Patience

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Dear Readers,

“Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.” This quote, attributed to the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, could have served as a guiding principle for the Princely House of Liechtenstein. Why? Because much of the Princely Family’s success, which is value-oriented and has grown over centuries, can be attributed to their entrepreneurial roots in agriculture and forestry – activities where for generations, they have focused on long-term thinking and actions.

Anselm Grün recommends using plants and animals as a guide for inner growth: “Transformation takes time, just like nature,” says the well-known monk in an interview with CREDO. In the Carte blanche section, entrepreneur Elisabeth Schirmer talks about how for her, patience means persevering until the time is ripe. She uses sunflowers, which cannot be forced to grow faster, as an example. “They follow nature’s rhythm,” she says.

Martin Schleske, who is featured in our cover story, chooses the best tonewood in the world – for example, 30,000-year-old kauri pine from New Zealand – for his internationally coveted handmade violins, and is prepared to wait a long time for it. In his article in the Report section, Roland Hagenberg travels across Japan to explore the fine line between enduring adverse circumstances caused by others and persevering in situations that can perhaps be changed.

In the case of the Bauer brothers, it was botany that demanded significant patience: their “Hortus Botanicus”, painstakingly created around the turn of the 19th century, is today one of the great treasures in the Princely Collections. I hope you find this issue of CREDO inspiring, and recommend that you set aside some time to read it – it will be worth your while.

H.S.H. Prince Philipp von und zu Liechtenstein
Honorary Chairman LGT
Martin Schleske is considered one of the best violin makers of our time. No more than 30 string instruments leave his studio in Landsberg am Lech, Bavaria, every year. Each one is a unique tonal sculpture. These pieces, coveted by world-class musicians, are created in a perfect harmony of craftsmanship, research – and the art of allowing things to take their time.
Repetition: There are 150 different steps before an instrument can develop its full sound. Each one requires the greatest care.
In small, targeted movements, Martin Schleske smooths the top plate of a violin with the help of a scraper. Spruce shavings measuring just millimeters curl on the surface of his workbench and on the floor. The workshop is silent, except for the sound of the soft, relentless scraping of the blade. There is a smell of wood. Planks that have been roughly cut to size are shaped here into immaculately smooth, gleaming sculptures that enchant people all over the world with their wonderful sound.

It takes three months, sometimes even longer, to create a master violin. Does this also require a mastery of patience? Martin Schleske chuckles. “There are 150 different steps before an instrument can develop its full sound. Each one requires the greatest care and is carried out many times in succession. It’s very time-consuming,” he says. But for him, patience is something else. “It’s not about a technique or strategy to reach my goal through perseverance – but waiting, with all of my senses attuned, for something that could happen.”

He takes the top plate from the table, blows away some wood dust and gently taps the unfinished instrument with the knuckle of his index finger. A dull sound resonates. “What I feel when I hear this sound is not something I can analyze in my head,” says Martin Schleske. “I can only sense whether it’s right or not.” He explains that when working on an instrument, this feeling guides him more than expertise or experience. “I observe my hands and at some point, I feel that I have to stop. Or: this is where I have to continue.”

And what if that feeling fails to appear? A smile lights up the master’s face: “Then a beneficial exercise follows – I stop and accept that nothing is happening,” he says. In such cases, he waits and listens for an inner voice that will eventually make itself heard, perhaps days, weeks or sometimes months later. “Only then do I get back to work,” he says. A master violin created by Martin Schleske is not a construction built according to a plan. It evolves in his hands.

**Following your path**

The Stuttgart native began playing the violin at the age of seven. His inspiration came from an uncle, a gifted concert viola player who became a music teacher following an accident and later took him under his wing. His uncle taught him a love for sound and the subtleties of listening. In retrospect, this was the first of many events that shaped the direction of Martin Schleske’s life.

