



Eva Jaisli
Motto: «Work
with the best»

Providing women with the tools for success

Eva Jaisli's motto: «Work with the best»

Progress made in Emmental: CEO Eva Jaisli and her company PB Swiss Tools produce high-quality tools for the whole world. Her recipe for success? She employs 30 percent women.

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In a remote corner of Switzerland's Emmental valley, where the Hornbach and Kurzeneibach streams converge to form the Grüne river, you will find the ribbon village of Wasen, which becomes quiet around midday because the shops are closed. On the narrow street running through the village, you will find a bakery, a saddlery, a shop belonging to a Schwyzerörgeli maker and the hotel Gasthaus Rössli, in front of which the farmers assemble with their cattle after descending from the mountain. Wasen, so it would seem, is that mixture of literary idyll and traditionalist farming community that people like to visit, but is otherwise left to its own devices. But here in this village, a business has grown up to become one of Switzerland's most progressive companies: the tool manufacturer PB Swiss Tools.

The reason behind this description is the unusually high female presence in the company. This SME declares a female quota of thirty percent across all production and hierarchy levels, and this in the almost exclusively male-dominated metal processing industry. The driving force behind this pioneering achievement is Eva Jaisli, the 54-year-old CEO of PB Swiss Tools - who also happens to be an opponent of a fixed female quota. This is a contradiction we thought too interesting not to get to the bottom of - so we asked about it. Eva Jaisli responded immediately. «It is our company culture, not quotas, that is productive for our personnel development», she wrote. «But please come and visit, I will be happy to explain it to you in person.»

The company's factory and administrative building is located opposite a disused rail station, and is a faceless building with red window frames. Nine million tools are produced here every year, a good 700,000 per month. Two-thirds of the products are exported to all the countries of Europe, as well as to America and Asia. The range includes over 2200 items in varying sizes and kits. The entire range is on show in the company's demonstration room: the red-handled screwdrivers, torque wrenches, ratchets, hammers, and awls, the bike tool for cyclists and the pocket tool for handbags - a kaleidoscope of shapes, colors, and technical finesse, enough to render a visitor with only a rudimentary knowledge of tools quite dizzy. Eva Jaisli is a trainer and hostess at the same time. Her petite frame sports a trouser suit and perfect pageboy hairstyle, and she is very welcoming, very fast, and very straightforward in the way she expresses herself.

She invites me to the conference table, offers coffee and mineral water, and I get the sense that she has no time for small talk. We get straight to the point. 16 years ago, she and her husband Max Baumann, great-grandson of the company founder, took over the company as fourth-generation proprietors, and

decided on a division of professional responsibilities: He, the mechanical engineer, would concentrate on the technical development, while she, who specialized in business development and marketing, took on the office of CEO - and with it the challenge of developing a new company strategy. She analyzed what it would take to consolidate and successfully continue the company's leading market position. She explains how she started from the following central themes: Firstly: «Our communication slogan is 'Work with the best'. We can offer the best tools, because we work with the best people.» Secondly: «While we develop and manufacture all our tools here in Emmental, we move in an international business context, in which more and more women are buying tools, either for professional or DIY use.» In West and East alike, a growing number of women are living in their own homes, and it is now commonplace for women to be using tools. We have to accommodate this situation. «This means», continues Eva Jaisli, «that we manufacture tools that fit in all hands: in old, young, large, small, Western and Asian, male and female hands.» This requires a universal mindset, that takes into account the diversity of all tool users. In addition, it appears that women require a more rounded handle, because this transfers their strength more efficiently to the tool, while at the same time, the rounded handle should still sit in the hand in a manner that does not cause any injuries. The company is still refining the ergonomic perfection of the tools in studies and prototype tests. A complex issue. The conclusion: «So that we can continue to meet these challenges into the future, we need a mixed team, a rejuvenation, and increased professionalism. Put simply: All age groups must be represented in our company. And: We need qualified women in all areas of the business who are involved in developing, manufacturing, and selling tools.» Female energy to increase company performance - with this conclusion, Eva Jaisli states in a nutshell - and realizes - an ideal that is repeatedly expressed in discussions on the advancement of women in business. However, if you mention the buzzwords «advancement of women» Eva Jaisli makes one thing clear:



«It is mainly women who identify when processes are not efficient»



Gender diversity at PB Swiss Tools: More a strategic approach than a deliberate quota





Part-time hours at executive level: Cornelia Krall is deputy CEO and mother to a young daughter



«It is important to identify women with potential. This requires intuition»

The decision to recruit more women into the company had less to do with fulfilling a quota, but rather was solely based on strategic considerations. Another company may have made an entirely different decision. «The answer does not lie in simply increasing the proportion of women», she stresses. «It makes far more sense to ask: how can a woman with her qualifications, her experience, and personality contribute to the success of a company? The same question is, of course, also asked of men.» 160 employees currently work in Wasen and in the steel warehouse and final assembly factory located in the village of Grünen, just four kilometers away. PB Swiss Tools is the only remaining Swiss tool manufacturer that still performs all its work processes in the country of origin. Ninety percent of its employees come from Wasen and the surrounding area, and many have been with the company for over ten years - a rarity nowadays. This awareness and pride in local craftsmanship is perceptible, whether in the machinery workshop, packaging department, logistics, or among management. Placards hang from the ceiling proclaiming mottos that the teams have formulated for themselves. «We will improve together, if we know and understand each other» or «We remain loyal and implement our objectives and decisions with shared responsibility». Those from outside the region may be surprised that in deepest Emmental, women can be found in the workshops, at the welding bench or the conference table, and that groups of girls are invited for workshops that present a career as a multi-skilled mechanic as an attractive option to young women, but in Wasen and Grünen this has long been commonplace, and has also won recognition from the highest political level. «PB Swiss Tools is an important company for the Canton of Bern and the region. It is a major employer and believes in responsible management», says Andreas Rickenbacher, District President and Director of the Department for Economic Affairs for the Canton of Bern. «The company's success is down

to its innovation, high quality, and consistent orientation to customer needs. The high proportion of women at PB Swiss Tools is a massive contributory factor, since different experiences and perspectives are of central importance when it comes to identifying different requirements and implementing them in products.»

