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4 SPEAKERS

Martin Hamel
Denise Stillinger
Martin Keiser
Speaker4

START OF TRANSCRIPT

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[00:00:04] Martin Hamel

Hello and welcome to the podcast about the International Management Trainee program of River international. My name is Martin Hamel, and today we are going to hear from veterans, so to speak, to people who have completed the program and who will tell us about their experiences during the program and afterwards. My guests today welcome Denise Stillinger from Category Management at International AG. Hello, hello.

[00:00:31] Denise Stillinger

Hello, everyone.

[00:00:32] Martin Hamel

And hello to Martin Keiser from finance at River International AG. Hello.

[00:00:36] Martin Keiser

Hello, everybody.

[00:00:37] Martin Hamel

Let's start with a question that's maybe maybe it's easy for you to answer. Maybe it's a bit hard. Tell us a little bit about yourselves. What made you start to program back then, and how long has it been since since then? Denise, maybe. Ladies first.

[00:00:50] Denise Stillinger

Yeah. I'm I can take over the start. I have basically finished my master's back then. That was in 2016 and yeah, I didn't really have a clear idea what or where in which industry I will start. I have basically done a business degree. I studied in, in Copenhagen in Denmark and wanted to come back to, to Austria but wasn't really sure which industry, what job it should be. And then I came across the trainee program and basically, since this gave me this opportunity to get to know a company without really deciding what exactly the position or the job should look like. So basically getting this opportunity of just yeah, getting a picture, seeing how the, the company runs and what are the different departments was, for me, a good way to, to start without having this clear vision in the very beginning.

[00:01:58] Martin Hamel

So a nice ramp into the company. You're still here, as we see so worked out.

[00:02:03] Denise Stillinger

I'm still here after six years. Exactly. So, yeah, there were definitely some some positive points to it, so I decided to stay. Exactly.

[00:02:13] Martin Hamel

Martin, what did your way look like?

[00:02:16] Martin Keiser

My aim or my, my my personal aim was that I wanted after university, also have a business degree in business and economics, which I did in Vienna. My aim was to get a little bit of experience in a bank, start in any department. And then I wanted to switch to big international company in a financial department or corporate finance, legal division or anything else. But my point in, in the beginning was that also the banks only offered a management training program or special training program. And so I decided to send my application forms to bigger companies. And so was there also. And then not only to in special for their management training, but I also sent some application forms to the handles women. So for pillar people and so on I got the information or the, the personnel from the HR department that I can assess the assessment center. And so was the beginning. And for me it was clear or that it was my, my, my goal to make my career or my future in a, in a financial department in a big company. And so I'm here at the moment and I'm very satisfied with it. Yeah.

[00:03:46] Martin Hamel

13 years ago you started 13 years ago.

[00:03:48] Martin Keiser

Yeah.

[00:03:48] Martin Hamel

That's a long time. You're still here, as you said. Yeah. You're you're still here. So when you think back during the program, can you think of a moment moments back then where you could say, yeah, this is the right program for me. The moment that made you see. Yeah, I chose right. I chose the right program. Anything you can think of from back then?

[00:04:10] Denise Stillinger

So what? When I realized the question is when I realized that this is the right program. Yeah. I would probably say only after the program I could really see what it brought or what input it gave me. The way the reason why I think it was a really good start was really the fact that I could see basically different perspectives on, on the business from different perspectives, basically like from working in the stores sorting bananas, giving out snacks over the counter, sitting at the cash desk. So this was basically one, one perspective. The other perspective was then starting to work in the strategy department figuring out where the company wants to go, what should be the vision, and what needs to be built up in order to transmit this vision to the customers. So and then if you like, then see these different perspectives, you're basically like your picture gets like with each, each different position that you go through, there is a different puzzle piece that adds up on this full picture. And if I look at it now, afterwards it really gave or built up a good understanding of how the business is running, probably. I still don't know all of it. And it will probably still take time to, to, to catch the full scope. But I think the relevant input was already visible after the traineeship because it basically equipped you with such a toolbox of things. You roughly know where to go to find what and how to solve things. So I think retrospectively, this opportunity of more perspectives was the thing that made it valuable.

