Brose wins Fokus 50plus award for progressive HR policy

Jürgen Preil (center), head of HR at Brose Coburg, received the award at a ceremony in Frankfurt am Main from Sibylle Laurischk, who chairs the Bundestag's Family Affairs Committee and is also patron of Fokus 50plus. Left in photo: Sebastian Berblinger of APRIORI AG, the founders of the Fokus 50plus initiative.

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On 22 September, automotive supplier Brose won the Fokus 50plus Best Practice Award for its exemplary HR concepts.

Fokus 50plus assesses HR measures that take account of demographic change in the workforce. The current demographic trend is leading to an increasing proportion of older employees in the labor force. At the same time, people are working longer and, with the low birth rate, there are no longer enough young workers coming through.

Jürgen Preil, head of HR at Brose Coburg, received the award from Sibylle Laurischk at a ceremony in Frankfurt am Main. Sibylle Laurischk chairs the Bundestag’s Family Affairs Committee and is also the patron of Fokus 50plus, an initiative set up by HR and management consultants APRIORI AG.

“An important political concern for me is that organizations and institutions, particularly in industry, should adapt their workforce structure to Germany’s demographic trends and recognize the potential of employees with a wide range of work experience,” the politician explains. A total of 137 companies took part in the Managing Demographics study across Germany. Six firms received awards.

Demographic change presents fundamental challenges to Germany as a production location in the global marketplace. The population in emerging economies like Brazil, Russia, India and China (the BRIC nations) is much younger, so companies all over the

world are increasingly investing in these growth regions – with corresponding impacts on the domestic economy and labor market.

“Partly in response to this trend, our family-run organization took steps early on at its German sites to ensure that, even with an ageing workforce, it can continue to be successful in the intensely competitive automotive supply industry. It is not just about healthy working conditions, but also about raising employees’ awareness long-term of the need to take care of their own health,” explains Jürgen Preil, head of HR at Brose’s Coburg site.

The study conducted by the members of Fokus 50plus’s scientific advisory board focused on company strategies and concepts in the areas of recruitment, career opportunities, continuing education, health management and work organization. Through structured interviews and questionnaires, the survey analyzed to what extent the potential of experienced employees is assessed correctly and what sustainable adaptation processes have been initiated.

“One of the things that convinced the judges was our recruitment policy,” reports Preil, who accepted the award on behalf of the company. Here, Brose responded to the demographic trend early on, launching its “Senior citizens wanted” campaign in 2003. In stark contrast with the attitude of most German companies, Brose was expressly targeting experienced candidates aged 45 and over. “Today in our HR work we take on candidates regardless of age as a matter of course – what matters to our family-run business is their qualification for the job,” stresses Preil.

The continuing development of Brose Working World, a project introduced in 2001, also reflected well on the firm in the Fokus 50plus study. “Our health management, benefits and work organization measures received clear recognition,” continues Preil.

For instance, Brose places a high value on promoting and maintaining the physical and mental fitness of its staff in good time through lifephase-oriented HR policy. “Our health services cover employees in all age groups. Our multi-award-winning Working World with its exemplary benefits caters well for their different needs,” explains Preil.

Staff have access to health and fitness facilities, which they and their families can use seven days a week. These include exercise machines, classes, a sauna and massages. Staff are treated by experienced company doctors and physiotherapists. The different age structures are also taken into account in the area of staff and family advisory services. As well as the Brose Kids Club, a company-owned facility that provides innovative childcare and educational services for the children of Brose employees, there is a comprehensive range of advisory services that includes advice on caring for dependents.

The automotive supplier has adjusted to the physical capacity of older employees in a number of ways, especially in production. A stress matrix for all workplaces helps managers and HR staff assign employees according to physical criteria. In order to achieve the company’s targets in teams of mixed age groups, employees are trained to work at several workplaces. Varying their activities avoids repetitive physical strain in one position. There are also individual workplaces to give employees the chance to determine their own pace of work to a large extent.

Production staff who are no longer physically fit enough are offered suitable activities outside the piecework area. However, before employees switch to a less demanding workplace they need to show some initiative by being willing to take part in an in-house training program including back care and exercises. When an employee returns from sick leave, employer and employee assess together whether their absence was caused by the working environment. If this proves to be the case, a remedy is found immediately.

“These measures illustrate how our company is responding in good time to the changing age structure of workforces,” says Jürgen Preil. Demographic change will continue to play a central role in HR activities at Brose, including increasingly at its sites outside Germany. “The Fokus 50plus award is another incentive for us to continue developing our HR concepts to attract qualified employees, to train them further, to win their commitment to the organization and to keep them productive and motivated.”