

**A Tribute to Götz Werner at the BIEN CONGRESS,
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Götz Werner was an entrepreneur and one of the most influential proponents of an unconditional basic income in Germany in the years from around 2005 to 2018. Even long before that, he advocated an unconditional basic income. But it was not until the beginning of this century that it gained public interest. He died this year, 2022, on February 8th. What made him so influential was, on the one hand, of course, his social position as the head of a very large company. But more than that he was inspiring because he was completely authentic. What he said was covered by his person. And because what he said had a spiritual, or let's just say, a real human aspect. He did not moralize, but shared insights from experience that logically resulted in an unconditional basic income and its financing through Value Added Tax. What made him special was that he came to the idea of an unconditional basic income for everybody from entrepreneurial experience.

In 1973 he had opened his first store. He had painted the walls and laid the floor himself together with his first employee, Helga Weiß, and was curious to see whether customers would come. Customers did come. And they bought so much that the cash registers ran so hot that they started to smoke. They had to be replaced with more efficient ones. It was a drugstore. Götz Werner comes from a family of druggists. His father didn't want to hear about his ideas. He kicked him out. Now, here, in his own store, he implemented the discounter principle, which was still quite new at the time. The company, dm Drogerie Markt, that he built together with the many who work there, who deliver the goods, and shop there as a customer, today has over two thousand stores and forty-three thousand employees in Germany alone, is represented in another 12 countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, has an annual turnover of around 12 billion Euros and a total of sixty-six thousand employees

and around 4000 stores. Even 14 years ago, Götz Werner could say: every day in Germany, 1 million people come to our stores and experience dm.

In 2008, Götz Werner withdrew from operational management and joined the company's Supervisory Board. What makes the difference of dm? How does Götz Werner's entrepreneurial experiences extend beyond the scope of the company to his commitment to an unconditional basic income? As the retail chain grew, as more and more stores were added, Götz Werner realized that he was no longer getting anywhere with instructions and uniform guidelines on how to act in the stores. He noted that things will only continue if the employees in the stores act in a self-responsible and entrepreneurial manner. After all, they themselves know best what kind of clientele they have, what is in demand in their region, what they need in their branch, how they can best work together. His advisor at that time, Hellmuth ten Siethoff, told him: "If you want them to be entrepreneurial, you have to give them the tools you have as an entrepreneur." This is how it was done. An entire hierarchical level of area managers was abolished. Branches to power!

All employees in the stores have insight into the company's figures. They can compare their sales with those of other stores and exchange advice with each other. They have insight into the salary levels of all employees in their branch as well as in other. They can independently commission a craftsman if something needs to be repaired in the store. They can decide for themselves whether to employ anyone else in the store and have a say in what their product range is like. Within a certain frame they can decide and carry out many things at their own discretion. All services provided to them by the corporate headquarters are billed to their branch. This has no influence on their income, but they can see how much value is being created for them in other departments of the Group. And they can decide to use less of it.

This increases everyone's awareness of services rendered and claimed by others, and it more quickly shows up the pay of internal settlements. So it's not just nice slogans like: "Employees are our capital" or "People are our focus". Instead, they take this seriously. And this is not inconsistent with business improvement. On the contrary.

"An enterprise is a social-artistic cultural event."

Human being is at the center? Well, no, Götz Werner says: the human being is the goal. Being human is not a state, but a process of development. The human being is not a means, but an end. The development of human beings is the purpose of all our efforts. The human is not the means for the functioning of the company or whatever else. It is ongoing about the becoming human. Which in turn also means better employees in the working community.

"The company is a platform for biographies."

