



Always on the go

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It's not as hard to go from being the son of a farmer to the CSO of KHS as you might think. This is demonstrated by the story of Dr. Johannes T. Grobe who first enthusiastically drove a tractor at the age of 15 and has been fascinated by technology ever since.

PHOTOGRAPHY / ILLUSTRATION

Frank Reinhold, Credit Paintshop M. Timothy O'Keefe/Alamy Stock Foto

COVER PHOTO

With his last employer Dürr Grobe was responsible for the sale of paint shops with paint robots to the automobile industry.

He first wanted to be a farmer, Dr. Johannes T. Grobe remembers. He would have liked to have trodden in his father's footsteps on his parents' farm in Schmallingenberg in the Hochsauerland region of Germany. However, as the youngest of five children – four boys and a girl – this wasn't a serious option. He began to be interested in technology at an early age and helped repair anything that needed fixing – including blowers and chainsaws and a tractor for which he got his driver's license when he was 15.

After finishing school Grobe signed up at RWTH Aachen University. He briefly thought about studying electrical engineering but opted instead for mechanical engineering, majoring in computer science. His doctorate thesis focused on the reengineering of computer-assisted business processes at large hospitals for example. During his time as a research associate at the university he again had the chance to work with tractors. For one year he was 'loaned' to agricultural machinery manufacturer John Deere where the principle of teamwork was just being introduced. In the course of this process a new assembly line was built, the tractors updated and the way work was organized adapted accordingly. Grobe's task was to set up a system of innovation management.

Profile: Dr. Johannes T. Grobe

Originally from the Sauerland region, Grobe worked for Rexroth from 1998 to 2015, a company which was part of the Mannesmann Group until 2001 when it was taken over by Bosch. In his last three years there the computer scientist and mechanical engineer was head of its factory in India before joining Dürr AG. The 53-year-old became one of the three members of the KHS Executive Management Board in April 2019.

Innovation manager and restorer of profitability

At the age of 33 he signed on at Mannesmann Rexroth with the Rexroth Hydraulics Business Unit. As project manager for change management he concentrated on two prime topics:

firstly, he was required to put an innovation management system in place. Secondly, he was entrusted with restoring a product division to profitability – which he did.

This proved to be good preparation for Grobe for the next step in his career. When Rexroth was taken over by Bosch in 2001 he developed a site concept and removed redundant products from the industrial hydraulics portfolio. At the end of 2003 he had to decide whether to gravitate towards production or the product. He chose the latter and was made head of the Industrial Applications Product Management Department and head of the Industrial Control Systems Sales Department.

Grobe professes to a love of opera. “Rather ‘Magic Flute’ or ‘Figaro’ than ‘Lohengrin’, though,” he adds, smiling. One of the biggest highlights of his time at Rexroth was therefore the restoration of the legendary Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in 2010 which was completed under his aegis. “The seats were all that was worth keeping,” he recalls. The Russians invested around €200 million in their new stage technology – from the steel structure to the stage with its individually controllable segments to the winches and pulleys in the fly loft. Besides this rather exotic job much of his work in the years 2007 to 2012 centered on engineering and systems development for industrial plants. This ranged from plastic machines through foundries and rolling mills to steel and hydraulic engineering or civil engineering. Among these activities was the expansion of the Panama Canal, for which Rexroth engineered the drive and control technology for collecting freshwater in what are known as water reutilization basins.

Incredible India

Grobe was particularly influenced by the years 2012 to 2015 when he was managing director of Bosch Rexroth India and responsible for the construction of and move to a new factory in Ahmedabad, among other projects. “This was a €40 million project involving about 11,000 people,” Grobe says. He’s especially proud that the production site was presented with Rexroth’s international quality award in the year of the move. “The fact that we were able to achieve zero errors in our key products even under these difficult conditions showed me just

what's possible in India. This country has a whole generation of very intelligent young people who are keen to learn and seriously improve their situation in life." The peaceful coexistence of people of different social backgrounds, their smiles, their satisfaction and imperturbability have all left a lasting impression on Grobe.

India is where Grobe also first came into contact with KHS; after all, the two companies are neighbors. He regularly met Yatindra Sharma, managing director of KHS there, at the branch office of the German Engineering Association (VDMA).

Back in Germany Grobe spent three-and-a-half years at Dürr as senior vice-president of Sales and Marketing in the Paint and Final Assembly Systems Division. Here, he dealt with systems of enormous size where paint shops can be 400 meters long, 250 meters wide and 40 meters high and are used to spray car bodies and later equip them with their various accessories during final assembly. The high point of Grobe's work for Dürr was the contract signed with a Chinese VW joint venture for the largest plant of this kind ever built. With a volume of €1.3 billion it was also a record in the order entry for 2018 at this division of Dürr.

Successful start

Since April 1, 2019, Grobe has been responsible for the Sales and Service Division at KHS as its CSO. He describes his first few months at KHS as being totally positive and has received a warm welcome from both his two colleagues on the Executive Management Board and all employees he has met to date. In the first few weeks he spent time at all of the technology units in order to gain a good insight into the products and structure of the company. He then began visiting customers, especially on the growth markets of Africa, Asia and Brazil at the subsidiaries outside Germany, and KHS' key accounts. What appeals to him about his new job is the task of moving KHS forward after a period of turbulence and emphasizing the company's reliability. Under the motto of 'one team, one goal', in the future Grobe wants to network the technology and marketing sections with

the aim of achieving greater customer orientation. Passion and fun are very important to him – also as a prerequisite for technological advance.

If he's not at the opera or visiting an art exhibition, to relax Grobe, who lives in Lohr am Main in Lower Franconia, likes to engage in various sports. He likes running – also long distances, taking part in the Munich Marathon last year in relay with three other team members. Dr. Johannes T. Grobe is indeed a man who is always on the go – also in his job with the aim of developing and implementing new technical systems with customers throughout the globe. This is a man driven by passion.