Today, Martin Schleske knows that God will never be lost to him: “My faith is an all-encompassing love that exists in all aspects of life. It carries him and gives him the strength to do everything he does with all his heart. It also teaches him to be patient, “And know that nothing can be forced. That nothing can be achieved with ambition and doggedness. That only openness and receptivity to God’s will can lead to more.”
At seventeen, Martin Schleske dropped out of high school and applied to what was then the Mittenwald state violin-making school. “There were hundreds of applicants for only twelve apprenticeship spots,” he recalls. “Before the exam, I sat in the sun and was very calm. I knew that if this was to be my path, the door would open for me.” And it did, which is how he learned to make violins. The fact that he would also go on to get a degree in physics was the result of his first job in a sound research laboratory: “The study of sound became a constant obsession. I wanted to understand how sounds are created, what determines their quality,” he says. So he finished high school and studied physics at the University of Applied Sciences in Munich.

**Singing wood**

Martin Schleske opened his master violin-making workshop in 1996. Today, the 56-year-old is considered one of the greatest living violin makers in the world. His customers include famous soloists, professional musicians and music lovers from around the globe.

Martin Schleske’s studio is located in the bustling historic city center of Landsberg, right next to the city’s parish church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The house is over 700 years old. Anyone who goes to the studio – with an appointment – enters a realm of tranquility. “In the past, the building was a house of prayer,” says Martin Schleske, “it still radiates that energy. That is ideal for me. Silence is the best way to be able to listen carefully; it’s paramount in violin making.”

At the back of the first floor is a shelf, where, like books placed back to back, pieces of wood of various colors and stages of maturity are stored. Martin Schleske pulls one out and runs his
Character: The sound produced by Schleske violins is individual and solid, earthy, full-bodied in tone, with depth and gravity, but also with great radiance.
therefore always preceded by an intensive process of getting to know the musician. They play for him, giving the violin maker an idea of their inner nature. And this is what he bases his work on. Is he always successful? Is he able to make everyone happy?

“Very often, yes,” says Martin Schleske. When a virtuoso thanks him enthusiastically and with tears in their eyes, he experiences moments of great fulfillment. And if something is off in the communication between the individual and the instrument, a comprehensive joint search for the reason begins. “We once tried out 53 different bridges before an E string was able to develop its full sound,” he recalls.

Craftsmanship and research

“Sound is the product of vibrations,” says Martin Schleske, standing in his acoustics lab. This is where he analyzes sound and vibrations with the help of state-of-the-art equipment. The information appears on the displays in the form of colored wavy lines, similar to three-dimensional maps. “It takes a lot of experiments to get to the bottom of why an instrument sounds the way it does using this scientific approach,” he says. A path, he says, that requires a person to not give up hope despite countless failures and to attentively follow up on even the smallest clues. In other words, patience as Schleske understands it. His data, collected in endless series of experiments – for example, on the acoustic fingerprints of the violins of Antonio Stradivari, Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù and Domenico Montagnana – have been added to the collection of the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

Sound and personality

So how does he choose? Why does he opt for a very specific piece of wood for a new instrument? “Feeling and experience,” says Martin Schleske, “and the desire to put each individual’s personal instrument in their hands.” This is something that the musicians who come to him for a violin – and more rarely for a viola or cello – are willing to wait several years for.

“My clients are highly individual people. Very sensitive artists who move entire concert halls to tears with their playing. Music is how they express themselves, it’s their language. They need an instrument that is able to absorb their energy and transform it into sound. Into sound that is alive, that can be powerful and passionate or gentle and moving – just like the person who produces it,” says Martin Schleske. The sale of an instrument is therefore always preceded by an intensive process of getting to know the musician. They play for him, giving the violin maker an idea of their inner nature. And this is what he bases his work on.

What drives him to combine craftsmanship and research, two disciplines that require so much perseverance? “For many years I was obsessed with the question of why Stradivari’s violins were so incredible. I was determined to find out how he did it. My hope was that a great wealth of knowledge would enable me to make violins just as good as, or maybe even better than, Stradivari’s.”
“It’s not about a technique or strategy to reach my goal through perseverance – but waiting, with all of my senses attuned, for something that could happen.”

