**Transcript Tim Bussiek - Hiflier**

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**Alexander Hertel**0:20

Can you briefly walk us through your personal background and your professional background so we can learn a little bit about how you ended up where you are right now?



**Tim Bussiek** 0:30

Absolutely.

So I actually am born in Germany in Westphalia Sauerland, where Friedrich Merz is from too. Grew up there 10 years. But my parents, especially my dad, as an English history teacher, is one of the biggest Anglophiles. And so by the way, this is kind of interesting. Never again something like the Nazis, that was his thing becoming a teacher way back then. And it is again very relevant today and maybe for your project as well. So that if you like, as a cultural value background has been for me in terms of how I am in the world and maybe what I see and what is important, I think that would have been a strong determiner.

**1:14**

We went when I was 10, we went to Sydney, Australia for six years where I grew up and I hope I learned some humor, but also parts of the sort of open new world approach to life and to trying new things, which I think again is really important. I learned things like how to sail there and stuff like that. Normally I probably wouldn't have done a lot of those things and to surf if I'd hadn't been for stuff like that. For the Australians. I finished high school in Germany and then I did, maybe relevant in the time today, I was a conscientious objector. So I did 20 months there in terms of I consider myself a peacenik, but I then studied economics in Freiburg and also did a PhD in economics, which was already the intersection of economics or society and information technology.

**2:14**

And at the time already we studied all kinds of things like AI and transportation, telematics and e-commerce and all kinds of great topics that were around electronic payment systems. So a lot of those topics actually have been around. I consider that a great benefit that I got to do that at that point in time. When I was done with that, this would be about 98. I then joined ASAP, but I didn't join them here, but in Silicon Valley, in Palo Alto. And from there on, I was about 25 years in California. I still am there months of the year. And so I kind of alternate, but most of the times in Germany now, after 12 years of SAP, more and more I was getting into startups.

**3:05**

And it's interesting, you know, if I hadn't gone to Silicon Valley and if I hadn't been with SAP, which by the way, in terms of a career, you know, I was an economist, if you like, an academic. But there I turned into being a product manager, a job that I didn't know existed. And I think it's a fabulous job. And it just goes to show some, you know, where you end up, you don't know. But so I got more into more being into innovation, being a product builder, also into being marketing from product management to product marketing into actually VP of marketing. And I still like that a lot. The sense of category shaping, the sense of creating new categories. The examples that are thrown around in Silicon Valley which I think you know, can be a big part of also in Germany is likeGermans maybe are intimidated of what happens over in Silicon Valley and things like that.

**4:01**  
They and then they have the smaller mid-size companies, family companies. But they don't really think of, OK, let's let's do a new category. Maybe they do nowadays, but. So stories like Uber and other things, and of course Steve Jobs being close by and things like that have made a difference. So, to get to the last phase, basically through more and more startups. About 2017, I founded my own company. Philosophically, that also had to do with not wanting to be top down software like SAP and other software where the system knows, but designing something from the get go, which is bottom up, so it's around an elastic workflow if you like. It's about process management. It's about anyone having an accessible visual way of designing easy processes.

**4:55**

We were not successful in the many sectors and we finally settled on education because the discrepancy there between sort of the teacher who stands at the front and who sucks the life out of the lesson by dominating the process and the people having to sit there being passive, is one of the biggest is one of the biggest hurdles that I see nowadays, still in terms of young people getting a great start into life, the dynamic component of learning by themselves is lacking and I think in Germany especially lacking because they are specially good at having discipline and the top down system.

**5:33**

And so the software now we have basically we have relocated to Germany actually had to do not because we thought the environment here was easier but because also we had great contacts through Berlin and into education partners and for the last two years about we've been active here through the Founders Foundation, which you know, we got into an incubator program there and through that in Nord Rhine Westphalia we've been quite successful in building out something which also then went into a model project with 14 schools, about 25,000 students, which is really around a setting of educators, technology. It's called valuable agile learning for all.

