

## Heimo Scheuch Podcast – Episode 25

Transcript

The Greta Generation and the Phenomenon of Moral Authority

March 2023

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to my podcast! I'm Heimo Scheuch, the CEO of Wienerberger and today I have a great pleasure to have a special guest directly from Berlin with me and Mrs. Hoppmann is also the founder of Climate Mind.

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Yes!

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

And I'm looking forward to this discussion. A discussion about society, the change, our perception of the climate crisis and let's start with it. Janna, when I was young I was reading Hemingway and I was passionate about his books and you know Ernest Hemingway he fought in the first world war and then after the war he lived in Paris and this generation was called "The Lost Generation" and they were Americans living in Paris especially and not knowing what the future would bring to them and when I look today, especially now in the Germanic background. Germany, Austria, Switzerland, a lot of young people call them "Letzte Generation, "last generation" and I think it's a little bit frightening for me. If I look at them, what they do when they sit in front of cars in a city and block the traffic and call themselves last generation. Isn't this from your perspective, you are working a lot with people and about the psychology, isn't this a dangerous development?

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Well, I work as a climate psychologist and as a consultant and trainer on training leadership skills for the Civil Society, but also for political leaders and administration, as well as civil society and I think it's not a dangerous development but it's a really understandable development as there are a lot of young people internationally who perceive a lot of fear, sadness and also anger about how, yeah, not enough is happening about the climate crisis. They feel betrayed by companies but also betrayed by their own governments. And we must admit it's not only young people feeling betrayed but also adults worldwide. A lot of adults worldwide are protesting and asking for change. So for me it's really understandable situation in the way of that we really are heading challenging situation challenging crisis um and not having enough solutions at all.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

But isn't it also an aspect of, if I may say so, from a civil society perspective and we'll come to the responsibility for leaders if it's in industry, in business or also in politics later, but isn't it a very important subject, also the own responsibility that each of us has in civil society, because actually every one of us can do something good at the end of the day. And when you are lost somehow you don't know what to do and I would call it the common sense. Common sense means for me to wake up in the morning and to do things that are good for you and for the society and for environment. But I doubt that it is good that I set such, as a sort of actions, like we had for example on the Berlin airport and then find myself three weeks later somewhere in Thailand on a vacation and what is then actually the real sort of interest of these people? Do they really want to change something or is it more or less because I have nothing to do? I'm just provocative for a moment!

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### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

I think a lot of young people have a huge amount of intrinsic motivation to drive societal change, systems change forward towards achieving the sustainable development goals and on the same time, as we all know, leaders on the C-level, but also politicians and people from Civil Society, we always have these contradictions. We call them in psychology the "cognitive dissonance", that we have values on the one side and behaviours on the other and nobody is perfect. How can we manage? Everybody still tries to have a good time and tries to go on vacation, so there's always this contradiction, which of course is not easy to deal with and, yeah, often is portrayed in media. Of course it's a nice topic to talk about, but in the end it's, it's a topic of our time because when we try our best, we will never succeed perfectly until the end, because we live in structures, we live in a context, where sustainable behaviour is not possible so far because there are no sustainable structures.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

That's a very good point and now we come actually, and I appreciate your comment about the individual responsibility and how everybody perceives the current situation, and now let's come a little bit to what we as leaders in business and also in politics and also in media by the way, should play in the future, because you're absolutely right! Is there a sustainable structure in order to manage this well? I think, and I would throw there in our discussion the thesis, that we, and I'm a representative of the industry if I may say so, are doing a lot in this aspect. Not only because regulations are changing, because it's our own only, it's in our own interest to do this. Take for example a company like ours: We produce materials to rebuild the city of three hundred thousand people every year and have a lot of output also the piping, when we do water supply, for example. We can go with the annual output 20 times around the globe every year. So you have a big responsibility towards the society, the people, the environment. At the end of the day, we work a lot with our own people: educate them, responsibility on a plant level, in the in the different management layers. Probably you will say "not enough" and we are doing this more and more. But what I see also, that the changes in government in the State..Management, in the administration are somehow a little bit slow. Ja! And the alignment of interest, that we basically say, "Sustainability is something we really want to achieve", there's a lot of talking and what I miss is the action, if I may say so.

