

Podcast with Christian Lietz, employee at the ZIM (Centre for Information Technology and Media Management) at the University of Potsdam

Intro: A warm welcome to all listeners! Our podcast aims to introduce you to students, teachers, as well as employees from the administration at the University of Potsdam. We interviewed people with and without disabilities. We wanted to hear from them, just how inclusive the University of Potsdam is as a place of study, and as an employer.

Christian Opitz: Well, a wonderful evening to you all. A warm welcome to our podcast. I have with me here today Mr. Christian Lietz. Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

Christian Lietz: Yes, hello. It's nice to be here. I am Christian Lietz, as you've already mentioned. I am 28 years old and have been here at the University of Potsdam for three years, meanwhile as an employee and I work as a systems administrator here at the ZIM, mostly responsible for Box.UP, maybe one or the other already know about it. That's the cloud service for the University of Potsdam and IT, my hobby, being my area of work. I like working here and I've actually started as a research assistant, and about my impairment I can only say: it's an invisible disability. I am an epileptic but fortunately without major episodes. Knock on wood in this case. But even so, I still have to deal with a slew of mental impairments. They range from concentration problems, to nausea, to headaches. These are the impairments with which I have to deal with on a daily basis. Even mood throughs. That's not always easy.

Christian Opitz: I can imagine, I can imagine. That sounds really interesting, even the work is so interesting and very useful for the university. What drove you to work at the University of Potsdam? IT as your hobby or something special at the university?

Christian Lietz: I've stumbled upon the university by accident. I've actually studied something else at a different university but started this assistant job while I was still enrolled there, during a project at the university's library and kind of transitioned over to the ZIM rather smoothly. I've studied something akin to IT, it's always been my area, that's why it was so nice and practical to get into IT here at the university.

Christian Opitz: That sounds really, really interesting. Yes, a very fortunate accident. What kind of experiences have you made because of your disability within your workplace? Like, with colleagues, supervisors, or other employees?

Christian Lietz: I have to say mostly positive. Not many people know about it. Obviously my supervisor and 2-3 colleagues. My supervisor has to know. what reassured me the most is that everyone has been really great about it. They do offer me understanding. Especially my boss. If I ever experience a bad period or anything similar or if I'm at the doctor more often it's very important to me: they don't treat me differently. I've only told them later on they didn't know from the start. There's always like slight anxiety that I've carried with me that they're gonna treat me differently afterwards.

Christian Opitz: Yeah, I understand that. I understand that really well. Although I have a pretty visible disability as a wheelchair user, I can understand you really well. From your point of view, what does the University of Potsdam need, to be an even more inclusive university?

Christian Lietz: The obvious choices are always the measurements for accessibility. Especially the structural and verbal ones, maybe, but as in my case for example: there are many disabilities that are invisible and for those affected with them they oftentimes don't even realize it. I've only realized it to be a disability that is recognized as severely disabled by accident. It's weird I've only been... had this severely disabled status and pass for two years or so. What I would have wanted from the university is a proactive informing for its members and students. It most likely happens quiet often that they don't know that there are possibilities so have their disability recognized and it would be nice to encourage the afflicted to educate themselves, to have it recognized and at the same time and encouragement for those not afflicted to engage what's this topic, to have more awareness more sensibility. It hasn't been a very proactive approach from the university so far.

Christian Opitz: Okay, I understand that. But the university is working on it. I'm speaking from experience, truly. Many people with disabilities are oftentimes scared to say something wrong. Is there a specific tip on how to act or behave with their colleagues weather disability, how to approach them, how to handle them? What would be your advice?

Christian Lietz: Well, obviously that's tricky. Especially because everybody is different. Everyone reacts differently. Therefore, my advice would be, to not go like a bull at a gate. It's important to be

able to have an understanding of the person before you approach such sensitive topics with them. You have to establish a personal relationship with them in order to actually know them and be able to tell how they're going to react. To me for example: I can handle it rather nonchalantly. It is what it is, if you don't really have a choice to get to know the person beforehand, then you're just gonna have to take the dive but you definitely ought to not treat them differently. Not majorly different at least. That is a worry I had, that I don't want to be measured differently just because I am disabled. My advice here is: just get to know the person, establish a personal relationship as much as possible, try to guess their reaction and then it's just taking the dive. I don't think it's possible to avoid blunders.

Christian Opitz: Yeah, blunders... there's just way too many in life to ever actually avoid them, but I think the people, at the university, students, lecturers, employees, they all tried to avoid explicitly big blunders and yes, every person is different, everyone handles it differently. I can only speak from experience and, is there something you especially value at the University of Potsdam?

Christian Lietz: With time, yes. As I've said, I started as an assistant in a small project and over time, I have developed a sort of sense of belonging. To this project, to the colleagues, and then to the university overall. It's like a sense of belonging on a larger scale and it is, let's say, a very familiar atmosphere here. I really like that. The University of Potsdam is an institution that acts in the interest of the public, and I've really liked that. I think it's important that members of the University of Potsdam, I mean that, you can count on acceptance and understanding from them here. And that is due to its community. It's been like that from the start and so far I have only made this experience myself. I haven't had any negative ones. I have had many different colleagues. Anne it's always turned out great and furthered this sense of belonging. I mean I really like it here.

Christian Opitz: I can only second that. I feel exactly the same way. Yes, many thanks to you that you've agreed to take part in our podcast and that you've talked this freely and openly with us, and I hope that all your positive experiences at the university, with the university, and for the university, continue.

Christian Lietz: Yes, thank you for the invitation and I am very optimistic about it.

Christian Opitz: Thanks!