



## Thierry Wipff

### One for All, All for Conti.

Thierry Wipff highly values his employees, but sometimes he has a bit of an issue with them: "They work when I sleep, and they sleep when I work," Wipff says, laughing. The Frenchman is head of Production in the Commercial Vehicle Tires business unit at Continental and is therefore responsible for production in eight plants that are scattered across the globe. Keeping communication flowing despite the different time zones is one of the challenges the 50-year-old is faced with every day. "I travel a lot and am often on site," he explains, "I like to walk through the plants and talk to people – which I call '*walk and talk*.'"

The closeness that develops during these visits helps him to realize his vision: "I would like the different production locations to pull together, exchange experiences, and learn from one another." Once every quarter, Thierry Wipff visits each of the eight plants worldwide where Continental manufactures commercial vehicle tires. But even from his office in Hanover, he maintains a close exchange of information with his "virtual team," as he calls it. "They receive an email from me every day. And we have a telephone conference once a week."

Thierry Wipff has been working at Continental since 2001; initially as a plant manager in Clairoix, France, and then in Timisoara, Romania. The slim man, who still looks almost youthful with his thick black hair, distinctive glasses, and shy smile, has been the head of Production at Continental Commercial Vehicle Tires for three years. "At first, I wasn't sure whether I could feel enthusiastic about commercial vehicle tires," the technology fan admits. "Today, I understand why the employees have such a passion for commercial vehicle tires. We make tires that we can be proud of."

Speed and streamlined processes – Thierry Wipff wants these features in production as well. He learned the meaning of "*lean production*" at a Japanese electronics company in France after completing his degree in engineering. When there is a problem, his employees shouldn't spend long racking their brains, but instead reach for the phone and ask their colleagues at other locations. "Often, someone already knows the solution." The production manager wants to make things happen: "Working on projects, supervising processes, training people, creating networks, involving people from different cultures in processes – I love all that."

Wipff knows a few things about different cultures: He grew up in Morocco, and even though he had a "nice, carefree childhood" there, it wasn't enough for him. He was just 14 years old when he left his family and moved to France by himself. "I wanted to make more of my life. And I wanted to stand on my own two feet." Wipff went to a military school because he didn't want to ask his mother and father for money for a boarding school. He preferred to replace the luxury of his parents' house with a modest room. "My way of dealing with people and being close to them comes from this phase of my life. In military school, I learned to accept people the way they are, to work with people without reservations, and to see differences as an advantage." Wipff carries this sense of community with him through his entire working life, whether in France, Romania, or now from Germany to the whole world.



The father of two has little time for much competition within a company. Instead, Wipff helps plant, production, and quality managers to build contacts. He urges the people in his business unit to share good ideas. And to constantly improve. "Even the best plant can still learn something from the others," he believes. "Especially as technologies are always advancing at a rapid pace. Moreover, work is much more fun without competitiveness!"