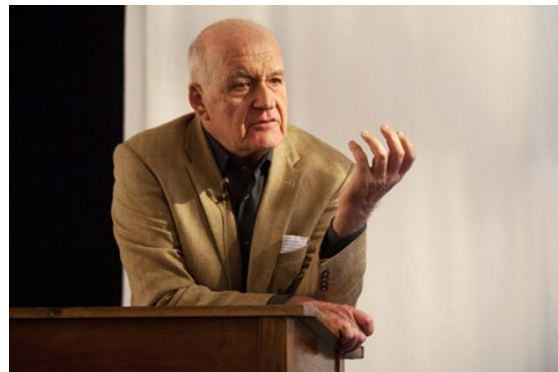


Götz Werner saw it this way: Work serves to develop skills. An income is needed by everybody to be able to work. You need an income to be able to buy what others do for you. First you need an income, then you can take part in society and then – show what you can! In a society based on the division of labor, no one can provide for themselves anymore. To live, you need an income. Then you can start working. The company is a platform for developing and contributing one's own abilities to others, is giving the space to discover one's own talents and unfold them, enabling people to find and shape their lives, to expand their horizons and awareness and experiences and to put one's actions in a meaningful context with what others need.

Income is the prerequisite. Work can only be made possible. Payments are always directed into the future. These insights were the result of his entrepreneurial activity, not detached ideals. His leadership principle was suction instead of pressure. *Sog statt Druck* in German.

"Here I am a human being, here I get in."

Creating conditions, opening spaces that interest others, where they want to get involved in, what they see as a task, a goal they want to connect with, a challenge for themselves in which they see meaning.



"Leadership is only legitimate if it is leadership for the self-leadership of the other. Otherwise, leadership is manipulation and prevents the other person."

The apprentices in the company are called learners because they learn themselves. They can figure out for themselves how to do the job best in their own way. They can try things out and make mistakes.

"Leading today can only mean: leading consciousness. And consciousness is led with questions. Not with answers, but by evoking questions."

Not by giving directives, but by awakening initiative. In the initiative, human appears as I-human.

"I am not a director, I'm an evoker."

With answers, the inner self falls asleep. With questions, the inner self wakes up. With questions it becomes active. With answers you are satisfied and does not think for yourself. 'Trust is good, control is better.' Lenin is said to have said this sentence.

Götz Werner said: "When you look at this statement in the light, it can only mean: trust for me, control for you. How do you want to establish a community, a development community, where people find their path in life, if you say: trust for me, control for you? Impossible. Don't we live by giving trust to the other?" Trust is good, control is better; many see it that way. Götz Werner also started out that way. But the bigger the company, the more elaborate and impossible the control becomes. And people never become self-reliant that way. "Confidence ennobles man, eternal guardianship inhibits his maturation.", the Baron von Stein said. And that's what Götz Werner said. Is the human being a stimulus-response creature? No, after Götz Werner, he is a developing being. A giraffe dies as the giraffe it was born as. A human being evolves in his life and changes.

"Everyone is an entrepreneur."

Insofar as everyone undertakes his or her life, shapes his life. And Götz Werner liked to add: believe me, this undertaking is guaranteed to end deadly. It was important to Götz Werner to see the other person as a human being, just as he is himself, and to concede to the other person what he conceded to himself.

If division of labor, then collaboration. If collaboration, then everyone is equally important to achieving the common goal. Then equal eye level. To know-why was more important to Götz Werner than the know-how. The why is followed by the how. Of course, you need know how, but more important is to know why. This is the question of meaning. Why do we sell toothpaste? This question was a theme in a seminar for which the management of dm Drogerie Markt had to write something. They thought up the most amazing things. On the last day of the seminar, Götz Werner came in, saw the fancy stuff they had written, and said, "Well, we're selling toothpaste because that's all I learned."

Where it became idealistic and moral, Götz Werner broke that by saying something very simply practical. But if you asked him a question for which you expected a simple practical and functionally business answer, you would get an answer from him that opened up a space of humanity and awareness that went far beyond the expected. 'Liberty, equality, fraternity', taken

seriously everywhere in life, were guiding stars for him. Everything that was done was measured according to these. Whereby the way there is not always the straight way. Freedom, equality – basic income.

