



Sarah Hintermayer started to work for Evonik as a process engineer in the fall of 2016. A few weeks later, she was leading the team that would take the concept of a self-healing concrete to market maturity

THE DRIVING FORCE

A good idea is not sufficient in itself—it always needs someone who actively promotes it. Someone like Sarah Hintermayer, who resolutely drove the WallCraft project forward

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Just before Christmas in 2016, Sarah Hintermayer's career path turned in a new direction. Hintermayer, who was 28 at the time, met with her colleagues in Hanau for a brainstorming session. Their task was to develop the bioprocess technology department's submission to the Global Ideation Jam. Evonik enables the winning team of this competition to create its own business, acting like a startup.

The colleagues discussed a series of ideas. Hintermayer was one of those who presented a proposal, which was for a concrete recycling process. The feedback was positive, but the group decided to submit a different approach: concrete that heals itself with the help of bacteria (you can find more details starting on page 10). "I realized immediately that this proposal was further developed than mine," Hintermayer recalls. "So I offered to help promote it."

She quickly became more than just a helper. All the brainstormers in Hanau knew that if a good idea is to be successful, it always needs an individual who actively promotes it and gives it a voice and a face. This person must have great patience and discipline, as well as the passion that is needed to convince others—in other words, an entrepreneurial personality.

"INTRAPRENEUR" ON PROBATION

Back then, Hintermayer had been working at Evonik for only a few weeks. Before that, she had studied and received a doctorate in Munich. This job as a process engineer was her first in the private sector. But she was definitely not a shy newcomer. "Deep in my heart I'm a little go-getter," she says with a laugh. "Once I've thoroughly understood a thing, it's easy for me to explain complex issues in a way that people can understand. That's important if you want to get them excited about something."

This is one of the qualities that convinced her colleagues that she was the right person for the job of "intrapreneur"—an entrepreneur inside the company. From that point on, preparations for the Ideation Jam were in full swing. The concept had to be worked out as concretely as possible by the summer. For months, the team made meticulous preparations and sacrificed quite a few weekends to work on their project, which they had named WallCraft. All of this hard work paid off: The team convinced the jury and won the Ideation Jam 2017.

Hintermayer was now a company founder with a limited term of office: She became the only team member working full-time on the project, and her mission was to promote Wallcraft within the company for a period of 12 months. Because she bore primary responsibility for the project, each of her decisions helped to determine WallCraft's success or failure. What's more,

she was doing many things for the first time. How do you prepare for making a pitch to customers? How do you put together a successful business plan? "For me, challenges like these are exciting," she says. "I learn the most after I've been tossed into cold water."

BUSINESS MEETINGS AND BACTERIAL STRAINS

Hintermayer quickly grew into her new role. She coordinated all the processes of the project and received a separate budget. "I was able to decide on every step myself for the first time," she says. "At the same time, I was constantly aware of the project's overall significance and its goal—that's a great feeling." Between business meetings and networking, she conducted experiments with concrete mixtures and bacterial strains. After less than a year, there was a breakthrough: The initial prototype was finished—a nondescript chunk of gray material that proves that concrete can heal itself.

The news quickly circulated throughout the company. As a result, Hintermayer was given the opportunity to continue working on WallCraft, this time at the Interface and Performance business line and at the Creavis innovation unit. In the months after that, she made her business idea fit for the market. Eventually the time came when she paused for a moment to think about where to go next. "The most important thing for me is to focus completely on a project and make sure I can keep learning something new in the process," she says. Because the project no longer completely fulfilled these two conditions, she passed it on to her successor.

However, she's still enthusiastic about innovations. Today she is creating a new unit at Care Solutions that helps small beauty brands to implement their ideas. In parallel, Hintermayer markets gluten-free flour in her leisure time—and continues to turn her passion for entrepreneurship into action. —

At the Ideation Jam in 2018, Sarah Hintermayer reported on her experiences during her first year as an intrapreneur