Exciting stuff! So has all his learning and research helped him get to the bottom of Stradivari’s secret? “In the end, I think I realized that this great master wasn’t looking to create anything special or extraordinary,” Martin Schleske says quietly. “He just did everything right. Every single step, every choice of material, every curvature, every coating of varnish. He wasn’t recreating a part of himself, and he wasn’t an internally driven perfectionist. He was a servant with a calling. This amazing approach finds expression in the voice of his violins.”

Finding your own voice

“At some point, I became aware of the symbolism of my work,” says Martin Schleske. “We are all instruments in God’s hands. It is our life’s task to find our own voice by taking full advantage of the possibilities given to us and doing so with gratitude. It makes no sense to try to copy or top someone else’s voice.” Smiling, he refers to the German language, which he describes as being in harmony with itself.

Martin Schleske has long been making violins that bear his own signature; instruments that contain his vitality, his passion and his experience in their sound. How would he characterize them? “Individual and solid, earthy, full-bodied in tone, with depth and gravity, but also with great radiance,” he says.

It was by chance – if there is such a thing as chance in Martin Schleske’s life – that he came into possession of a 30,000-year-old piece of wood from New Zealand. It came from a mighty kauri pine that once sank into a high moor there and was only recently recovered. “I made a violin out of it,” says Martin Schleske enthusiastically. “Its sound is incredible. Powerful and wild!” He has enough kauri tonewood in his warehouse to make twelve to 15 instruments. “Maybe these violins will one day become my own personal legacy. That which will remain of me long after my time.”

Franziska Zydek lives in Switzerland and Italy. A graduate of the Deutsche Journalistenschule in Munich, she has worked for publishing houses in Germany and Switzerland, fundraised for environmental causes and co-owned a corporate publishing agency in Zurich. Today, she writes about people and their life journeys, and teaches mindfulness.
Books about sounds and tones
Every day, Martin Schleske records thoughts and insights that come to him while working on an instrument. This is how “The Sound of Life’s Unspeakable Beauty” came into being. Written with passion in gripping and moving language, the 352-page book explores all the phases of violin making. Each step in the process is described as a symbol of personal development, vocation and the search for one’s path. One critic described it as a declaration of love to creation and to life itself. The book has been translated into numerous languages and sold over 100 000 copies. Other books have followed, and they too are bestsellers.

Information on the life and work of Martin Schleske can be found at: www.schleske.com
Lines, groups and numbers

Text: Michael Neubauer

When it comes to queuing, everyone is equal. The egalitarian principle behind waiting one’s turn has made this an intercultural phenomenon. In today’s globalized world, the queuing culture is similar in many countries, however, variations exist when it comes to specific waiting-line behavior.

Great Britain: The champion, but not the originator

If an award were to exist for queuing, it would go to the British. They love discipline in their queuing; clear rules and fair behavior prevent the need for unnecessary discussions. And those who push their way to the front of the line attract contemptuous looks. Whoever arrives first at a bus stop or post office counter has already formed a queue – and likes to inform the person who comes after them of that fact by saying: “This is a queue!” But although the Brits are considered queuing professionals, this phenomenon probably didn’t originate in the UK. The Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle once observed people “waiting in tail” in Paris, which he wrote about in his three-volume work “The French Revolution”, published in 1837. He was enthusiastic about the strict order he witnessed and recommended that his fellow citizens adopt this “quasi-art”. The English term “to queue” is derived from the French “faire la queue”.

Sweden: In love with nummerlapps

Nummerlapp dispensers can be found in public administration buildings, pharmacies, opticians’ shops and many stores with service counters. The Swedes are big fans of these machines. Anyone who presses their touchscreens receives a small ticket with a number printed on it – and knows that their turn will come as soon as they hear the “ding dong” and their number appears on the display. In Denmark, similar ticket dispensers are also found at many bakeries: foreign tourists tend to overlook them, then wait forever or push their way to the cash register, unaware that they are upsetting the locals. “In countries like Germany, this type of number system is often done away with again because there is something very anonymous about it,” says Andreas Göttlich, a sociologist at the University of Konstanz and head of the research project “Waiting. A Basic Theory”. But he points out that they have an advantage: people can better estimate the waiting time and perhaps get something else done while they wait for their number to flash up on the screen.

