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# «I want to drive change – with vision and teamwork.»

Martina Koch has worked at UBS for over 25 years and has repeatedly taken new paths. How does she keep her pioneering spirit alive? She has many approaches — but at the heart of it all is one thing: truly listening.

**M**s. Koch, what qualities and character traits define a pioneer?

A pioneer should be curious and not just follow the well-trodden path. It is important to actively consider other opinions and perspectives while thinking visionarily about the future in order to anticipate potential changes.

**And what about the initial spark?**

Courage is definitely part of it. In the beginning, you have to convince people; often you are in the minority and are testing something yourself. It takes perseverance to consistently stay on course. These qualities are important at UBS and keep coming into play. You should be able to inspire others while also being resilient enough to consistently pursue your ideas.

**When did you personally have to show courage?**

In my leadership roles. Specifically, when I took over a small team of five people in Wealth Management, we sat down together and asked ourselves: «How do we want to move forward together in terms of our goals?» We then became one of the first teams in Switzerland to define not only individual goals but also team goals. At the time, we were pioneers in Switzerland for implementing this approach, and doing so took courage. In this setup, everyone individually contributes their performance to the overall team result.

«At UBS, pioneering spirit and innovation are actively encouraged.»

**That means team spirit is recognized and, where appropriate, rewarded.**

Exactly.

**That was about listening. How did that work in practice?**

We had open discussions within the team. Everyone contributed their perspective. It was important, as a leader, to speak openly with those involved and to take everyone along on the journey as a team.

**That's where criticism can become painful or difficult.**

Constructive criticism is necessary to take the next step forward. It's an active dialogue. In the end, criticism is nothing more than feedback.

**That requires the recipient's ability to hear it the way it is intended.**

It's important to communicate clearly and factually, to give feedback consistently, and to receive it directly in dialogue. One annual performance review is far from enough.

**How difficult is it to be a pioneer in a large company like UBS?**

At UBS, pioneering spirit and innovation are actively encouraged. A good example is the development of UBS My Way by two client advisors who identified a gap in the offering and created a new solution for clients.

«One performance review per year is far too little.»

**Do you consider yourself an expert in the field of “female leadership”?**

I wouldn't call myself an expert, perhaps more someone with experience.

**Women in leadership positions have once again become a topic of discussion. It feels as if diversity has turned into a buzzword with negative connotations.**

I am clearly in favour of diverse teams. For me, «diverse» doesn't just refer to gender but also to different skills, strengths, and seniority levels. UBS promotes diverse teams. Women are often more reserved in application processes, and I see it as my task to encourage other women to take on responsibility.

**Centuries of ingrained modesty?**

The visibility of women is improving, but many still don't like to step into the spotlight. Here in the region, I have the privilege of being involved in the presentation of the «POWHER Award» for women entrepreneurs, and I see that young female entrepreneurs are becoming more proactive.

**Sometimes I feel we live in a time when everyone is broadcasting — and listening has become increasingly rare. What is your observation?**

Listening is very important. If you don't listen in leadership or with clients, nothing meaningful can come from it.





**How do you listen properly?**

Asking the right questions and creating space. It's about taking the time and focusing on the conversation in the here and now.

**«I want to encourage women to confidently take on responsibility.»**

*When someone talks about «the here and now,» I always get the feeling they either meditate in the morning or do yoga.*

Is that so? Not me. But I do work out in the mornings, usually at five o'clock on the cross-trainer.

**Compliments. What other aspirations do you have as a pioneer that are still in the pipeline?**

I still want to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Last year, I had the chance to travel to Bhutan, and since then, the idea of climbing Kilimanjaro has captivated me.

**Kilimanjaro is no small feat. Have you been near it before?**

No, never. It would be something completely new. I'm fascinated by the wildlife there and the connection to the mountain.

**That's a personal project, a personal challenge. And what about a bigger project?**

The psychological health of our employees. I want us to have platforms where employees can speak openly and truly engage without fear of stigmatization. This way, we as an organization also have the opportunity to learn and continue to grow.

**You see it as a problem that people fear it isn't anonymous?**

Yes, a certain level of anonymity really helps to bring such topics forward.

**«I see change as an opportunity.»**

**We live in uncertain times. You don't give the impression that this is a threat to you.**

I see the glass as half full. I see change as an opportunity. Of course, I have concerns, but I move forward with healthy optimism and make realistic decisions.

*Interview: thk.*