Sina Warncke, a 31-year-old mechanic from Huttwil, has been with the company for eight years and is a good example of how women can forge a successful career in the metal processing industry. Her responsibilities include inspecting the quality of steel deliveries, which amount to three hundred tonnes per year, and checking their hardness, tensile strength, and bending moment. She has recently been promoted to deputy head of Medicinal Products, a new line of business that is intended to further increase the company's competitiveness. This new line of business focuses on extraction instruments - tools used by surgeons for removing implants. In her new double function, Sina Warncke switches between the steel warehouse, microscopes, and product demonstrations. She recalls how, when she first started at PB Swiss Tools, some of her male colleagues still laughed about her. However, since she was able to quickly re-program an incorrectly set-up milling machine, she is regarded as an undisputed expert.

Gender diversity, as many recent studies have shown, is a factor for success. Eva Jaisli believes that this is partly because women have a high sensitivity for cost-effectiveness and efficiency, and particularly those who have multiple roles, be it as a mother or as a holder of political office. «In these situations, everyday life demands efficiency, requiring time to be invested effectively.

For this reason, it is often women who identify when meetings or processes are not progressing efficiently. I notice this frequently, including in committees outside my own company.»

Companies who have no, or a low proportion of women are quick to justify this by stating that they wouldn't find any competent women for their positions. Eva Jaisli does not accept this explanation. If you want competent women, you will find them. «It is important to deliberately identify women who have potential. This can be at the interview stage, or when they are working in the company. However, this does require intuition and a lot of direct contact, which is of course easier in an SME such as ours than it is in a large corporation. I know every person by name, I know where they come from, how they live, and what they do.» Personally, Eva Jaisli has always been challenged to be autonomous in all life situations and to stand on her own two feet, including in her career. This is how she was brought up. Her parents ran their own company in Oberaargau, she trained as a teacher, studied, got married, had four children, and continued to work, her positions including tutor and member of the management team at the Bern University of Applied Sciences, before starting at PB Swiss Tools.

If Eva Jaisli identifies under-utilized potential in a female employee, she asks the «big, tricky question: Do you want to make something of your strengths?». Women are often unaware of their strengths, and remain entrenched in the same patterns of thought and behavior. Many harbor a deep skepticism towards power and influence, and doubt that a management position would suit them. A career promotion also often depends on personal circumstances. «If I notice that women hesitate or are not supported by their friends, family, or partner, I take a step down», she explains. She doesn't give up on them, but instead enables them to take part in personal coaching. «Often, even the mere thought of career advancement is followed by major personal changes. This can be as extreme as the woman thinking that she is not with the right partner.»

For Cornelia Krall it was not quite so dramatic, but she did get an attack of cold feet when, two years ago at the age of 28, she was offered the position of deputy CEO as a result of her social competence and analytical talent. This was alongside her existing position as the head of personnel and events. However, she soon realized that she would receive the support that she needed. She gradually took on more responsibility, was able to realize her own ideas, such as a concept for personnel development and absence management for sick employees and those who had suffered accidents. The most enduring confirmation of her future came when she fell pregnant: There was no mention that she would not be able to perform her new role as a mother. Quite the contrary: Shortly after the birth of her daughter, Cornelia Krall took on the responsibility of managing the company for the first time while her boss was traveling abroad. After her maternity leave, she reduced her working hours to seventy percent. Child-care is organized between the grandmother and an au pair, and Friday is «Daddy day». This is a way of life that is still unusual in the village, but which is the ideal scenario for Cornelia Krall and her family. «The part-time hours mean that I am even more focused than before», she explains. «When I start work in the morning, I know exactly: Now you have five hours to do what you have to do. This makes you extremely efficient.»

In the meantime, men in management positions have also reduced their working hours at PB Swiss Tools due to parenthood. Most to eighty, and one even to sixty percent. These are challenging conditions for a company, as Eva Jaisli stresses. «But our employees are highly motivated and fulfill their tasks, and that is very positive for me. If you are convinced that it is of benefit to the company for employees to work part-time, then you will find solutions and the energy to realize this.» With this she also emphasizes what is underlined later: The will to implement changes in a company must come from above.

In this respect, the advancement of women is a matter of management.

Family Tradition

The history of PB Swiss Tools begins in 1878 with a village smithy in the Emmental valley. Paul Baumann (PB) produces iron goods for farmers, such as nose rings for oxen, and mousetraps. During the second world war, Baumann and his son begin to make hand tools for the Swiss army. In 1941, the first screwdriver with a wooden handle is produced. The arrival of a specialist casting machine from the USA heralds the production of the transparent red handles, which are not only practically unbreakable, but have also become a trademark of the company. In 1960, tools are exported to all five continents.

In 2008, a forty percent fall in orders due to the economic recession leads to the loss of twenty jobs.

However, the company has now been back on course for the last two years, and many of the redundant employees have been reinstated. Eva Jaisli and her husband Max Baumann lead the company as fourth generation owners.

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