

PFW AEROSPACE: SECURING THE SKIES

The ability to weather change, evolve and satisfy customer demand is a primary metric for success. Award winning Stefan Zimmermann, CEO of PFW Aerospace discusses the corporate longevity of this established centennial in the aerospace industry.

From humble beginnings in 1913 responding to the needs of a commercial aviation industry in its infancy, PFW Aerospace now employs more than 2000 staff at locations across Germany, UK and Turkey.

The journey has certainly been a demanding one. Rising to the challenges of providing systems and solutions for conveying fuel, water, oxygen, hydraulic fluid, and complex structural components to an industry which has seen vast technological growth is no mean feat. An organisation which has survived the aftermath of a World War, innovates and keeps pace with a rapidly changing world to become a recognised global leader, is one which fully deserves the lofty title of 'a company which writes history.'

Leadership of an organisation with such an eventful history, especially whilst in the throes of an unprecedented global pandemic, requires specialist industry expertise, commitment, passion and an ability to motivate others. Award winning Stefan Zimmermann, CEO, took over the helm at PFW Aerospace in Sep-

tember 2020. Here he gives us an insight into the strengths of this remarkable organisation, discusses future trends and his opinion on successful leadership.

As a leading global player in the aerospace industry for more than a century, PFW Aerospace is unique in both its longevity as well as having to overcome major challenges. Where do you see its main strengths?

Any company with more than 100 years of service behind it must have an innovative business model, and the capacity to evolve within its sector.

One of the strengths of PFW has always been to be a world class player in distinct niche markets with a rock solid track record of being a reliable supplier and partner – especially in difficult times. All our customers can clearly count on us – come hell or high water.

There is undoubtedly a high level of resilience within the work force at PFW which has helped to withstand other historical challenges. Today, this is of particular importance in the ongoing Cov-

id-19 induced crisis. The company has to be strategically redirected to compete in a rapidly changing dynamic market environment. In this respect, flexibility and tenacity are key attributes a company needs in order to master a major crisis. These are deeply engrained in the PFW DNA, and I'm proud to now be part of this reputable team.

You've previously undertaken key management roles at Airbus, Rolls Royce and formerly Collins Aerospace. Could you briefly summarise your career journey for us, including how you came to be offered the position of CEO at PFW,

why you accepted it and your first impressions of the organisation?

Having had the conviction to work in aerospace fairly early on in life, it was a logical step to start my career with Airbus, acquiring the necessary technical and business grounding. In addition, it provided me with the opportunity to be an integral part of the leadership team in France launching the largest aircraft in the world – the A380.

My interest in the aerospace was far reaching and I genuinely relished the challenges of an international environment. Moving on from Airbus, as an executive leader I've had the opportunity to shape the future of major British and American organisations, Rolls Royce and

Collins Aerospace, respectively.

With the emergence of Covid-19 last year – the toughest challenge in our industry since the beginning of commercial aviation – I was offered the opportunity to lead PFW Aerospace, one of the few aerospace companies in the world that has successfully celebrated a centenary. The fact that PFW had recently been acquired by the French Hutchinson Group was the icing on the cake!

Taking on the leadership mantle during the height of the Covid-19 must surely have been a worry. How has PFW Aerospace been impacted as a supplier during

this period and how do you see the future panning out?

The global impact of Covid-19 on the commercial aerospace industry is totally unprecedented. I do believe that in any crisis there is always a silver lining on the horizon, and now with nine months in post I have a firm impression of the company's strengths.

For example, we have been successful in capturing market share from our direct competition as some of our peers started to struggle with the beginning of the recession. Nonetheless, it must be stated that those new wins do not compensate for the overall reduction in the market, but it clearly indicates that we are on the





STEFAN ZIMMERMANN

CEO
PFW AEROSPACE

truth – good or bad – as long as it's clearly explained to them. When you give people the chance to understand complex subjects, you have a high probability of them buying into it, and following you in all you aim to achieve.

I'd also add that it's all about team work, recognising and appreciating the diverse talents, ideas and strategies of your team and the ways in which they work, think and feel. A good leader is able to piece these together for the good of the company, hopefully to achieve the unachievable! Nevertheless, it is all about efficient team work in the end.

Last, but certainly not least, I'd mention enjoyment. Enjoying your role and interacting with others should be satisfying, otherwise it's fair to say you may be either in the wrong environment or even the wrong company. I've always aimed to find the right balance between a challenging, yet enjoyable working environment.

On a personal level, we understand you've amassed quite a collection of self-built aircraft models over the years. Evidence, if ever it were needed, of having a real interest in the subject and enjoying your industry. Could you tell us more about this industry-related hobby?

Yes, you could call it profession meeting an obsession! Thirty years ago I set about creating a model collection of every aircraft which had taken to the skies since the early 1930s. I've a current collection of more than 2300 models, including helicopters, all built to the same scale, 550 of which are complete. Ultimately, I'd love an opportunity to display my unique collection to the wider public or perhaps donate it all to a specialist museum, but for now the goal is to enjoy a personal hobby alongside a professional career in the aerospace industry.

PFW Aerospace has been an important leader in German aviation for over 100 years and a global innovator in the field of tubing systems, structural components and fuel tanks. Comprehensive information on the company's products, services and core technologies can be found at <https://www.pfw.aero/en/>

right path to gradually pull ourselves out of the current crisis.

Looking some four to five years ahead, we do see many opportunities. However, more importantly, we need to ensure we make the correct decisions to ultimately benefit PFW going forward.

As an award winning, motivational leader, what advice would you give to aspiring CEOs or those who have recently acquired senior leadership positions?

I'm not a believer in there being a set in

stone golden formula, but I do consider it crucial to be authentic in everything you do or say as a senior leader. In a volatile, uncertain and dynamic environment, staying on course whilst having sufficient mental flexibility to challenge your own way of thinking is perhaps easier said than done, but being authentic and transparent will ultimately reap rewards in terms of respect from others.

Hand-in-hand with this is the need to keep people informed as regularly as possible, keeping on board the message of transparency. People appreciate the

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