**6:26**

So it's really about - Can learning being an agile project based learning be valuable so that it's not like an add on nice to have, but it's part of the regular plan? Like one day a week, every student has one day a week where they are completely self-organized, and then the software allows that to happen. I mean, Montessori and others have always wanted that, but so that's something that we are for. I mentioned that because you've asked me just one question. I know I'll get to the end, but if you're talking about innovation in Europe or Germany, I what we are trying to do is get one day per week into schools, into all schools.

**7:07**

And so with that to have an innovative spirit, leadership and self-confidence in schools and the German entrepreneurship, if it's not about specifically founding a company which seems to be where you guys are also going, but if it's about simply being able to organize in an economic way between time or resources and people and just making things happen and being a change agent, and if that's, you know, designing a bicycle path, or if that's phoning a new company or whatever, that might be, you know that's the kind of entrepreneurship that we are really trying to get into Germany as a system too.

**7:50**  
And anyway, so that's the big sort of. Where I come from and I'm a big believer in what I do in the purpose has not been successful financially obviously, very few startups in the education sector are, but I think we have a big opportunity there. The kind of people we talk to so happy to go into that more but anyway, that's sort of my background.

 **Alexander Hertel** 8:22  
Yeah. Good thing is I wanted to say that you already talked about a lot of stuff that I wanted to ask you, so that's fine. Since we are already, we already touched on your business model, so you're operating in a highly regulated market. Obviously in in education, especially in Germany. When you look at politics as a whole, but also policies, regulations, how much do they influence your business model, how much did they influence it in the beginning and has it changed over time in the last couple of years?

 **Tim Bussiek** 9:03  
I believe the regulatory environment or the way the system is set up, if you like, which means that the federal you know system and then also the federal is what I mean and then they also so they pay the teachers, but the schools are paid for by the communities and you know, so everyone's paying. So the system is really impermeable. It is not possible. It's like rock, it is set in stone. And I would say nobody in the system is paid to, for instance, do digitization. I think the all the concepts around how to do better have been around for many decades.

**9:45**  
I'll give you an example. The labour scholar in Bielefeld has been around now 50 years, and they've already implemented all the things about project based learning and everything that you need to do, which would be great for kids, for all the kids to have nowadays. But it's remained, it's one school within all of North Rhine Westphalia and the German schools, so the system is absolutely not to be changed and any start up that tries to change it is doomed to fail.

**10:14**

And so, for instance, even with the backing of the Founders Foundation being a model project finance partially by the state itself, it is not possible to get in touch with the Bildungsministerium [Ministry of Education]. The Ministry of Education in Nord Rhine Westphalia, even though there's politicians from the CDU and the Green Party saying, please talk to these guys, it's not happening and we have business models that show that just on the Berufskollege, if that means something to you.

**10:44**

There's 360 in Nord Rhine Westphalia 500,000 students. The schools that we work with, they have failure rates or dropout rates up to 40-50% in the year 11.  
Now €11,000 per student per year is about the cost, so they are losing about 2 billion per year. There's a tremendous inefficiency, and yet nobody wants to talk to us. So there's a lot of talk now, you could say what has changed in the system in the last years. Maybe the talk is getting louder about the crises, the numbers are certainly getting worse and my firm belief is that through social media and people being extremely passive, I think the last 10-15 years have made the situation actually much worse.

**11:37**  
It's not just super diversity and these kind of things and artificial intelligence coming. I think the situation in schools with students being like completely in themselves, easy dopamine verses hard dopamine is making it even harder. So back to the regulatory environment, there's no changes that are discernible and I would have stopped based on that, except for I, I do believe the system is incredibly ripe for change and there are those schools that we are allowed to or able to work with. And actually schools have a certain amount of freedom and of course, there's now Startchancen program and there's the Digitalpakt too.

**12:15**  
So there is a chance, I think if you do it right and it's based on technology because it's never been tried before, project based learning based on technology really done well then school by school it is possible to get through, but not because the regulatory environment is helping, but maybe at least it's not getting in the way as forcibly as it used to.

