

Podcast with Julia Schoenberner, employee at the Center for University Sports at the University of Potsdam

Intro: Welcome to all listeners! In our podcast, we introduce you to students, faculty, and staff from the administration of the University of Potsdam. These are people with and without disability. We want to know from them how inclusive the University of Potsdam is as a place to study, but also as an employer.

Annette Guzman: Welcome to our podcast. I'm Annette Guzmán, the Representative for Employees with Impairments and I have with me today Julia Schoenberner. Julia suffers from diabetes type 1, a congenital metabolic disorder that is treated with daily insulin doses. This gives her a disability degree of 40 and Julia works at the Center for University Sports as an academic staff member in the position of Assistant Director of Communications. How did you come to the University of Potsdam?

Julia Schoenberner: Yes, hello Annette, thank you for the invitation and the introduction. I started to study at the University of Potsdam in 2004, sociology, business administration and English as a master's degree and then went to a chair in 2010. I worked there as a research assistant and then joined the university sports department as a career changer in 2011. I did an internship there and the exotic expertise in business studies helped me to get a foothold in university sports and find a new niche, and I'm very happy with that.

Annette Guzman: What exactly motivated you to come to the Center for University Sports here?

Julia Schoenberner: Yes, it was a super friendly reception in the team right from the start. I was very interested in the sports aspect. I was very interested in organizing. The size and also the development opportunities to be able to achieve something, to build something up. It was a great start and a great opportunity to stay at the University of Potsdam. Which may

not have been my plan in the first place, but at the start of my studies it really was a great opportunity to get a good start in the working world.

Annette Guzman: You say you work at university sports. What are your experiences regarding your impairment there in your direct work environment with colleagues or also with supervisors and so on at your workplace?

Julia Schoenberner: Yes, if you think about it, I was diagnosed in 2014, so it's been a longer period of time, but honestly, there hasn't been a big change. Everybody knows about it from the beginning. It was never a topic that was somehow kept secret or something, everyone knew from the beginning that I might have a little hypoglycemia from time to time and since there are enough people working here who are familiar with the topic, they know that a little sugar helps and then I need 10 minutes and then I'm back to my old self again, but it doesn't happen that often and otherwise it doesn't really show up much in everyday work and you can actually live with it well in the team.

Annette Guzman: So you're very, very open about your impairment in the work environment, which is something very unusual, because you often hear more about employees who tend to hold back on chronic illnesses or mental illnesses or don't tell the employer much. What do you think is needed in the work environment to build trust, so that people can work together better there? Or even what? What does it give you personally to be open about it? What benefits does it have for you? So do your colleagues support you or do you have certain expectations of your colleagues?

Julia Schoenberner: Yes, of course I am in perfect hands with this disease at the university sports center. We are many trained sports scientists, sports therapists, who are also very, very knowledgeable about nutrition, health and so on. And yes, where would I be better off with type 1 diabetes than here? So I can get nutrition tips, I can get sports tips or I'm also forced a little bit to eat a little bit healthier and more sporty, yes, and to move. And the expertise here is just gigantic. So that is already strong and I have, I think, or I would have at no other, in no other area in the university? But of course it is also a pity, I would say,

that others, who perhaps have a similar impairment or other impairments, do not have such a match between illness and workplace, where it is of course more difficult to implement.

Annette Guzman: What do you think the University of Potsdam still needs to become an inclusive university or also other areas? What else can be done there?

Julia Schoenberner: Yes, I think that is the issue. How are employees who come to the University of Potsdam informed that there are offers? Well, I slipped into this story a little bit. I already had the job before my impairment, before the illness became public or became known. And I think that those who are dealing with it freshly and have just come to the university simply need more visibility, they need a guide where they are informed about all the offers, what they might be entitled to, what options they have, what support they can get. I also think quite pragmatically that when you are newly hired, you receive a potpourri of documents, whether it's about inclusion or company health management or all the offers that are available to employees, so that you can pick out the measures and opportunities that suit you or that suit you and that you would like to take advantage of.

Annette Guzman: Yes, the University of Potsdam has adopted an inclusion concept, and the aim is to systematically implement and develop measures that are also based on the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. And of course, this also includes passing on structured and systematic information to employees on how they can obtain information, but also, of course, broad-based sensitization, so that the relationship between superiors and colleagues improves, so that people can deal more openly with impairments and illnesses. What do you think these goals associated with the concept are? Are they also reflected in the culture at the university? Or will they maybe be reflected in the culture at the university? So by that I mean the attitude towards people with disabilities.

Julia Schoenberner: Well, I think that perhaps a positive side effect, if there can be such, of the pandemic situation can be that people were forced to deal with themselves and also to listen to themselves: "What is good for me, what is not good for me?" and that, as a result, greater attention and awareness was created for what one needs and in what kind of world

one would perhaps like to live or how one would like to live together with what kind of people. And I believe that this can also have an effect on such a cultural development, that this is addressed more attentively. That's the reference to people, and I'll perhaps also mention the keyword "new work" here, that employees are being moved a bit more into the center again and that inclusion can of course play a big role, no matter what impairments you have. It's also about other weaknesses, I'd say, that were perhaps tabooed before, which can be eradicated a bit because everyone has become a bit more open to weaknesses and is basically more open to them, to inclusive living, yes, open to it sounds a bit strange now, but can visibly concern themselves with it more.

Annette Guzman: In your mind, is the university an attractive employer for people with impairments?

Julia Schoenberner: Yes, I don't know if it's the University of Potsdam in particular, but basically the public sector is, I think, a very, very good area for people with impairments, because there the pressure to perform may not be quite as high as in the private sector, you have the feeling from the start that you're a bit more open, a bit more cordial, perhaps also a bit more sociable, and even if one is absent for a few days due to the impairment or cannot perform as well, that this does not have such a serious effect on the assessment and one can therefore approach the work a bit more openly. And I think that the public service is a really good area to enter the working world and to stay there. And I think that the University of Potsdam is also a good employer that opens up a lot of opportunities, keyword "work-life balance", that you simply have a lot of possibilities, a lot of flexibilization options in the working environment, also in connection with the family. And I would say that it is an attractive employer.

Annette Guzman: Dear Julia, I have one last question. Many people without impairments are probably afraid to say something wrong when they are in communication with people with impairments. Is there any specific advice on how best to behave towards impaired colleagues?

Julia Schoenberner: My impairment is not so decisive for everyday work, but basically I would say just normal. So that's what inclusion means. Integrating people, including them and simply treating them as normally as possible so that they can live together.

Annette Guzman: The important thing is probably the dialog, so when difficulties arise or there are questions, that you get to a very open communication there.

Julia Schoenberner: Right, exactly. So just work, live and deal with each other as openly as possible. That would also be my credo.

Annette Guzman: Thank you very much Julia, for this interview.

Julia Schoenberner: Thank you for letting me be there.