

Dual leadership: How successful cooperation at management level shapes the future of the family-owned company Börlind

Silke Fußbahn in conversation with Alicia and Nicolas Lindner
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Börlind was founded in 1959 and is one of the leading natural cosmetics manufacturers in the world.

In 2020, the siblings Alicia and Nicolas Lindner took over the family business from their father in third generation.



You run the Börlind family business together as siblings. How did that come about?

Alicia Lindner (AL): My brother and I grew up with Börlind. Our hearts are attached to our family business and we have shared a love of natural cosmetics since childhood. It was therefore a logical and completely intrinsic process that we aligned and tailored our training to later take over the company.

How have you positioned yourselves as a leadership duo?

Nicolas Lindner (NL): We discussed the division very openly in advance. It was important to us that there is a clear separation in the operative business, that each of us can make final decisions in the respective area. Of course, this does not exclude that we consult each other and decide on the big central questions together.

You have already been leading together for over two years – how did you experience the first months?

AL: We actually had a special start together, as we officially took over the company from our father on January 1st 2020. As we all know, the Corona pandemic started shortly after. At that time, no one knew: What will happen tomorrow? So we could and had to create our own master plan and rely on ourselves. I am proud that the handover, even in this really uncertain and challenging time, worked very well.

What was your personal survival strategy?

NL: It was clear to us that we are in this situation together as a company and as a society, so we have to deal with it together. Our attitude: maximum transparency, clear communication that we are also driving on sight and depend on the input and creativity of our employees. Our IT provided the hardware equipment very fast and we were lucky that software such as MS Teams was already implemented. This enabled us to meet the new challenges very quickly and agilely.

You have known older employees since childhood. Did that change the way you started?

NL: I think I can speak for both of us when I say that we grew into the company with the increasing tasks. At first, there were many ad hoc tasks that had to be dealt with quickly. As part of a trainee programme, we got to know all the teams and departments, travelled a lot with the field staff and came into contact with our customers and external partners. When I started, there was a big need in the marketing department. At that time, my sister would have been predestined for these topics because of her background, but she was not yet in the company at that time. So I jumped in and the department has stayed with me until today.

Do you and your father approach issues differently? How open do you find both sides to change?

NL: My father comes from a different generation. It was clear to us that we would first have to convince him with our new ideas. We had very intensive and valuable discussions, talked a lot about the added value of different approaches. When our father was convinced of something, he let us run with full support. So there were no blockades at all, but rather real interest and the desire to be informed and learn new things. This approach was insanely important for the beginning and crucial for our successful journey together in the company.

What differences do you experience when it comes to leadership? Do women lead differently than men? Are there generational differences?

AL: Leadership is a very complex topic and is shaped by different factors, from my point of view especially by the components zeitgeist and personality. I can speak for myself that I attach great importance to the fact that leadership runs through the entire company and that great scope for decision-making is also anchored at the management levels that follow us.

NL: I can only agree with that. To reduce the topic of leadership to gender is, in my opinion, too striking. It is rather the individual person and their individual professional and personal background, as well as the dynamics of the team, that determine the quality of leadership.

You work in the cosmetics industry, which generally has a high quota of women. How do you feel about this?

AL: We currently have a female quota of around 70 % in our company, and around 50 % at management level – and this has not just been the case since we joined. These figures have not come about because of an imposed quota of women, but dynamically as a result of the expertise and personality of the applicants. And that is a good thing!

What advice would you like to give to other daughters and sons who are taking on a succession in the family business?

NL: You should first gain experience and make mistakes outside your own company and position yourself so well in a specialist area that you enter as a real expert and the company can hardly wait until you are there at the end. At the same time, a strong bond with the company and identification with the products are of course enormously important.

AL: In addition, I can only recommend getting external support. Company succession is a complex and emotional process. It is worthwhile to bring in a person with an objective view.

Do you also have a tip for the senior generation?

NL: Basically, the senior generation in particular should ask themselves a few central questions with regard to the handover: Do I want to stop at all? How do I deal with it if my successor does something better than I do? Only if these questions can be answered positively for the next generation, a successful handover and a good arrival of the next generation is possible in the long term.