



## **Geert Roik**

### **The Idea Promoter.**

When his door is open, it is open to anyone, be they engineer or manager. "If someone has a good idea, they should just come to me and tell me about it," says Geert Roik, his eyes twinkling. Almost thirty years ago, he started at Continental as an engineer himself in Research and Development. So he knows exactly how important it is for the boss to lend an ear when you want to cook up something interesting.

Today, Geert Roik is the boss himself, the head of Global Research and Development at Continental Commercial Vehicle Tires. The 58-year-old does not need a tie; he exudes plenty of charisma even in casual attire. But he relies on the creativity of his colleagues because the range of products is huge and the requirements in the different markets are varied. Customers in Asian countries want completely different tires to those in North America or Central Europe. In addition, Roik and his people do not have all that much time to develop new tires. "Things like that used to take four years or longer," explains Geert Roik. "The new tires had to travel up to 800,000 kilometers on the road in testing procedures and then be analyzed again." Today, the research team uses state-of-the-art computer programs that simulate the stress on new tires.

A wide variety of knowledge is called for here, about the rubber compound and the physics of tires, as well as about specific conditions and temperature behavior. Geert Roik studied mechanical engineering; he has been developing tires for longer than most people have been driving cars. He says: "The tasks are incredibly complex; nobody can know every last detail of every area at the same time." So the head has experts to advise him, who can offer knowledge about every imaginable detail in their particular field. "I know that I have the best people. I can rely on their knowledge – and am happy to use it." The final decision about a new development is made as a team. The vote of the relevant experts, "who know exactly what they are talking about," is a decisive factor.

The experiences of other departments of the Commercial Vehicle Tires business unit are considered as well – "in order to swiftly examine a subject from all angles." Over the years, Geert Roik has built up a broad network at Continental. He sees this as the basis for successful work. For example, his department collaborates with truck manufacturers and universities. This also provides opportunities for recruiting talent for the team. Roik knows that hardly any university graduate has a penchant for commercial vehicle tires: "I doubt anybody dreams of tires – tires need to be discovered," he says with a smile. "Those who start out with us like the environment in our technology center."

If someone has a good idea, in Roik's team it makes no difference how long they have been working at the company, how old they are, or what position they hold in the organizational chart. And of course it also doesn't matter where they come from. Geert Roik is proud to say that the employees currently developing in his department – which include an increasing number of women – come from 55 different countries. "Diversity is one of our greatest strengths," he says. "We think further and wider!" Also, he explains that there is a difference between, for example, a Chinese person developing a tire for China and someone who knows neither the market nor the language doing it. "And of course it is very motivating to develop a great product for your home country."



Young people from eight countries are currently starting their professional careers in the trainee pool. English is the working language. "Nobody needs to speak a word of German to work with us," says Roik. "The central task of the pool is for the trainees to organize their own training and start at Continental in the form of a project." Even those at the start of their careers benefit from the flat hierarchy that Roik exemplifies. "New employees in particular challenge established structures and often provide valuable impetus." And that is why his door is always open to them as well.