



Angela Hartmann (EMBA 2004)

SHORT & SWEET

WHU degree: **EMBA 2004**

Place of residence & work: **Starnberg, Germany**

Position: **Founder & CEO, sayao GmbH**

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Dear Angela, great to introduce you in this issue of 'Keep in touch!.' Let's begin with some exciting news: You recently received the 'Starnberg 2024 Business Award' for the succession of your company, Estate5 AG, which you sold in 2023. The award was presented under the motto: "I'm off then: we companies can successfully shape their successors". Could you kindly provide us with an update?

Yes, of course. What impressed me the most was that more than 40 companies participated, all of which had successfully managed internal or external business successions. And that's just a small snapshot of the entire country. For me, this proves that successful business successions are possible and that young people are eager to embrace entrepreneurship and take on these challenges.

Two aspects that particularly impressed the jury were, first, my early succession planning after my husband's children decided on different career paths, and second, the clear transition plan, including communication and a clean break: no small office for me, no consultancy contract. The buyer and I agreed on this – and now, after nearly two years, we would do it exactly the same way again. One of the biggest risk factors is when former owners don't have a plan for their lives after the sale and then look for ways to stay involved somehow.

Despite having a solid plan, selling the company was also an emotional challenge – after all, our family had been active in property management in Starnberg for 35 years.

Key terms that stand out in the award's laudatory speech are 'digitalisation' and 'sustainability.' Could you tell us more about your concept and the scale of your efforts in these areas?

Property management has traditionally been a very staff-intensive business – staffing ratios of 85–90% are not uncommon in traditionally organized, paper-heavy companies in this industry. Demographic changes in Germany, rising labor costs, and a declining number of annual working hours leave property managers with a clear choice: digitalize and automate or go out of business in the coming years. That's why we started driving the company's digital transformation as early as 2019 – with significant personnel efforts and high investment volumes. It may sound almost absurd, but COVID-19 actually helped us in this regard, as our clients had to learn and accept that even a property management company could offer digital services. One example was the digital document and invoice review process for advisory boards in residential complexes.

I handed over the company as a 'digital gem' with a staffing ratio of 68%. And with the new tools that have come onto the market over the past two years, this ratio can be reduced even further. We have always considered sustainability on two levels: first, in the residential complexes of our clients, and second, within our company and its processes. A little anecdote about this: After largely digitalizing our property management operations, we no longer needed file folders – or the shelving units that held them. So we dismantled and donated them. However, this led to a new problem: noise levels in the office increased. As a solution, we installed hemp and moss panels for sound insulation.

'Entrepreneurial spirit' – and a personal question for you: You grew up in a family business, later took it over, and successfully expanded it. Was this path predestined for you?

No, my path was by no means predetermined. After graduating, I started out in a typical corporate trainee program, worked as an executive assistant to the board, and held various responsible positions. However, after my MBA, I have had enough of corporate structures – long decision-making processes and cumbersome hierarchies frustrated me. At that time, my parents were ready to step back. The question was: Should I take over, or should they let the company wind down? Looking back, the MBA program not only sparked my interest in self-employment but also gave me the confidence to take this step.

Following the takeover of Estate5 AG, you founded sayao GmbH and you were recently appointed to a Specialist Committee of the IHK for Munich and Upper Bavaria. What is your focus?

I founded Sayao GmbH together with my husband. It is a business consultancy with a clear focus on property managers – particularly in the areas of process optimization and digital transformation. Here, we channel all our expertise from property management and digitalization. Based on this background, I was appointed to the Digitalization Specialist Committee of the IHK Munich and Upper Bavaria. This allows me to examine digitalization and AI not only within the property management industry but across different sectors. Ultimately, our clients benefit from this broader perspective. In this honorary role, I also try to contribute to ensuring that we in Europe do not get lost between GDPR and the AI Act. I see this as a major risk for Germany as a business location.

Angela, thank you for the interview!