Japan: Mentality and markings

Respect for others, self-discipline, conforming with accepted behavior – these values are very important to the Japanese in everyday life. It is therefore no wonder that, in this country where inhabitants are very courteous with one another, the concept of queuing works perfectly. “But the important virtue of waiting in line doesn’t just have to do with the Japanese mentality,” says waiting expert Andreas Göttlich. He explains that a lack of space and precautionary measures are other reasons for the exemplary queues that the Japanese form. For example, on the subway or for trains such as the Shin-kansen, markings on the platforms indicate where passengers should stand in line, and the carriage doors open directly in front of those spots. “If – like in many European countries – confusion reigns on the platforms, people will also tend to elbow their way in,” says Göttlich.
Spain: Order thanks to small groups
In Spain, small groups and clusters of people can often be observed as an alternative to queues. But to think that there is no order to this approach would be a mistake. If you’ve just arrived, you ask: “El último? La última?” (“Who is last in line?”) to find your spot in the invisible queue. In Spain, waiting has also become a well-established business: when hundreds of pilgrims line up in front of churches on name days, for example, a “stand-in” can sometimes be booked. This person takes over the task of queuing until the last moment. Some professional “waiters” earn considerable sums of money doing this. “Not having to wait is also a question of prestige, power and money: those who can afford it are happy to buy their way out of having to queue,” says Andreas Göttlich. Agencies and apps that can be used to book professional waiters also exist in India, Japan and the US.

France: Sometimes discipline, sometimes a race to the checkout
The French usually respect the queue when picking up their daily baguette. But this is also a country where people are reluctant to let a light at pedestrian crossings dictate when they cross the road: if there is no car in sight, they like to switch to “I’m next” mode. And so respect for the queue doesn’t apply in all situations. Whether at the ski lift or the airport counter, some French people will squeeze past the others in line to fill the nearest gap. In France, but also in Germany, there is a common occurrence that would be highly disapproved of by the British: the race to the checkout at the supermarket. If a second checkout suddenly opens, people can be seen dashing from the back of the other line to the front of the new line, and acting as if no one was witnessing the switch. “They give themselves a little freedom to break the norm,” says sociologist Göttlich, “and the others usually accept this kind of rule-breaking because they say to themselves: maybe next time, I’ll be the lucky one.”

Indonesia: Elbows and bodies
If you stand in line in Indonesia, it’s your own fault. Push, overtake, fill that gap: the order of the day in road traffic is also the norm at service counters and supermarket checkouts. Physical contact: why not? If you’re polite and let the self-confident pass, you will never get your turn. So the approach is to get your elbows out, stand with your legs wide apart and place your bags strategically to claim your spot. Shaming pushy people by scolding them is not something that is done. But in some situations, a friendly hint that the end of the line is further back can work wonders. At airport counters and in public administration buildings or hospitals, belt barriers or number systems bring a little order into the Indonesian world of waiting – and since the pandemic, the same can be seen in supermarkets. Nevertheless, always be sure not to leave any gaps!
He is a Benedictine monk, treats people who are suffering from burnout and writes bestsellers that sell millions of copies: Father Anselm Grün is Germany’s best-known comforter of souls. In an interview, he explains why too much tranquility scares many people.

CREDO: Father Anselm Grün, we are somewhere between the third and fourth wave of the pandemic, which has given rise to a great deal of personal suffering. We had to be patient until we were allowed to meet friends and relatives again, until a vaccine was developed and life returned somewhat to normal. Has the pandemic taught us how to wait?