If you don't have a dream, you don't have a future, Götz Werner stated. That applies to society as well as to our own lives. Götz Werner's entrepreneurial attitude was to give confidence to the other. As a result, many in the company have risen above themselves. But sometimes that has gone wrong. People were trusted who used this in a negative way or proved to be destructive for the company. They were then dismissed. But that didn't stop Götz Werner from giving confidence always again. Because the main point was not that this always produced positive results, but that this is the way to deal with people, because people are developmental beings. And that means: in their very own and perhaps not at all pleasing way. Different than me. But equal with me as a human being. This was not superficially about morality, not a nice ideology, or a means to the end of commercial success, but about cognition. Cognition of the human being. The human being is not the means but the end of the undertakings. Income enables work. Work is human development. Working time is time of your life and not an antithesis to life.

"The economy has the task of freeing people from labor."

Freeing to leisure or freedom? Freeing to their meaningful activity. In the world based on the division of labor, in external supply, we always work for others, not for ourselves, and trust that others will work for us. We live from the initiative of others. So it's only good for me if as many others as possible can take action, can take the initiative. Initiative-enhancing framework, that was what Götz Werner was all about in the company. But that's just as true for society as a whole. The fact that Götz Werner was in favor of an unconditional basic income is no kindness. It is not the benevolence of a rich company owner who wants to do something good in the evening of his life. It is only a consequence of his findings.

Among these findings was that a price for something, for a good, a product, a service, dissolves completely into income once you follow the path that money takes from paying a price. It is not the thing, the refrigerator, the bus ticket, the potato that takes the money, needs the money, that costs money, but what it costs are income shares of all those who have contributed to the creation and provision of the product or service. This includes income shares of those employed or contracted by the public sector, by the state, who contribute to the circumstances and conditions under which it is possible in the private sector to produce and make services and goods available. For their income – public sector – the taxes are levied. And these are also paid for in the price of a product or service ultimately by the end customer, the consumer. The money that pays the taxes and charges, whether as income tax or profit tax or any other tax, comes out of what consumers pay as the price of the final product. It comes from what consumers spend. The consumer bears the tax even if it is later deducted from earned income or business profits or levied on specific goods. In the price the consumer bears the share that goes to the state as tax. These are discoveries of Götz Werner, not intentions. The intention is to make this known. And to draw the consequences.

Unconditional basic income, because it frees up people's initiative. Enabling the creative power of work. In the initiative the human being appears as an I am, an entity, that develops and recognizes itself. Change all taxes to a tax that is not only born in prices, but also levied there, the value added tax. So that the creative power of capital is not hindered. Capital here meant as the force configuring the cooperation and interaction of all components of the company, which is expressed in equity. Equity – *Eigenkapital* in German – is – according to Götz Werner – the figure on the balance sheet that indicates the creative power. This figure refers to nothing visible, no monetary item in the company. It indicates the creative power of the enterprise. With the consumption tax, this creative power remains unhindered. It is not the service provider who pays the tax, but the service recipient. Value added tax and unconditional basic income were the two sides of a medal, that Götz Werner saw as progress. And the two fit together.

The basic income is levied as a tax component in prices. Even before that, everyone's basic income was a share in the prices. Because, as already said, spending money for a price is paying the income of other. Including the basic income component in all earned income in both the private and public sectors and the existing state transfer income. With the introduction of a UBI the basic income amount for all is in the price as well, but as a tax share. The basic income amount, levied as tax and transferred separately as UBI, may disappear in all other transfer income and earned income. The latter will be a matter of negotiation in the labor market. To the extent that the basic income portion disappears in other income, the basic income tax does not raise prices. The point is that basic income should become unconditional. "It is already financed", emphasized Götz Werner. "We have enough services and goods for everybody, and we could produce even more. Everything that can be produced can also be financed - provided we have the sincere will to do so.", as Götz Werner liked to quote Oswald von Nell-Breuning. Funding is a question of whether we want it. Götz Werner was not concerned with this for merely moral reasons, but out of insight into the necessity of these measures for the progress of people and mankind.

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