[00:06:21] Martin Hamel

That's a nice way to put it to to all the pieces of the puzzle. And then afterwards you have the puzzle all together. That's that's a nice way to look at it. Martin, what about you?

[00:06:31] Martin Keiser

I completely agree Denise, to to this issue or to her statement from my side. It was that I saw that I'm here. Right. And and I want to to join this. This company was after the market sequence. So after the start in the builder store as I talked to Mr. Neighbor, who was my mentor afterwards after the the first part of the second, the first two parts of the of the program. And so I got the feeling that I'm right here. So he gives me a perspective that I can educate myself in a financial area. So as I mentioned before, that as it was my aim from the beginning on. And so it, it feels good for me and, and from day to day, I saw more details in the, in the from the whole company and what it makes, especially for the financial area or for the financial segment, very, very special is that we interact and we communicate with nearly all departments in the in the whole company. So we have links with, with the regular companies, but also with the C department, with the, with the country, with the other segments or anything else. So that's, that's very interesting. And that's really my, my motivation. And yeah.

[00:07:58] Denise Stillinger

I actually had one more thing. Now coming up to my mind, can I still say that as well?

[00:08:02] Martin Hamel

Of course please.

[00:08:03] Denise Stillinger

Probably one thing also that made me stay at the company, because in the beginning I was actually quite hesitant applying for the railway group because as I mentioned before, I studied in Copenhagen in the Nordic countries, it's like they really live like flat hierarchies. So my first to go company was not so much a big corporate. I was more looking for lean structures. Creative people like not so much hierarchies. Yeah. And then I said, okay, but still the traineeship sounds interesting. I will still give it a try, since even though I'm not sure that the corporate is is my place to stay. But in the end, this traineeship somehow was also showing me that regardless of how long you already how of how much time you already spend in the company in case you come up with like good ideas, new approaches, and you work hard to somehow bring some good input or handle challenges in a new way. If you show this willingness to come to somehow learn fast and bring in a new input, then you're giving also the opportunities to do so. So that also somehow proved that it's an interesting program and, and a company to stay because even though there is hierarchies, you can basically you have your opportunities also to, to move fast across boundaries and departments. And that was also one reason why I liked it.

[00:09:41] Martin Hamel

When you think about River in general and the retail in, in general, what is it about it that fascinates you? What made you stay in retail and with this company?

[00:09:52] Martin Keiser

Well, for me it is a very fast changing industry. That makes it very interesting. And an additional part is that the different departments, different entities we have in our company. So there are there private label companies, the in-house agency, real estate companies we have in our whole company. And that makes it very, very interesting for me. And, and the interaction and the communication with the colleagues there, the work, the project you have all together and, and that there's really no time to really get bored so far.

[00:10:31] Martin Hamel

Then sometimes some guy from the radio calls you and says, hey, let's do a podcast. So it's like that. Yeah. Denise, what about you? What? What is it for you that makes retail a good thing to work at?

[00:10:45] Denise Stillinger

I can totally agree to Martin. Like it never gets boring. Especially in in these times of Yeah Corona crisis, war times, sourcing issues, harvest shortages, climate change that's coming up completely shaking, harvesting circles and so on. So it's never gets boring. There is a new challenge every day. There is a usually never the same challenge. So you are always yeah, facing new things. And yeah, this is one thing. And the other thing is probably that it's like especially food retail is something that everyone can relate to, which can be an advantage and a disadvantage like you are usually also then in your friends and family circles, you are then basically blamed for all the things that don't work, but at the same, but at the same time, you always have a good topic to talk to because I think food is something where everyone gets emotional about. So you always have something to talk about, no matter with whom you engage, even outside of the company. Yep.

[00:11:59] Martin Hamel

Know exactly what you mean? Yep. So you did the program. You finished it. And what then? What did you do afterwards? What were your next steps after finishing the program in? What did your career look like after that?

