Thomas Hirsch

### Founder – Enabler – Visionary

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*Manfred Hoefle*

This is the story of a young entrepreneur, a self-made man. Thomas Hirsch is a representative of the Mittelstand, the much-vaunted yet underestimated engine of the German economy that receives little support from politicians.

#### **SIMPLE, ORDERLY CIRCUMSTANCES**

Thomas Hirsch was born into a working-class family in Rebdorf-Eichstätt, Bavaria, 33 years ago and grew up as the oldest of five siblings. Money was scarce, but the children felt safe, also lovingly cared for by their grandmother and grandfather. From his grandfather, Thomas learned how to work with wood and how to handle tools. He graduated from elementary and secondary school. As a 14-year-old, he delivered newspapers and earned some money as a garden helper. He actually wanted to become a carpenter, but an allergy to wood dust prevented this early career aspiration.

He took a three-year apprenticeship as a precision mechanic for mechanical engineering. His performance was so good that he shortened the apprenticeship period by half a year – and also received the state award in his subject. This was followed by another apprenticeship as a mechanical engineering technician. While working, he also attended the Eckert technical school in Regenstauf, specializing in design.

#### **EARLY START AS AN ENTREPRENEUR**

After Thomas Hirsch has acted as an exhibition representative for a French company at the Automechanika in Frankfurt, he became eager to register his own business. At the age of 21, he started as a sole proprietor aiming to offer "complete solutions and designs". The business produced one-off parts, small series and assemblies with the focus on sheet-metal forming technology. He was soon working on the first order for a milling mold and issuing the first invoice.

He also took on three or four tooling jobs as weekend work. More and more business came his way. After six years, in 2011 he moved to *EDAG Engineering GmbH* (formerly *BFFT GmbH*) in Gaimersheim and was appointed as project manager. In addition, he grew his knowledge of technical purchasing, quotation preparation, accounting, acquired his first laptop, and a Catia license.

#### **DIFFICULT PATH TO A HIGH-PROFILE COMPANY**

On 4 January 2016, *Hirsch Engineering Solutions GmbH & Co KG* was entered in the commercial register. The company name already emphasized the provision of professional solutions. With a sound future planned, an office for five employees was set up in the old town. Soon the company started manufacturing with two CNC machining centers from leading technology suppliers, which then made a move to the industrial area of Eichstätt necessary. The order situation was quite good, the company was operating at a profit and was awarded a founder prize.

Completely unexpectedly, a critical situation arose at the turn of the year 2017/18: The firm's lending bank suddenly blocked all payments. In the midst of this build-up full of promise, insolvency loomed. Thomas Hirsch did everything he could: Deferred payments on all sides, made private deposits, even the painful dismissal of two of the eleven employees so that the company could survive. Today he speaks of this as the "painful side" of being an entrepreneur; it was a lesson for life. From then on, he personally dealt in depth with the financial side and risks of the business.

## **COURAGEOUS BUSINESS EXPANSION**

The Corona period meant temporarily enforced short-time work, but this time was also used to prepare for the upswing. Proactive investments were made in a new measuring machine. In 2020, the company was ready to scale-up, to grow to be more than a sub-contractor dependent on other sub-contractors. From then on, the aim was to focus more on its technically leading customers, to develop and manufacture its own products, and to enter into additive manufacturing technologies. After automotive and mechanical engineering, aerospace was targeted as a high-growth customer segment that also required EN 9100 certification.

The expansion of the business was accompanied by industry-wide networking according to the maxim that you must "plug into the system" in which you want to be a player. Participation in regional associations and business policy initiatives complemented this networking. That is why Thomas Hirsch now still devotes most of his time to business strategy and implementation.

Guiding principles of the firm are organic growth, rounding off the service portfolio, deepening and thus controlling the depth of added value - and what is also important to Thomas Hirsch - local, regional ties in line with the motto "At home in Eichstätt, at home in Europe".

## **PEOPLE AT THE CENTER**

A The HIRSCH Group's employees are the be-all and end-all in the true sense of the word. For Thomas Hirsch, only they make possible a firm that aims to be one of the "fastest, most adaptable and most modern companies in Bavaria". This requires a management style that is all about promoting and encouraging employees to develop their talents doing appropriate tasks, who think optimistically about future challenges and act accordingly, who feel appreciated, and want to work with others in a collegial atmosphere.

Thomas Hirsch embraces the perspective of others: customers, employees, partners. This wider perspective is a real asset. Some of his memorable statements spell this out: You must "swim against the current, because this will make you stronger; also, it is never too late to learn." With this attitude, he is convinced of the "power of objectives" and also of the value of helpful guidance provided by mentors. In his case these included a professor at Ingolstadt Technical University and a former founder and managing director of *BFFT Ges. für Fahrzeugtechnik, INSTART Consult GmbH*. However, his very first coach was his grandfather, who always supported his child's curiosity. His mother was also a role model for him and his life-long sense of duty.

## **COMPLETE RESPONSIBILITY AS A MISSION**

The purpose of the HIRSCH Group is, in short: "Helping customers succeed and giving something back to the environment". Entrepreneurs make opportunities possible, make fallow land fruitful, make innovation effective, and unleash talents. That is why their role is eminently important for a dynamic society and for the creation of community. This is what entrepreneurs do.

**Entrepreneurs take "responsibility for tomorrow."**