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Walking the talk, yes exactly! That's what we're needing - all around, so internationally we need it in big organizations, politicians, Administration, but also Industries. I think also in a societal dimension, we are there. A lot of values are there, a lot of intentions are there and now it's the time to really act, to not just discuss, but to really put radical in the way of tackling the roots of the problems to really put radical action into place.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

What is your perception? Should the radical action come from the leadership or should it be a common approach?

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Of course both! [Laughing together] We can only find solutions, when all the different levels work together. I'm a big fan of unconventional partnerships of, for example, social

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enterprises, big corporates, civil society, NGOs and academia. I think in the end we need to think about how to find systemic solutions for our systemic problems and we can only find them together. So I think it's about the responsibility, finding the purpose for example of a company. What is the topic, I really want to tackle? For example for Wienerberger it's about affordable fair sustainable buildings and a sustainable living circumstances and finding allies to work together with. I think that's really crucial. So in the end of course we need very much conscious civil society, we need advanced and sustainably, sustainably thinking politicians, a fast and less bureaucratic administration and of course also the leaders, who really dare to also work about themselves and educate themselves being more authentic, because so far, leaders and industry they are not authentic enough to really drive the change as we need to.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

You might be right and as you said yourself at the beginning, we all are only humans and we fail and there's a development to be done and I would say that certainly in business, in the industry, you have people who are not yet at this stage, I agree with you. But on the other hand I will sort of throw a little bit also provocative statement to you again: How can you deal with governments, how can you deal with international bodies like the EU, that get changed every four years and they're in continuous election process? And sustainable means to be long-term, yeah, so we actually must write certain principles in our constitutions, that are not political subjects for every day to discuss, because otherwise every government can change the approach to sustainability, as they like and for us in business, it needs a long-term vision. If you want to make out of Europe net zero carbon, for example area, which is doubt doubtful, because obviously we cannot be isolated on this planet, because we have other big regions, that we have to work with, but if, provided you want to do that, you need to have it on a long-term perspective and you need governments that support this, that actually work in favor of such things and this I miss today, as I may say as a representative of business.

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Of course! We need governments to think long-term, as we need business leaders to think long-term, and people from Civil Society to think long-term and so we need to build structures and on the context where long-term thinking visionary thinking, systems thinking is really appreciated and also rewarded in the end. So as we are now educated so far, we are,.. we are driven by short-term profit and to change this, to change the mindset in all the different sectors is really necessary because future topics are long-term topics and it doesn't make sense to just think about the next five years, when it comes to sustainable living circumstances. Makes sense to really think it for the next 100 years.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

I agree with you a hundred percent..sort of support would you say. The problem that I see from my own and humble experiences that obviously politicians want to get re-elected. So for them it's very critical to have short-term success. That's again a little bit working against your principle of the long-term and in the financial community if I see the investors internationally, not by the way only the Anglo-Saxon investors, but also the European ones, have also still a very short-term mind because it's about profitability, it's about what they can achieve as as short-term profits, so changing this will be a very,

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very tough thing to do I think in the future and it needs a lot of effort from us all! Yeah definitely! Where would you start? With education, with a continuous work with people or convincing them this is the right way to go forward?

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

So we as ClimateMind, we focus on two theories of change from the same time: it's bottom-up change and top-down change and I think we can't do just one, but we need to do both on the same time. As Patagonia also does, the the top-down change on the C-level and on the same time they support with the 1 percent for the planet, they support activist groups. So we do it in a bit similar way. We support the Civil Society movements the NGOs to drive the campaigns forward, to really educate people, to raise awareness on these topics. On the same time we have our leadership programs on sustainability and they're exactly these topics, where we talked about the long-term thinking, the authenticity, the empathy and compassion, that is needed to also work with the intersection of global justice and ecological issues, as well as thinking about how can we build up critical thinking, complexity thinking, systems thinking and also in the end build people who are courageous enough and resilient enough to drive this change, not only for three years but for, yeah a lifetime basically. So rebuild leadership programs to really educate leaders and C-level positions to become an authentic and courageous leader to be prepared to make decisions, that are not only valid and valuable for today, but really for the next couple of decades.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

