

● INTERVIEW WITH KLEMENS HASELSTEINER

STRABAG
TEAMS WORK.

More conductor than rock star: his unique view of the company



INFO

Klemens Peter Haselsteiner completed a bachelor's degree in business administration at DePaul University in Chicago. He joined the STRABAG Group in Russia in 2011 with responsibility for central controlling, among other things. From 2015 he was employed by the German STRABAG subsidiary Ed. Züblin AG in Stuttgart – first as commercial business unit manager for turnkey construction and then, starting in 2018, as commercial subdivision manager. Haselsteiner joined the management board of STRABAG SE on 1 January 2020.

Since the announcement that Klemens Haselsteiner was joining the management as CDO (Chief Digital Officer) and sixth member of the board, the youngest son of Hans Peter Haselsteiner has been in the spotlight. Few other people in the recent history of the company have been the subject of so many expectations and speculations. But what makes Klemens Haselsteiner tick? And what does he expect of his new role?

How many people can claim to have experienced all the various facets of the construction industry up close already as a child? Thanks to his father, ILBAU was a constant part of Klemens Haselsteiner's childhood in South Tyrol. "Though my first building experiences were on the home front," Haselsteiner recalls. "My father was also an enthusiastic builder at home and saw to it that we were always renovating and remodelling things around the house."

What really impressed him were the visits to major projects. "There is one tunnel project near Mount Etna in Sicily that fascinated me to no end as a child because the dimensions alone were so impressive." Without knowing it, this experience probably laid the foundations for the five-year-old Haselsteiner's future career choice: "Around that time, the question was raised in the family as to who might be interested in the business. I was the only one of us three brothers to raise his hand, because I was already genuinely interested at the time."

When ILBAU finally became STRABAG in 1998, Haselsteiner was studying in Chicago. But still his thoughts were on what was happening back home: "Of course I was aware that something historic was happening in the Austrian construction industry, but geographically I was on the other side of the world."

So what sort of "fresh wind" does the 40-year-old bring from his previous posts? "I spent five years working for STRABAG in Russia and five years in Stuttgart. In all my previous positions, I have experienced that successful managers were always those who believed in respect, appreciation and trust and who had no problem standing up for their staff. That is how you build a team: you weld the people together with passion and personally ensure that you achieve top results together."

For him, leadership means being able to let go and trusting in the qualities of others. "I like to compare that with the role of the conductor in an orchestra. Strictly speaking, he himself does not make any music, and yet he has a decisive influence on how the overall delivery is perceived by others."

Becoming a company officer and joining the concert of the management team doesn't necessarily mean that he will be changing his style: "I have always liked to speak plainly and clearly and I am looking forward to people continuing to speak openly to me."

But the CDO believes he is in the right industry for this anyway: "I generally find people in the construction industry to be passionate, very human, honest and sympathetic. We don't have time to beat around the bush. This also holds true for leaders and it is a style that suits me personally very well."

The "performance" on the management board stage, however, means having to deal with other people's expectations. "My primary goal is always to make things better. However, you've got to maintain a realistic perspective of what is possible. Even in my new position, I don't have a magic wand with which I can simply make structural problems disappear," says Haselsteiner.



Haselsteiner also wishes to put the notion of "fresh wind" into perspective: "I am basically open to new approaches. However, I do not see myself as someone who will innovate at all costs, but rather as the continuation of a success story. Time and circumstances will show which path to take."

Thirty years after his childhood in South Tyrol, it is now Klemens Haselsteiner who comes home to his wife and three children after a day working at STRABAG. What does he think of the similarities in this story? "I like being a father, but even in this role I don't see myself as a rock star or as something special." What is certain is that the next generation of Haselsteiners will also be growing up with a direct connection and in direct proximity to Austria's leading construction company.

"Leadership means being able to let go and trusting in the qualities of others." Klemens Haselsteiner believes in respect, appreciation and trust if you want to achieve top results together.

→ You can read **the unabridged version** of the interview with Klemens Peter Haselsteiner in Stranet.