Yes, I think so, but the price of that lesson has been high. Our society, which is used to getting everything at the click of a mouse, suddenly had to learn how to wait for things, because even home deliveries were put on hold. Learning how not to get everything and not be in control of everything has been painful; we have had to wait for things to change and have been told to stay home and take a step back from our normal lives. In the past, periods of fasting were observed during which people consciously did without and waited; today, many people have forgotten how to do that. Sigmund Freud once said that those who cannot do without will never develop a strong ego. Being able to wait is part of inner strength. Patient people are used to dealing with themselves, this is another thing that has become evident during the pandemic.
"The impatience of the young is justified, but the constant panic that tomorrow will be too late will not give rise to any long-term solutions," says Anselm Grün.
How do you mean that? The pandemic has forced us to not always do what we would like to do. Some people were almost in despair about this; others came to terms with it and found inner peace because they can accept themselves as they are. That’s another tendency we see these days: if a person is dissatisfied with himself or their partner, they have to change everything immediately. I take a different view. There’s something aggressive about radical change, because it means you want to make yourself into a different person. I prefer transformation: I value myself as I am, but perhaps I still have to grow into myself. Transformation takes time, just like nature. I can’t constantly pluck at a plant, that won’t make it grow faster. I have to let it grow.

But people today have no time and, above all, no patience. Why do so many of us constantly rush around: is it a fear of death? An old monk was once asked why he was never afraid. His response was: “Because I always keep death in mind.” Accepting one’s own death leads people to on the one hand live in the here and now and enjoy the moment. On the other hand, it gives them greater serenity. Death means completely letting go of the ego.

So if we want to become more serene and patient, we should constantly remind ourselves that we will die? The key to becoming more serene is to accept yourself as you are. And not to place expectations on yourself that are too high. It’s about taming our egos. The ego always wants to prove and present itself, the ego constantly circles around itself: am I good enough for the boss, attractive enough, slim enough, rich enough? These ideals make us sick. People who are willing to put their ego in the corner are suddenly freer, can devote themselves to other things – and become more serene. Serenity doesn’t mean lazing around in bed and not caring about anything. On the contrary. Only those who are serene and free themselves from the pressure of their ego can rise to new challenges.

You are Germany’s best-known comforter of souls, you hold seminars for managers and work with people suffering from burnout. How do you teach people to become more serene? Burnout is not only related to the amount of work and stress a person has. It can also be the result of personal attitudes: how much you let yourself be pressured and want to meet everyone’s expectations. Greater serenity is definitely a proven remedy for that. The typical workaholics, the work addicts, have to inundate themselves with work because they are running away from themselves. People who are constantly tense find work exhausting; those who work more serenely, on the other hand, are more effective. Serenity is conducive to better concentration.

That may all be true in theory. But in practice it’s different. A full agenda, an overflowing inbox and lots of noise and likes on social media are considered positives. Tranquility and patience, on the other hand, are seen as something for retirees and escapers.

That’s true. But the constant hustle and bustle and rushing from one appointment to the next often seems a bit feigned to me. The idea that there is strength in serenity is valid. If people act in a way that is frenzied, it’s difficult for them to achieve anything meaningful, because they aren’t able to engage in their work or their relationship. I see many people, especially those who hold very high offices, who want to slow down their pace of life but panic as soon as they don’t have anything going on. Fearing that unpleasant thoughts or feelings of guilt could surface, they suppress them from the outset by saddling themselves with work. But the approach should be a different one: only people who are not afraid of the inner truth can find tranquility.

In this morning’s paper I read that the pandemic is taking a turn for the worse in Brazil and that homicides using firearms are increasing in the US. Unemployment is rising in Europe, and millions are facing hunger in Myanmar. How is anyone supposed to be serene and patient in times like these?

Those kinds of reports are frightening, and they can’t be ignored. But the crucial question is: what can I do about it? But also: what are my limits? In this context, patience means weighing whether and how you can help, and then making a conscious decision to do something. Even if it’s saying a prayer.

Praying often sounds like an alibi. During prayer, people at least feel a sense of solidarity with others and don’t just think about themselves. They sympathize with the fate of the Brazilians who have to live in a country with a crazy president. Our ability to help is limited. That’s just the way it is, even if this realization is painful.

Some people avoid consuming media in order not to expose themselves to these messages. Monks also shut themselves off from the world. You, on the other hand, address the big questions and problems of the world in your books and lectures. What drives you?