 **Alexander Hertel** 12:39  
You already touched some general developments in the world and obviously also in politics or the political environment. There is a certain shift in the last 10 years, society is getting more divided, discussions getting more head on and less about collaboration, more about confrontation. So this overall political vibe and shift that we also feel in the European Union and in Germany, does that have any influence on how your business operates? How's your strategy for the future? So, do you take that into consideration when you think about your company or do you do it a bit less?

 **Tim Bussiek** 13:21  
We maybe have to spell out what you are getting at there more so in terms of being remote. For instance, the company is very remote. I could have we could have settled in Bielefeld, but we went to Berlin. It's the center, it's where innovation maybe happens, it's being close to certain areas there. In terms of for us, we believe like I just tried to explain that what we are doing - getting people to work together to solve goals on a simple level is what they have lost. And so we believe now that has strengthened our or makes our model more, we actually provide even more important than before. I don't think that's where you were going, but. Just recently and I'm super happy next.

**14:05**

I'm talking now to Brigitte Mourn of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, very important person and but many people are stepping up. Verena Pauster is another one who are saying that, you know the AfD is happening. The political situation is just really descending really fast. There has to be something that we can do, we are losing these generations and out of the political discourse, or they can go any kind of directions, the whole stability, economically and otherwise we’re losing, and so I think they're very open to maybe changes happening and so we are talking about something like that and with the newspaper also like a project based way of the students really doing their own newspaper and figuring it out - Tiktok, whatever.  
But really, using the new generation to help us figure some of this stuff out.

**14:56**  
But so in that sense, we are, I think, right in the middle of that trying to solve that. But I think overall politics in Germany is, I don't know. If on a level of one to 10, I'd say it's an 8 or 9 behind. Understanding that and there's something I like to quote was in the Guardian recently. I could look it up for you, but.  
The Democrats in the US have completely missed it. They're still trying to sort of, you know, the Republicans are trying to go back into the 20th century.

**15:31**

The Democrats are not able to figure out the 21st where people are online, and if you don't do that, and I in terms of the politics, I think especially the SPD and the CDU are just reacting in a reflexive way that the way they've done in the last 50 years and it's sort of like, well, we have to the way we divide money is more SPD is like, OK, and they said, well, we have to do more economics or something, but, I don't think they really have anything interesting to offer in terms of, OK, like how do we use AI? I think that's a really interesting question in terms of bureaucracy and what we could solve.

**16:13**  
So maybe I don't know if that was your question. I think there's a huge potential for Germany to show and political parties also to show there are solutions that can be built and that can help us and that we here in Germany can build. And we have the young people to do that with, but they the politics is the way the way they think it's, I find it amazing that they, I'll pick on Schultz if you like, but I don't think he's arrived yet. In this sort of decade, and I don't hear anything that he's saying, which is like really a solution, I don't think Merz has either.

 **Alexander Hertel** 16:53  
Yeah, just to clarify, it's a matter of academic rigor that I'm not giving examples. So I'm not influencing your answers.

 **Tim Bussiek** 17:02  
OK.

 **Alexander Hertel** 17:03  
But you touched a couple of points that I would get at if I would ask more specifically.  
This was like what we discussed now was the outside view on how politics shaped entrepreneurship or your business model. Let's look at it from the other perspective.  
So do you, as an entrepreneur, actively engage in politics or in political discussions for that matter, for example in social media, and if so, you don't have to tell me on for which party or whatever, but how do you engage in politics if you do?

 **Tim Bussiek** 17:38  
I try not to. I think in terms of where I am I probably would like to. I did try when I was young at university. But they couldn't really use me at the time and I would still have that feeling today. So I'm, but I for instance one I work with associations, I work with the industrie und handelskammer [Chamber of Commerce and Industry], die Jungen Unternehmer [the young entrepreneurs] is a group that we work with closely. There's there's a number of those. But would I try to get so, these are lobbying groups, let's say, and I would do that.

