

“Want to join me, Tanja?”



Pioneers, new shores and a skiing accident: Tanja zu Waldeck, COO *BurdaForward*, in our “Want to join me?” interview series © HBM

The snow on the bare trees glistens in the morning sun as Tanja zu Waldeck, COO of *BurdaForward*, steers her car through the winter landscape. We are somewhere between Lake Starnberg and her office in Munich. In the latest addition to our series, I am joining her daily drive to work.

As Tanja keeps her eyes trained on the icy road, she remembers a story from her childhood: “I once got my hair caught in a ski lift and was dragged up the mountain.” I look at her in horror, and she starts to laugh. “My hair was really long then and there was nothing to grab onto. It was unbelievably painful. When I got to the top, my father asked me if I wanted to go home, but I shook off the snow and kept on going”, she says, adding “I was always very good at getting up and carrying on!”

Getting up and carrying on

This certainly served her well when setting up the *Netmoms* portal for parents. After all, young company founders face plenty of challenges. “In the early days of *Netmoms*, we were often just a step away from insolvency”, says Tanja. Ultimately, though, *Netmoms* proved a great success, perhaps partly due to Tanja’s role as a mother of four.

During my preparations for today's meeting, this has made me stop and think more than once: Tanja zu Waldeck, mother of four. I inevitably think of Ursula von der Leyen, German Defence Minister and mother of seven. It's very rare that we hear about the family lives of successful men. Willy Brandt had four children. Konrad Adenauer had seven – but nobody ever spoke about it. Does our society perceive successful women and mothers differently than successful men and fathers? I ask Tanja.

"I had an interesting experience at a management meeting when a very nice colleague asked me how I manage to do everything I do with four children – I'm sure his intentions were good. So I told him how I organise my life. Then I asked him whether he asks this question to anyone else – some of our male colleagues also have several children. And he realised that he never asks them how they do it all. Many people do this unconsciously without meaning any harm." Tanja makes sure to take regular, short breaks from her sometimes stressful life.

Seeking new shores

"I read a lot in the evenings when my children are asleep. I particularly enjoy historical novels about far-flung lands and pioneers who settle in new places". Her eyes light up as she talks. Tanja is herself a pioneer of a sort, working with her *BurdaForward* colleagues to steer a ship that changed direction some time ago in order to shape the digital future of the media industry.

The phrase "digital future" has been used to excess and has almost lost all meaning. So how does Tanja picture the digital future and the challenges to come? "Digital publishing platforms like Google and Facebook need clear legal frameworks to give competitors a chance. Voice recognition is one key trend that is making its mark. In the future, most search requests will be made verbally. We need to adapt to this and reconfigure user interfaces accordingly. This will be a major challenge for us."

Bright red Beetle with white checked seats

Tanja and I have reached the last set of traffic lights before our destination. Time for my last question. What would she do if she didn't need to go to the office today, or if she didn't work at all? Smiling broadly, she says: "I need the intellectual challenge – I can't imagine sitting uselessly on the couch or simply staying at home and looking after the kids – although that can be very strenuous and I have great respect for people who do it. But it's strenuous in a different way. And I really like to travel. One of my favourite childhood memories is sitting in the back of our bright red Beetle with white checked seats and driving to Croatia for a family summer holiday."

We say goodbye and I look back quickly as she runs up to the huge building. For a moment, it almost looks as though she really is boarding a ship, just like the pioneers in her books.

by **Saki Athanassios Danoglidis**
Senior Editor - Corporate Communications
Athanassios.Danoglidis@burda.com



Category **Careers**

Tags **BurdaForward, BurdaForward Advertising, Tanja zu Waldeck, WDMMG**

URL <https://www.burda.com/en/news/want-join-me-tanja/>