

Press Info

Der The War of Minds

Innovation attracts talent.

SoMa. South of Market in San Francisco. Previously in this district – directly located on the waters of the bay – there was an abundance of storage facilities. They still exist – but now they are virtual. I am a guest at Dropbox, one of the largest virtual storage facilities for data worldwide. Over 300 million people and 4 million companies use Dropbox to store, manage, and distribute photos and documents. In 2007, the company moved from Boston to San Francisco – the first business premises consisted of an apartment with two bedrooms. The times have changed. Inspiring loft floors and significantly more people are now on board. And this, precisely, is now a challenge in the country of unlimited possibilities: to retain the limited number of brilliant minds so that they stay with the company that hired them, and don't move to a competitor.

In addition to the many amenities in terms of sports and leisure, Dropbox offers a canteen that is legendary. Although canteen is already the wrong word, because in Germany, we still have a sense of "I'm going out to eat..." Here, it is called "Tuckshop," and is led by Brian Mattingly, a native of Britain. A cook, who has learned in starred kitchens, and was previously chief chef at Apple and Google. His goal is to use his culinary skills to bolster the innovative power of the company and to give techies good, healthy food along the way. There's breakfast, lunch, and dinner – the menu has never been repeated since Mattingly started at the company. He sees the company restaurant as a perfect way to promote communication and collaboration. Want to spark your appetite? Then take a look at Tuckshop's Facebook page.

Three meals a day are also provided by quixey.com, a search engine for apps based on the main street of Mountain View: Castro Street. In the middle of this food mile, between Chinese food and a gyros place, is an open shop window. Strung in the window is a clothes line, on which hang notices about vacant jobs. And, at the same time, information about the advantages that one can expect when hired: alternative kosher or vegan cuisine; yoga classes; free selection of computer hardware; and (especially by American standards) comprehensive health insurance for the entire family. Of course, one's environment should also be suitable – innovative interiors are supposed to ignite the creative cells. Google allows its employees to work in completely different bureaus – variety, inspiration, and fun included. A quick look at a meeting room is like looking at the inner life of an Airbus. Under the California sun, however, conferences are also held outside.

On the Google campus in Mountain View, I discover a conference bike, which I have observed in Germany so far only in connection with Father's Day tours. Here at Google, seven colleagues can take their seats on the bike and bring their innovative enthusiasm into motion. Don't forget your helmet! Many German companies still seem to have difficulties with such ideas – after all, we are programmed to think that work must be hard. A lot of work should be easy and fun – as the success of these young companies proves. Everything pretty, yoga, coffee machine, etcetera, says Jason Aiken, product manager at 99designs.com, which I visited in San Francisco. For him, this is now just standard. Many folks nowadays are concerned with doing something different. To change the lives of people.

99designs brings clients and designers together, arranging design tasks such as logo designs. He gets reports, from clients who say their logo was the beginning of an entrepreneurial success. Or, an Indonesian designer they arranged a job for, who initially worked from an Internetcafe, and who was able to buy a computer from his first earnings and then, later, gave his parents a house. To be involved in such stories, to do something meaningful, that is suitable to bind good people to a company, Jason says.

But is that all innovative? The implementation yes, the idea itself is not. In the 1930s, Walt Disney – a Steve Jobs of his era – already ensured in his company that his employees were doing well – creativity depends on that. He brought together the best architects and designers of the time to create a cheerful work environment. An air conditioning system was installed, which was a special feature at that time. In order to inspire his people, he established training programs, invited exciting personalities to lectures – and there was the company's own golf course. His goal was for work to be relaxed, without pressure. In a video you can watch at the Disney Family Museum in San Francisco, witnesses from that time remembered: you could be proud and feel secure. Whether you would like to be inspired by Dropbox or Disney, it actually doesn't matter. Sometimes old ideas can bring new life into the place. And if the place is also built by star architect Sir Norman Foster – like right now on 1 Facebook Way (the address "1601 Willow Road" in Menlo Park directly opposite the construction site was probably too profane) – that's also an advantage. Who doesn't want to live and work so beautifully?

About Gerriet Danz

Gerriet Danz has been one of the most recognized experts on innovation and creativity for over two decades. The lectures of this passionate lateral-thinker, multiple startup founder, and best-selling author (CAMPUS/Random House) are as inspiring and unusual as the mix of his experiences. He worked initially as creative director of the international advertising agency BBDO, supporting global players in the development of innovations. His second career led to television: Gerriet Danz developed new TV formats, and even moderated the knowledge game-show classic: JEOPARDY. Motivating, humorous, and practical, he describes in his appearances how companies can create the perfect innovation climate and overcome creativity barriers. "One of the best in his field!" writes *Computer Week*; "It's hailing ideas..." says *GQ*. And *Der Spiegel* asked him, "...what really matters." Gerriet Danz is a visiting lecturer at the Steinbeis Hochschule Berlin, advises the European Patent Office in The Hague, among others, is a member of the German Speakers Association as well as of GSF Global Speakers Federation Toronto, and is a winner of the CONGA Award in the "Speakers & Coaches" category.

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