Shutting yourself off cannot be the right approach. We stand in solidarity with people in need. We all live on the same planet, so it’s important that we all do our part.

The Climate Youth in Switzerland – and also in Germany – are saying that we need to act now, because we are facing
an unprecedented temporal threat. Remaining calm is fatal in the eyes of young people like Greta Thunberg. At a UN climate conference, she said, “I want you to panic!” Climate change is a very serious threat. But here too, it’s important not to rush headfirst into action but to act judiciously. We can change our lifestyles – and we can do that from one day to the next. This means that everyone has the ability to make a personal contribution. At the same time though, we need governments and businesses to be on board in order to tighten the big global screws. The impatience of the young is justified, but the constant panic that tomorrow will be too late will not give rise to any long-term solutions.

What do you mean by that?
Each person has to find his or her own way. All I can do is give them suggestions.

Does seeing your books on a bestseller list give you a feeling of pride? Or is that kind of ego stroking unimportant to you?
It would be arrogant for me to claim that it means nothing to me at all, and it wouldn’t be true either. When a book is well received, it makes me happy. And then I try to let go of that joy or pride. I don’t want to be dependent on success. That’s very important to me.

Do you get any criticism from within your own ranks: people in the clergy who begrudge you your success?
The idea that I write my books because I’m hungry for money is something I hear time and again, and which is not true. There are, of course, also many envious people among the clergy who are critical of any kind of success, but success in itself is something beautiful. It propels us. Having said that, the art is to let go again and again and not to define yourself by success. I write my books to speak to people. I want to serve people.

Do you feel that people in the 21st century face greater challenges than in the past?
Comparisons with earlier times are difficult. Major natural disasters such as floods and storms have always occurred, just not on this scale. But there were the really big wars, which Europeans have been mostly spared from for 70 years. We have to learn to understand that we cannot control everything. This also applies to the pandemic.

Before the pandemic you gave countless lectures. You’ve sold over 20 million books worldwide, making you one of the most successful German-language authors of non-fiction. Even Pope Francis is a fan of yours. The blur about you on the dustcover of your books says you write for grandparents and singles, for stressed out mothers and successful managers. But you live a relatively worry-free life at Münsterschwarzach Abbey. What makes you, of all people, a good advisor?
I don’t see myself as an advisor because I don’t consider myself to be wiser than others. I don’t think of myself as having a solution for everything. I try to describe life as it is. I have an outside perspective, which helps me to look at things from a distance. And I talk to a lot of people, which means my knowledge and experience increase continuously. I am not a know-it-all; I want to get people in touch with the wisdom of their own souls.

Is fear a good advisor?
Fear fuels authority. Because suddenly, everyone who doesn’t live the right way and still takes a plane to go on vacation is demonized and denounced. Renunciation must not turn into a denial of life. We also have to be able to enjoy things. People who give up everything in one go elicit fear and aggression. Instead, I advocate for voluntarily foregoing certain activities and weighing whether you really need to fly to New York for the weekend in order to relax. A walk in the woods would be a better solution.

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You are – among many things – also a financial expert. Serenity and patience are not exactly widespread in the world of stock markets. The person who moves fastest often wins. I don’t share that view. I’ve been dealing with investments for 40 years. There’s a saying in German: too much back-and-forth leads to empty pockets. That’s another example of how people who are patient will benefit more in the end than speculators who act quickly and in haste.

It’s been reported that you lost money during the financial crisis. Was that because you ran out of patience?
Well, anyone who didn’t lose anything in the financial crisis also didn’t make any gains beforehand. It was important to react calmly during that period. The price of many shares declined rapidly, but they were back to their previous levels a few years later. I didn’t lose money in the end, only temporarily. For many things, stock markets included, you have to be able to wait. The only people who lost a lot of money during the crisis were the ones who panicked.

