



Barry Guildford

He just can't work without passion.

A few hundred meters above a New Zealand canyon, Barry Guildford had the choice, for his first ever bungee jump, whether to opt for the easy jump or the slightly less easy one. He said "Give me the hardest one." But it's not as if the young Brit wasn't scared to throw himself backwards into the void with only a flimsy rope to catch him—on the contrary, you could almost have heard his knees knocking.

And he must have felt the same when he came to Germany to take on the role of Head of Marketing for truck tires in the Europe, Middle East, Africa region (EMEA for short). Or at least that's what his friends thought. But this time they were wrong.

Barry Guildford had already made a few career moves before he moved to Hanover, but in fact he had only ever dreamed of one thing: "I absolutely wanted to be a professional footballer," he says, then adds with a smirk, "but then so does nearly every young boy in the UK." So he decided to study Business Studies specializing in marketing. When he discovered he couldn't become a footballer, he at least wanted to have a job in which there was room for creativity. And preferably a job to do with cars - fast cars! So when he finished his degree, he applied for positions specifically with car manufacturers and suppliers. His first job was in marketing for a European automotive company, but just 18 months later a position in product management at Continental Tyre Group enticed him away. It was the start of a varied career.

For he had never quite let go of his dream to become a footballer. So barely six months later, Barry Guildford took the bold decision to move to Australia, so that he could at least say that he had really tried to fulfill his dream at one time in his life. "It was completely mad," he says, "but it worked!" In fact, he was to be selected by a club in the Australian National Soccer League to play for its team, the only one out of 120 players, who took part in an open trial. A little time later, he switched to the Vietnamese soccer league. An experience that made a profound impression on him.

"The transfer to Vietnam happened incredibly quickly. Suddenly I was standing in an airport, didn't understand a word anyone was saying, hadn't a spare dime, had missed my connecting flight, and didn't have a phone number or contact name at the soccer club. Nothing."

So when his friends in England asked him if he was anxious about moving to Continental in Germany, he could smile to himself.

He had managed to live out his dream, even though it didn't last very long. An injury forced Guildford to hang up his football boots once and for all. Barry Guildford returned to England, and returned to Continental. "My experiences overseas changed me," he says. "Before, I was impetuous and impulsive. Going to Australia and Vietnam was probably the best thing that could have happened to me at that time. It helped me to grow up." A fact that apparently boded well for his old and new employer. "Continental was fantastic with me," says Guildford. "I was taken on again, I was promoted, and given the opportunity to develop, to make a career for myself."



Over ten years, he worked in various roles, from Brand Manager to Marketing Manager, through to General Sales Manager. He grew with the company and got to know it better from all these different vantage points, including truck tires and specialty tires. Guildford was comfortable at Continental, he felt he was in the right place—and on the right track.

But then another huge career move suddenly beckoned, to a different company. "It seemed like the opportunity of a life time," he says, almost apologetic. "I couldn't turn it down. But I was miserable there. The job was not at all what I had expected."

At that company, Guildford experienced first hand a completely different company culture and way of working. He discovered that everything he had taken for granted in his years at Continental was in no way a given in the rest of the working world. So he came back to Continental again—or, as he puts it, "back home"—because, he says "I like the company's approach. It's more about what you can do than about what you can't. It's good that if you have an idea that the company is interested in, then it is acted on, the company supports you and helps you to implement this idea."

Today he is responsible for Marketing Truck Tires in the EMEA region. Europe, the Middle East, and Africa—a region that represents a particularly exciting challenge for Guildford.

"These three regions are very different. Even Europe alone is not a homogeneous area. We cannot simply assume that exactly the same approach will be suitable for each country. And that is exactly what makes my job so exciting."

Even though, in his private life, he now prefers riding a motorcycle and can hardly wait to get his bike out of the garage and back on the road at the end of every winter, in his professional life he is genuinely happy to have ended up in Commercial Vehicle Tires.

"For me, Commercial Vehicle Tires is a fantastic place to work, because I can essentially be myself there. I am able to express myself freely and think about things in a different way, and the environment there allows me to push myself to do the very best that I can."

But it is not just the environment itself and the corporate culture that he values so highly. "I have worked in a whole range of different fields in the tire industry," he says, "but I find the area of truck tires fascinating. The most interesting aspect is the customers' commitment to the product and the services that we offer them. Customers are passionate and knowledgeable about the product, because it has a direct impact on their business. And, in my estimation, this is something quite unique."

Guildford noticed this passion when he first started working for Continental in 2000, and it remains a key factor for him today because, he says, he couldn't work in a place where there was no passion. "I want to make a difference, and I want my team to make a difference. Of course," he adds, "I want to see success - success for our business, success for my team, and also personal success. At the end of the day, I'm always aspiring to move things forward both professionally and personally. That's why I do everything that I do with passion."