I think it's very, and I can only say from my personal experience, it's a very good and very valuable sort of impact, that you make there because there's a lot to be done, also on the management side, but if I think through all this and if I look what I said at the beginning law "Lost Generation" ..Shouldn't be sustainability, the climate issue, the environmental issue, all of and the broader holistic way, part of our education system starting from very small? I give you an example: I told you earlier this morning when we met for a glass of good Austrian water, and no coffee, by the way, we talked about that I come from a really a rural background in the Alps of Austria and there obviously it was,.. as a kid you learned planting trees, working with nature and that you need to give something back to nature, when you take something and I think obviously, when you're small and when you're growing, these principles it's easy to understand and to learn and you live with this because then you feel also responsibility towards nature - and today with our globalization on one hand, the more urbanization that we see in people living in cities and spending more times on smartphones and others, it's difficult to get the message across what has to be done. So I think integration processes with respect to what nature means really for us and to make them understand that not others have to change but yourself have to change is also important.

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Yeah, I think education in the best case, it starts at the very beginning with kindergarten and school, but our challenges are that urgent, that we can't wait for the young generation to grow up and wait until they are in the C-leaders positions, so we need to, of course, do both on the same time. We need to educate the young people to be afterwards in responsible positions and to drive the change, when.. when it's when they are in charge, but on the same time, we really need to find a very urgent solutions which are still thought in a long,.. in a long visionary term. So I like the idea of education for

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Transcript

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March 2023

sustainable development that is really focusing on all the different aspects; schools, businesses, universities and so on. We all need to be educated! I totally agree! This topic of nature connectedness, it's not um yeah, we are not connected anymore to nature in this Northern countries of the global North, because we are literally not living with nature anymore. So this is also a re-educating process of understanding, what is actually my position in the world, my position on earth. We as humans often think, we are the only and the very powerful ones, but every person who've already been on the Amazon rainforest or another really big uh biodiversity hotspot directly realizes, we are single humans, we are tiny, we are not powerful enough to really drive biodiversity in another way. Biodiversity is driving us, so understanding that and also being humble about who we actually are and reconnecting to our understanding, that we are just part of the system, we are part of the ecological system and not reading it.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

Absolutely agreed and by the way, in your day-to-day work, when you when you do your work and engage with a lot of different people from social backgrounds, do you see that there's an open-mindedness for this idea and that the best perceive your work as positive - in the business world and also in the more political or administrative area?

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Yes, we receive incredibly, a lot of requests from business leaders from politicians, from administration, from big NGOs, so there is a big interest in understanding more the psychology about sustainability, so we are experts on that, understanding how people perceive climate change and sustainability, understanding why climate anxiety is such a big topic why people are feeling powerlessness and for example and then doing the next step of what what can we actually do about it? Because for example in big companies we actually need to drive a corporate culture of sustainability forward. Every single employee needs to be part of this game, needs to join the journey and how to do this, there's still a very big question, that is open for a lot of organizations. That's why they come to us, to find solutions for them personally, how to engage and encourage people to become more active on sustainability topics.

### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

No very passionate and thank you for your passion and I can only confirm! We just launched 2 years ago a biodiversity program within Wienerberger as you know, for every site and the 20.000 people are very enthusiastic. All the feedback that I get, that they can contribute something and it comes back to what we said at the beginning: Let's start ourselves and do something good about this and not be passive and wait for others and blame others that they have not done something or not,.. are not doing enough. I think, that's very right and I'm grateful that you could join me - thank you very much - on my podcast! Was very passionate to have you here and hope we can engage in much more detailed discussions in the future! Thank you for being here, thank you!

### **JANNA HOPPMANN:**

Let's all join the movement of being a corporate, that is not only net-zero, but net positive.

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### **HEIMO SCHEUCH:**

Absolutely! And I think it's it's like you say: In financial terms, in business terms, we always want to grow and do things better and it's also,..it.. sustainability has to be part of it! We need to do things better - but in a better way, for the environment as such. Thank you very much for joining me, thank you for listening in and hope to see you soon!