**18:12**

But in terms of trying to change, for instance, the political environment around education. I've tried. I've offered it like in Nord Rhine Westphalia, like I mentioned, there's no interest and all that they offer you is oh, that's nice, but they don't, there's nobody that's paid to actually do that or help you. There's nobody paid to do digitization, so there's no one who's actually asking, there's nobody actually interested and so, but would I go into politics? You know I can't afford to. And so I try to actually stay away from it 'cause I know there's no result. I've tried Green Party all the others and I think what we have is extremely relevant, but would somebody sit down for an hour to understand what we have? No, I've not seen that happen. Well, no, that's not true. No, no. The CDU in in Nord Rhine Westphalia has done that time. They have spent their time. But would they actually then do something?

 **Alexander Hertel** 19:14  
Mm hmm.

 **Tim Bussiek** 19:15  
Very limited anyway, so for me personally politics I could not spare the time. I think I think it would be good if some if a party was able to, so I'll give you the example. The one party was it was the SPD at the time, but it was like well if you want to be part of the party, you have to then go on the marketplace and hand out Flyers and stuff like that. And I'm like, well, I'm a PhD economics guy. You know, I could help you design a program that does this and this and this. And there was no interest. So, for me to work my way up 30 years through the party system would not work. Look, if a party was smart enough about how to do that, how to leverage people like me. You know then that result would be completely different. I've not heard a single party do that kind of outreach.

 **Alexander Hertel** 20:06  
So we've mostly now talked about the level of politics where it comes to daily decision making to parliamentary elections and then and policy making. When we look at politics as a whole, like the democratic system that we live in and that has certain pillars that, you know, keep us from either killing each other or stealing from each other. From your perspective, should entrepreneurs and businesses get more involved in evolving and keeping the system alive, so having a positive impact on the political system as their core business model? Should that be the purpose of any business or should they stay away in general?

 **Tim Bussiek** 20:55  
I think it's a great advantage if they were part of it in some way or another in in a way that allowed them because they obviously contribute something very relevant. And I was talking to this the way we teach economics or entrepreneurship in schools. It's terrible right now, so to be able to just provide examples of that to maybe it doesn't have to be funding, but it can be funding for certain areas to go forward uh for entrepreneurs, for companies to be involved, I think is highly advantageous. We do some of that work. We have founded to work well. There's no where the companies then try to influence the students and stuff like that. They're very good about that. This schools maintain the overall control of everything. So it's it's all in a good way.

**21:50**

Absolutely. I think entrepreneurs or companies should be much more open and especially the way that we do that in our program is the students have an incredible benefit of understanding why they are learning what is going on in society, in economics or other. It doesn't have to be just entrepreneurship, by the way. Companies can be anything can be politics, communal systems can be green, whatever it is, but that the young people see hey, there's actual real challenges to be solved and you know, let me try. Let me try my luck at some of these and I can find my own purpose.

**22:27**  
So for the for the companies or whatever society to open up and to show, hey, this is the stuff we're working on and you know, why don't you help us a little bit and see where you fit in just that kind of where the system opens up, I think could be hugely advantageous because right now it's not working. The Ausbildung [training] and then you'd kind of do that and they have the Berufsorientierung [Career orientation]. That's so old that there's a lot of, think it's one of the biggest issues Germany has.

 **Alexander Hertel** 22:57  
Yeah, you already touched a couple of times the point that entrepreneurship is also about problem solving and innovation and finding new solutions.

 **Tim Bussiek** 23:05  
Yes, yes.

 **Alexander Hertel** 23:07  
So in a broader sense, do you think the political climate in Germany supports new ways of thinking, being innovative, being an entrepreneur from the mindset I don't mean about, I don't mean specifically about making money, but about having the mindset that there needs to be innovation to solve challenges. Do you think this way of thinking is currently being proposed by or people are getting like a positive feedback to engage in these kinds of thinking?