[00:12:12] Martin Keiser

Well in my case I started as an assistant of the CFO or as assistant from the financial department. In the beginning, I got I got there some finance projects or from the accounting, some projects. What I have to work for or work with the colleagues. And the next step was that after one, I think it was roughly a year my former superior getting a maternity leave. And so so I become the, the head of the Treasury Department. And so from that time on. So I think it was 2012. I'm the head of the department And yeah, I'm very happy with that situation. And I did a lot of work a lot of some to, to, to optimize some, some issues, some, some processes and, and it's going on. So we are not in the end in the, in the at the moment. And that makes it very interesting.

[00:13:14] Martin Hamel

So we're still happy where you are. That's good to hear.

[00:13:16] Martin Keiser

Yes that it is. Yeah.

[00:13:18] Martin Hamel

He says with a big smile. Okay, Denise, what about you? What is your way in look like after finishing the program?

[00:13:27] Denise Stillinger

Well, I also I didn't really finish it with a clear cut because the project that I was basically in, in Czech Republic was so interesting that I expanded my stay there. So from the initial stay of six months, I stayed there, I think one and a half years. So I was continuing on this project management position, and after that I decided that I wanted to start with category management. So as I mentioned, I had the opportunity to work together with a couple of departments, and in the end I was sure that I would like to engage further with category management. So at this time there was an open position in Slovakia. So I changed from Czech Republic to, to Slovakia. I started there to be an assistant to a category management team within the dry food. After some time in like getting to know all the the buying processes in the country, I was then starting also a little bit strategically to work with category management by building up something called the CVA process. Like a category analysis process. So engaging more strategically how we can basically improve our categories, our assortment and after a certain time, then I took over the position of a category buyer. I was then responsible for non-food categories. And after two years in Slovakia, I changed to the headquarter of black. I stayed within category management and basically took over some food categories. And I'm still coordinating these basically. So nowadays there is a new change. So I will be the new team lead within the category group dry two. So I will be in operative responsible for for the sweets. And within my team, I also have the buying colleagues for breakfast categories, hot drinks and salty snacks, and also the colleagues from non-food and non-food. One. So I'm going to to have a new challenge in front of me. In addition to the operative tasks, I will get the opportunity to design a little bit how we want to continue strategically within the Sea team in order to, to support the countries in a more efficient way.

[00:16:26] Martin Hamel

So congratulations are in order, I guess.

[00:16:29] Denise Stillinger

Thank you. Thank you.

[00:16:31] Martin Hamel

And as I can hear, you're also still happy where you are and you like your job. So far.

[00:16:37] Denise Stillinger

I'm still happy where I am. Yes, exactly. It has been a journey so far. Where, yeah, it never got boring and I always had the chance to to learn further. And this is also what I plan to continue So. Yes.

[00:16:53] Martin Hamel

So my final question, when we think about the people who will listen to this podcast, maybe people who are considering joining the program who are listening to this podcast to get some, some information about it. What would you tell them if you could talk to them right now, to the people considering joining the the program, what would your message to them be?

[00:17:13] Martin Keiser

Well, from my side be natural. And if you become or if you have the plan to become a superior or a head of a department, the the most important part from my side is communication. So communicate with your colleagues. Don't be shy. Talk to each other. Ask each other if something is unclear. That that that's really the the point I want to to give everybody from the future colleagues.

[00:17:42] Martin Hamel

Denise, what's your message to our future colleagues? Maybe. Yeah.

[00:17:45] Denise Stillinger

Yeah. In addition to that, I would say be open to to any kind of Challenges also really learn all the basics. So ask questions even when when it's stupid ones because, yeah, it's all about really understanding. Really understanding it and not just giving giving an answer to something. So be open when you see something where you think this shouldn't be done in this way, then also be brave enough to say that and yeah, be open. Bring bring your inputs to to the business. And I think just be open and and engage in whatever is confronting you. I would say thank.

[00:18:29] Martin Hamel

You very much for telling me for telling us today about your experiences with the International management Trainee program and your way so far in international and in Riva Group. Thank you so much to my guests today, Denise Celina and Martin Kaiser.

[00:18:42] Speaker4

Thank you, thank you. Bye bye.

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