



## **Barbara Wilson**

### **The Team wins.**

"I have a great boss" is a sentence that you don't hear much in the business world. But Barbara Wilson means just what she says. "My boss is a wonderful team leader," explains the 31-year-old. "She always encourages us to learn more and think about the next step in our career. If you want to change your career and go down a different path, then she'll help you do that." Wilson knows that this doesn't happen very often in the working world. "It's always something that I've enjoyed," she says, "that your bosses encourage you to share new ideas. And they really do listen. There's a lot of collaboration that happens with idea sharing and idea generating. Because of course we all want to move forward and be successful."

However, Barbara Wilson is in no hurry to change her career path again. She works in Supply Chain Management for commercial vehicle tires in Fort Mill, South Carolina, and she is so happy there that she has made the state her permanent home. "I'm originally from Ohio," she says. "But now I live here." She still misses her home a little. "In Ohio it does rain a lot, but they have all four seasons there. And I like the people there. They're very direct, and huge sports fans." Is she one too? "Me? Of course! I am from Ohio!" she says laughing. "I'm a Browns fan. They lose a lot, but they're our local heroes, so I have to support them." Since she's been working in Fort Mill, she can't go to the football stadium to see the Browns play home games any more, but that doesn't mean she misses out. "There are quite a lot of people here from Ohio. We get together and watch the games on TV. That feels a bit like home."

Back in Ohio, she studied business administration and specialized in sales and marketing. "My degree was very practice-oriented," she says. "It was a good basis for my career. I started at Continental just six months after finishing my degree." Before she switched to Supply Chain Management, she gained several years' experience first in inside sales and then in outside sales. She started in truck tire sales, then switched to special tire sales. "It was a really exciting time for me. It's a very technical job, and you have to know all the different vehicles. I had to learn all that first." Now, whether it's airport shuttles, baggage transporters, cranes, forklifts, container transporters or even trucks and buses – a whole new world has opened up for her. "I had so much fun doing that," she says. "I was happy to dive into the material."

It even went so far that customers called her directly when they had technical questions on individual tires. But when she changed position within Continental after a while, she became familiar with outside sales. "I was really surprised about all the different companies that I got to know, from tradesman's workshops through bottling facilities to drug and foodstuff suppliers. Those are areas that I never had the chance to check out before. The variety in this job is really unique."

Barbara Wilson found that her familiarity with both inside and outside sales was of great advantage when she eventually switched to Supply Chain Management. "I think that this benefits my current job," she says, "because I'm able to understand the sales mentality, I understand the systems that they're using, and I understand our customers. As a result, I'm able to communicate to them effectively what needs to be done on a supply-chain level." This



communication between two parties is extremely important to her. "I'm a sort of mediator who looks for the best possible solution with the two sides. I enjoy it – I have a lot of fun always coming up with new solutions and being the best possible intermediary for my colleagues and our customers."

Soon she will be able to communicate her solutions even more effectively, because she is currently learning Spanish. Every day a Spanish teacher comes to the company to teach Barbara and her entire team. "I think it's great," Wilson says, "that we're taught the language here. In my work, I often deal with customers in Mexico and Ecuador. We have to work together to get things moving and that's much easier if we speak the same language."

Barbara Wilson doesn't just work with her team and learn the new language with them. "We get on so well that we also meet up outside work. We've become friends. I think that has a lot to do with the fact that we're treated as people here at Continental, not as numbers." Because she has switched department several times, she has had to get to know a new group of colleagues each time, but has not forgotten her old ones. "We write each other mails on holidays, and go out in the evenings," she says. "You stay in touch here regardless."

More often than not, conversation with colleagues stops at work-related topics. For a lot of people, this prevents them meeting up with colleagues outside work. Not Barbara Wilson. "We simply like talking about work. And that's why I would recommend working at Continental to my friends. I have recommended working at Continental to friends of mine. And in fact, to most of my friends I don't even say anything, I just talk about work and that I really enjoy my job and I like my company. And they're always saying things like: 'you've got to get me in there!'"

It's not as if she doesn't have anything else to talk about when she is out and about with her colleagues and friends. "I spend a lot of my free time with them—we go shopping or to the cinema, or we go out to eat. Actually, I'm also a member of a gym, but I haven't been so much recently, because I'd much rather meet up with my friends. Now I've simply persuaded my friends to always come with me to the gym," she laughs. "Now that's perfect!"

When the results of a recent survey of employees in the Charlotte area, which includes the Continental Fort Mill site, were published, Barbara Wilson was not at all surprised. "Continental was ranked as one of the top ten places to work in the Charlotte area," she says, "and I think it's fantastic that I get to work at a place like that."