 **Tim Bussiek** 23:43  
No, and I think that's one of the biggest issues. It's Germany, but it's the whole of Europe and the Europeans are very happy to live their life and they've got a great lifestyle and you know, I get it. But and to take your vacation and everything. But in terms of opening up to innovation, clearly Germans are well known to be naysayers. You know, you come up with something and they're like these five reasons it's not going to work. And some of that is good because then it leads to higher quality. But to make it more open towards and everyone participating more in some form of innovation and seeing them to be innovative and curious, I think could be one of the biggest things that would make this country benefit tremendously. I just go back to this also the study of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung that was quoted to me.

**24:30**

And it, it really showed the way that economics or entrepreneurship is taught in schools. The books that are used are like 30 years old. And it's like the company or companies are often they, they sound like they're rather mean or bad or something. And then if the problem arises, it's like, well, now it's that you have to call the government. And so this whole sense of, well, you know, that's not what it is. It doesn't have to mean that you're always left on your own. I mean, we have a great system of social market economy that's, you know, it's not capitalism like in the US, but to have entrepreneurship being built. That's why we say that one day per week for everyone to figure out.

**25:15**

And especially now in the age of social media to practice it.Just a sense of and gain confidence in having change.I think that's one of the biggest things.I think the Germans have lost this idea of confidence that they can actually achieve and make things shine.And then the and where you guys could help also is like the telling the examples.So SAP is 50 years old, 52 and that's the last big example or so.I think there are more examples and that's where the companies should show themselves.

**25:48**

And so yeah, but Germany can and I believe in the people. I mean, culture maybe has changed, but it's, it's not remotely close to Silicon Valley obviously. And even in the US Silicon Valley is an outlier. But the whole sense that there is good in technology. And I could go into examples of the AI law that US passed. And if you listen to that, it's like, OK, I'm not going to touch it. It's so onerous, the requirements to even play around with AI that I'm not going to start a company doing that.

**26:24**

So once you do that then or even now in schools and stuff and kids use it at home anyway, but the schools are sort of like, no, don't touch it and something's going to go terribly wrong.And that's hold, it's holding us all back, which is a great shame because there's a lot of benefit in that stuff.

A person wearing glasses and smiling

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**Alexander Hertel** 26:43

When we use the the phrase entrepreneur or entrepreneurship, it appears to me that in the last 20-30 years it changed very much from starting a business, hiring people, making money, doing good for the society to getting as much venture capital as possible and scaling as fast as possible.

**27:06**

That's just my observation, you might have a different one. Do you think that we also have to reconsider the way we think about entrepreneurship as a whole? And do entrepreneurs have to actually more engage with challenges for society and not only business models that have the highest return on investment?

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**Tim Bussiek** 27:26

I would absolutely agree. The only question is how, what are the models, what are the formats to do that? I think we have a good one. I think to bring that into so entrepreneurship, like you were also said, like a mindset and even be less than that and use a different word for it maybe.

**27:42**

It's not about the company like we worked with Nifty, if you know them and others who's like, you know, I get all that and start up teams, but it's always like the Champions League of oh, you have to found like these kids and they start, they find an idea and they start a company. No, what about if it's like on the Kreisklasse [district class] that everyone becomes and gets to and don't even call it entrepreneurship, call it self-confidence in being able to do things and from that then I think the financial financing is not that relevant. If it's VC money, if it's Angel money, if it's spin off here there, wherever it doesn't matter so much. The whole question is, you know, can you just let people be in the - hey, we can change things up, self-efficacy.

**28:29**

And there was a study done, 2018 was Pisa with 15 year olds and the Germans were at the last place, in terms of only 60% thought that they could make an impact on the world's problems. It was the saddest thing that I could see and to change that around to just let them accomplish something together in teams. I think that's one of the biggest things that we could do. So, companies, if we find the right model, I think they can, for instance, the ones we work with, they sort of OK - here's 5 challenges that we have. Solve this for us, right? And come up with a social media plan for your generation. Or, you know, do this or do that.

