

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Martina Hofmann, Managing Director of KEA-BW

«A transformation is urgently needed.»

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Martina Hofmann is a key figure in Baden-Württemberg (11.2 million inhabitants): she is the deputy managing director of the Climate Protection and Energy Agency Baden-Württemberg (KEA-BW) and is tasked with rapidly increasing the share of renewable energy. A dream job for a pioneer like her — or so one would think...



In your various roles, you are undoubtedly a top executive. What qualities make a person in a senior position a pioneer?

In my view, it is important to constantly question oneself and not fall into fixed patterns.

You have to be able and willing to continuously adapt to new situations. This mental flexibility is key for me. Because if you only do what you already know and have always done, then being a pioneer is over.

I would have expected you to talk about visions. Or about people who are also willing to go headfirst through the wall.

Visions only come when you are flexible. You come up with things no one else does. You definitely have to be creative to have these visions. And maybe also a bit unconventional.

«I see a major problem rooted in the inertia of our system.»

That might be the heart of the issue. Various pioneers — good or bad — are sometimes rigid and don't appear very flexible. Specifically: you are responsible for increasing the share of renewable energy in Baden-Württemberg. What challenges do you face in this regard?

(laughs) That there are influential people who don't want that!

I started at KEA-BW about two years ago. Back then, I thought: All signs point to fast.

But then I had to realize that there are still enough actors who don't want it to happen quickly, and that slowed me and my team down.

Of course, there are also people who don't understand or don't know what renewable energies bring them. For laypeople, it is difficult to keep track of the facts. What statements are scientifically proven? And what is unproven and therefore unreliable?

So if you could convince the people, everything would be fine?

That could be one possibility. However, I also see a major problem rooted in the inertia of our system.

Our political and social system has developed over decades and has been continually strengthened. Today, it is very complex and has many interdependencies. Unfortunately, it originates from a very different time with completely different conditions and challenges. In my opinion, an adjustment or transformation is urgently needed. But it seems that either this is not possible or many responsible parties are not yet willing to do so. For now, I have to accept that.

A heretical remark: This is currently happening in the USA. What is being torn down there in terms of government institutions – does that give you a certain satisfaction, and do you think: «Oh, I'd also like to 'transform' like that sometime?»

No — they may be able to tear things down, but not to put something better in their place.

By now, I have also come to believe that it won't work in the USA. You can currently observe how the system protects itself.

I now believe: the systems are stronger, and I have to make the best of it personally.

That sounds resigned.

No, simply realistic.

I also think it's important that voters pay close attention to whom they entrust responsibility. Who, for example, do we send to the EU? The fact is: we have to implement what is decided there. But I do wonder: are we really sending the most capable people?

«I have never worked with role models.»

Here we may be at another core issue: as a pioneer, you would have to dream of cloning yourself ten or twenty times. The panic attack of pioneers is realizing that they are only one person.

Yes, yes, but you have to be able to live with that. (laughs) Actually, I would find it terrible if there were multiple identical people. Diversity is definitely a gain.

Do you have role models you can look up to?

No. Honestly, I have never worked with role models. I have always tried to simply do what seems right to me. I get inspired by various people and otherwise try to follow my inner compass.

In these times of upheaval, which seem to spread like a wave from the USA across the world, do you see more opportunity or threat?

I wouldn't say it's something very special. There are always these extreme events happening somewhere. Now there are fears because of the USA, environmental protections being rolled back, etc. It could also be that a volcano erupts somewhere causing major damage to the climate, or there is a problem at a nuclear power plant.

That no longer affects me. The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. I don't go against the course of things. If I worried about that all the time, I'd already be completely embittered.

«I do not oppose the course of things.»

I observe what's happening and try to make the best of it for myself and to contribute my part.

Whether religion or something else — everyone has their survival strategy and meaning-making in life. It just doesn't work without it.

I believe that too. You can't move anything in the world if you're not whole within yourself and haven't found your purpose in life. That's something very important — especially at my age. When you're young, it's different. You still have to 'knock your horns off.' My vice dean said that to me at university—even though I had already been in industry for ten years and was relatively quickly a program director. At the time, I found 'knocking your horns off' insulting. But in the end, he was right. I wasn't whole yet. By now, I'm more at peace with myself.

The key with such criticism is not to lose your spirit and sink into cynicism or defeatism, but to keep the visionary mindset alive.

I believe that being visionary is genetically ingrained in me. It doesn't fade away that quickly.

Horns and bumps: knocking off your horns, getting bumps—and learning from them. What would you wish for from a fairy?

I would wish that as a society we change our way of life, our culture: away from the «aster, higher, more» mindset towards living.

I believe that as a society, we have taken a wrong turn somewhere. I have been deeply engaged for a long time with health, nutrition, and how the body works.

«As a society, we have taken a wrong turn somewhere.»

We eat poorly and move too little, which makes us sick. This also makes our brain sluggish. You can observe this in some people in publicly exposed positions. Over time, these people look different — I assume they don't take very good care of their bodies. That then leads to comprehensive changes, and at some point, they may have lost their visions.

I have gained experience and learned from it.

You are an expert in resource management — both on a large scale and in the small, personal sense.

Exactly. We have to live with what is available to us — personally and as a whole.

I think even pioneers repeatedly face situations where they have to overcome fears. Are there situations in which you feel fear and have to overcome it?

Not really anymore. I have cleared a lot within myself of any baggage from the past. Seriously — I can't think of anything I would be afraid of.

Impressive. Has there been a key experience? It sounds as if someone held up a mirror to you at the right moment.

Yes, there was. I found a new coach who has been supporting me intensively. He looked at me and said, «Hey you. Your balance is completely off. You have to do something now, or it's over.» That was the trigger.

One penultimate question people like to ask every pioneer: How do you manage patience?

(laughs) It varies a lot for me. It depends entirely on what it's about. There are things where I have incredible patience. No idea where that comes from. But with other things, I go crazy if it doesn't happen quickly. I could bite the edge of the table. But I'm also working on my patience.

Other people simply have a different rhythm than I do or other possibilities. I have to accept that.

I am very fast, efficient, and goal-oriented. When I latch onto something, no one can get me off it until it's done. I can't expect that from everyone else.

You often use the word «work», even when it comes to patience.

Yes, I am truly a total workaholic in every respect. I believe it's genetic.

«I am truly a complete workaholic in every direction.»

Do you often struggle with self-doubt?

I often observe how I come across to others in different situations. I reflect a lot. I want to know: «What am I actually doing here? Am I the bull in the China shop now, or am I doing something good?»

A healthy amount of self-doubt is allowed.

Professor Hofmann, thank you for the fascinating conversation.

Interview: thk