Sacha Batthyany is a journalist and author. After spending several years in the US, where he worked as a US correspondent for Tages-Anzeiger, Das Magazin and Süddeutsche Zeitung, he is now an editor for the “Hintergrund” section of NZZ am Sonntag, a role he assumed in 2018.
Father Anselm Grün (76) entered the Benedictine Abbey of Münsterschwarzach in 1964, following which he studied philosophy and theology, and then business administration and economics. For 36 years, he managed the financial affairs of his monastery as its cellerar. He has written more than 300 books, which have been translated into over 30 languages and sold millions of copies, making him one of the most successful non-fiction authors in the German language. His lectures – which he often gave twice a week – were packed until the outbreak of the pandemic, and his seminars were fully booked for years in advance.
Bauer brothers, Hortus Botanicus, Plants collected by Prior Norbert Boccius, detail from “Crocus floribus fructui impositus tubo longissimo” (Volume 3, Leaf 111), 1778 © LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Vaduz–Vienna
Red gold

If you are looking for a good, safe investment, should you consider saffron? A single gram of these precious threads can cost around 30 euro. Saffron (*crocus sativus*) has always been expensive; a noble spice, a dye worth almost its weight in gold, whose antidepressant effects are being researched in depth. Considering its qualities in terms of taste, its intensive color and its healing properties — and the complex, costly production it involves, the spice's steep price is not surprising. In fact, considerable patience is required to obtain just one gram thereof: each flower has one pistil, which is divided into three stigmas. It takes 150 to 250 of these flowers to produce one gram of saffron. Experienced pickers harvest around 60 to 80 grams per day during the short period when the flower blooms, which is in the fall.

It was out of Persia that the best saffron conquered international kitchens; the famous *risotto alla milanese* would be unthinkable without this delicate ingredient. And no woven carpet, no kilim from Iran would be the same without a splash of radiant saffron yellow.

This special crocus species is also a fixed component of many plant books and herbaria. It could not, therefore, be left out of Johann Wilhelm Weinmann's four-volume "Phytanthoza Iconographia" published in Regensburg between 1735 and 1745. The plant was also included in the Bauer brothers' famous fourteen-volume "Hortus Botanicus", one of the great treasures in the collections of the Prince von und zu Liechtenstein. Between 1776 and 1804, these three extremely talented young artists depicted the plant collection of Norbert Boccius (1729–1806), the prior of the Fieldsberg monastery of the Brothers of Mercy, in sumptuous gouaches on parchment with previously unattained mastery.

Joseph Anton Bauer (1756–1831), Franz Andreas Bauer (1758–1840) and Ferdinand Lucas Bauer (1760–1826) grew up in Feldsberg, which at the time was part of Lower Austria and is now in Southern Moravia. They studied at the University of Vienna under the botanist Nikolaus Joseph von Jacquin (1727–1817), where they learned to use microscopes to examine and reproduce plants' finest details. From that time onwards, patience became a constant in their lives. This quality played an important role in their laborious discoveries and their collection of flora and fauna on journeys through Greece, Asia Minor and even Australia. It was also much needed for their reproductions thereof on the precious pages of the "Hortus" or their botanical watercolor paintings, some of which can today be found in the Natural History Museum Vienna, England's Kew Gardens and the Natural History Museum in London.

These thousands of pages were created with the help of a standardized color code that linked colors to numbers. Thanks to this code, the brothers only had to note a number in their field sketches in order to later assign the plants’ natural colors to their illustrations.

However, where there is light, there is also shadow. And why should this be any different in the case of a costly, precious product of nature? As in the world of art, knowledge is indispensable if you want to avoid being cheated and losing significant sums of money when buying saffron.

In the bazaars of the Orient, saffron can be found in a wide range of qualities, the lowest being adulterated or even fake saffron. The safflower (*crocus ortensis, crocus ortolanus*) has been cultivated since ancient times and the Middle Ages as a dye for silk. The plant, also known as "false saffron", produces a weaker dye than real saffron and, perhaps most importantly, does not add its own characteristic flavor to dishes. Connoisseurs can distinguish safflower's tubular flowers from saffron's thread-like stigmatic lobes at a glance. Turmeric blends are another trick used to deceive inexperienced customers. In this case, in addition to the purely optical distinction, a baking soda test can bring the truth to light: if a solution of baking soda and water is mixed with just a few threads, it remains yellow after the addition of real saffron; if turmeric is used, the baking soda solution first becomes cloudy and then turns red. This is a test that traders were familiar with and used centuries ago.