**29:09**

And I think that's one of the best things that we can do to create some kind of where they interact. That is interesting for the companies as well. I think that's also been the problem. Whenever you've had schools and companies interact, it never worked. It was like, oh, there was a teacher, they tried something, they met, but no, there was no result. The students experience was bad. The company's experience was bad. If you can change that, then I think, you know, the companies will take time and money 'cause they do wanna know, get to know those people. And for the students, it's immensely beneficial too.

**29:45**

So, but so we have one format which we believe in obviously, but there might be others and absolutely to your question, should they show up? Yes, and sometimes tell that story. And I think in Germany, people have always gone back to the sort of interesting founding stories. Like Breuninger and all these people who have sort of done things. Like in the US, they would go back to Steve Jobs. I think he still, you know, just keep doing that also on a personal level. So how did they get there?  
And but you know, just allow also the kids to get, like, try out a little bit, right. And yeah, build that in.

 **Alexander Hertel** 30:27  
Two last questions before we finish up. The first is we already talked about wishes, so if you could not only wish, but actually, either change a policy or introduce a totally new policy in Germany, regarding entrepreneurship, what would that policy look like?

 **Tim Bussiek** 30:46  
It would introduce one day per week for at least the higher like 11th and 12th classes, but maybe earlier to do project based learning, agile learning and that would be implemented and also was they all want to do project based but they so far that's sort of on different days and different courses, I think that could be done wouldn't cost anything. It wouldn't change the whole system, but it would make a clear signal to entrepreneurship, starting from the individual for everyone, I think that's also like Social Democrats always said it should be for everyone, which is great Chancengerechtigkeit [equal opportunities], and then the others would have said, well, you know you want performance and you want entrepreneurship.  
Well, here you get both.

**31:32**  
So I think that that would be it and and then you would organise it with, you know, partners from outside allowing them into the schools as well having those challenges.  
But I think that's doable.

 **Alexander Hertel** 31:46  
Great. And final question after speaking with me for the last 35 minutes, are there any final thoughts or any topics we did not cover that you think are important when we talk about the relationship of politics and entrepreneurship?

 **Tim Bussiek** 32:04  
Probably, I think you know, I'll just at least one, in let's say, Nord Rhine Westphalia to try out. But I think you guys do something similar. If there were these test beds.  
So if there's a way that, because as a politician, I understand you don't want to sort of say, OK, this technology, this company should win. You don't want to pick winners. I get that. But on the other hand, it's like sometimes there's highly regulated areas which are correctly highly regulated, like medicine and like schools, you don't want to open that up, but. In those cases, at least allow certain areas where you can experiment in a way and allow companies to show themselves or concepts. And that seems to be something that's left to foundations, and I think it's a very haphazard way. And even now what I fear is like you have startchancen [start opportunities].

**33:00**

And so I think there's 20 Billion EUR spent. But then the schools, because they are clueless. I mean, every school is now picking something and then they'll follow the big trend and it's not going to be very intelligent decision, whereas if you had maybe certain areas. Anyway, so that's something having more of these, maybe test beds in highly regulated areas would work. That's just an idea, but for me as an entrepreneur I can say, of course bureaucracy is an issue. I can give you examples. That it's not made easy to just exist and the Germans have a way of also being right about everything. So I could give you examples also of comparing like with in the US if you want to have an advisor. There's great advisors out there, great people who will actually pay forward and do good things for you. And then you just, there's an agreement for that and then they get a part of your company and it's OK.

**33:58**

But here there's so many like tax implications and things like that. And then also if you wanna hire someone here, just to get started and to try it out, then that's not gonna go because then immediately like their employee -what does that mean in terms of taxes? So to get to the level of even starting anything at all there's already a big sort of - It has to be done right and you have to follow all the rules and to do that is basically impossible for most people. So that's something. I don't know how you create the environment for that, but it's always gonna be a huge like Cliff. You immediately get run into that wall and it's just it's very difficult to get beyond.