

Source: Westfalenpost (WP)
WP edition of January 28, 2016.
Internet www.siegener-zeitung.de

Photo: BIKAR METALLE

Date: 28.01.2016

First an apprenticeship and then study

Continuing education at university: This is how a dual study program works at Bikar in Raumland

Raumland. "I only realized what I wanted to do during my civilian service. I knew I was good with numbers, but I didn't want to do anything with mechanical engineering, but rather in the direction of business administration," says Louis Lauber. He is 29 and works for the company Bikar as an export manager in sales. Before that, he did a dual study program there. This is a combination of training and studies, so to speak, although the training and studies can be quite different.

Training in Wittgenstein: Dual studies at Bikar

However, not every apprenticeship is also offered as a dual study program. The procedure can differ depending on the company and the university. There are variants where students are at the university for the whole semester and work in the company during the semester break.

Then there is the option of working in the company and attending the university on the weekends.



Advantage through training

Louis Lauber chose yet another option: He first trained for two years as a wholesale and export merchant in the company, attending vocational school - in his case the vocational college in Siegen - two days a week, as is usual for an apprenticeship. Because he had his Abitur in his pocket, he was able to shorten his training, which actually lasts three years, by one year. This was particularly convenient for him because he still wanted to study. That was the plan from the start: "At the job interview, it was already clear that I wanted to study, and I was given good advice."

After completing his training, he then took up a bachelor's degree program. "Mittelstandsmanagement" at the Technical University of Central Hesse. This was followed by a master's degree in "International Management" at Accadis University in

Bad Homburg (near Frankfurt) - in English, by the way. For Louis Lauber, this sequence has very clear advantages: "You definitely benefit from the training during your studies, especially since you already have a degree in your hand and something to show for it." He says there is a clear difference between those who have already completed an apprenticeship when they start studying and those who come from school. After training, students already have a certain basic knowledge and have a completely different approach to the subject matter at university, explains Lauber.



Fun at work

It took him a total of seven years to complete his training, bachelor's degree and master's degree, so he managed to do everything in the standard study time. "It was really tight at the end, you can't say otherwise," recalls Lauber. He took up his position as export manager in 2012, so he worked and studied at the same time and stayed with his training company even after completing his studies. And he has good reasons for this. "I was signaled at all times that they were counting on me and wanted to support me. What was promised was true, and that has been a common thread throughout." Immediately after the interview, he was accepted for the apprenticeship and the dual study program. Louis had still applied to other companies in the region, but canceled the interviews after receiving the acceptance. "It was a gut feeling, it just fit." What he enjoys most is seeing the business grow and having made his own contribution to it, he explains. "I have no problem going back to the plant on Mondays. I like being here."

Traveling and making phone calls

In his job, he spends most of his time in the office, and a telephone or headset and computer are essential. As an export manager in sales, he has a lot of contact with customers, handles and coordinates inquiries and orders, prepares quotations, and takes care of pricing and transportation. The most important aspect is communicating with customers, whether it's acquiring new customers, providing technical advice, maintaining contacts or concluding contracts. That's why the job also involves a lot of traveling around the globe. "If you put it in perspective, it would be 70 percent office, 30 percent travel," says Lauber.

That he would go into sales crystallized during his training. The stations for commercial training are always the same at Bikar. Starting in the warehouse to get to know all the materials, to work preparation, to the shipping department, to incoming goods, to stock accounting, to purchasing, to accounting and to sales.

Cruise as motivation

Heinz-Georg Stark is sales manager at Bikar and advises trainees as needed: "During training, it quickly becomes apparent who has which preferences and where strengths lie. One person talks the talk, he is a born salesman. Others are good at juggling numbers, they're in good hands in accounting." The company and employees then benefit from this, Stark says. "You're not supposed to drag yourself to work and think 'I hope the day is over soon.' It's supposed to be fun!" He explains that as a company active in the metal processing of aluminum, copper, brass and bronze, Bikar trains commercial professions such as wholesale and foreign trade clerks and industrial clerks, as well as industrial professions such as industrial mechanics, warehouse logistics specialists and machine and plant operators. The special feature: Bikar has so far taken on all but one of its trainees.

The company currently employs 18 trainees, with ten new ones expected to join in the summer. As a small incentive to motivate the young employees, the best apprentice in the chamber district gets to go on an Aida cruise. Louis Lauber had the pleasure in 2009 with his good degree and spent a week in the Mediterranean.

By Sarah Engelhard