Comparisons can thus be drawn between saffron and fine art: the more expensive they are, the greater the risk of falling prey to fakes; the higher the quality, the more important it is to have the patience to collect the various pieces, whether they are paintings, sculptures and other works of art – or precious saffron threads.

Dr. Johann Kräftner is Director of the Princely Collections and from 2002 to 2011 was Director of the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM, Vienna. He is the author of numerous monographs on the history and theory of architecture.
Tea ceremonies and flower arranging as meditative rituals: Chiyo Yamamoto's family has been producing fine fabrics in Kyoto for generations.
From the martial arts practiced by 17th-century samurais to flower arranging as de-escalation training for prospective police officers: Japanese from different backgrounds ponder the role played by *gaman* and *shinbo* – patience and perseverance – in their history, politics, society and the way they live their lives.
On 13 April 1612, history was made in Japan. On that day, samurai Musashi Miyamoto pierced the chest of his rival Kojiro Sasaki with a wooden stick. The two men were considered the best fighters in the country. Sasaki was a master of the odachi: a two-handed sword over 90 centimeters long, like the one Uma Thurman wields in the Hollywood movie Kill Bill. Miyamoto, on the other hand, was considered unbeatable with the katana, the 70-centimeter-long blade that all samurais, the warriors of feudal lords, carried at their sides. In those days, duels were a matter of life and death – unless the opponents had previously agreed that the encounter would be a bloodless one. Such duels came down to cunning, patience and stamina. Sasaki was feared for his “swallow cut”. His blade would whizz down from above, splitting both the opponent and his armor. If Sasaki’s blow missed, he would direct his swing back up at an angle just before hitting the ground and cut the enemy in half sideways. Sasaki is said to have been so nimble that he could decapitate birds in mid-air.

Why Miyamoto appeared at the duel without a metal weapon is still a matter of debate among historians. The idea was probably to disconcert his opponent, to distract him. Miyamoto waited patiently for the sun to be behind him and the tide to come under his feet, and was therefore two hours late. This was a tactical move that he later described in the manual on the art of combat, “The Book of Five Rings”. Intended as a tactical guide for samurais, the book was briefly banned by the American occupation after World War II, but today serves as a source of inspiration for tough managers. Sasaki was irritated by the wooden stick and offended by the delay, and had thus already lost in the test of patience. He swiftly delivered his swallow cut, but only caught a tuft of Miyamoto’s oiled hair. The latter, in turn, took advantage of his opponent’s carelessness. He ended Sasaki’s life with his replacement sword and was able to flee in his boat thanks to the low tide – the followers of a slain loser were always out for revenge.
Unwavering perseverance

400 years later, samurai virtues such as honor, courage, sense of duty and loyalty live on in Japan. Such virtues require patience, perseverance and stamina, which the Japanese refer to as *gaman* or *shinbo*. The two terms are almost synonymous and interchangeable (see info-box on p. 29). “Gaman tends to refer to enduring blows dealt by fate, for example, triggered by typhoons, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and wars, which we can’t do anything about, and whose timing is unclear,” explains star architect Jun Aoki (64), known for his Louis Vuitton flagship stores and the Aomori Museum of Art. “Shinbo, on the other hand, refers to perseverance in situations into which we have often maneuvered ourselves. An example in my profession would be searching for a perfect design solution shortly before the deadline. Or a politician who has to conclude negotiations; a single mother who works day and night until her children graduate from university.”

These words can be interpreted as a general attitude and spirit of self-control and discipline against which life can be measured – depending on which side you look at it from. When the US put their fellow Americans of Japanese descent into camps during World War II, the latter behaved stoically. They did not complain, protest or resist. The camp guards mistook this for submissiveness, lethargy and lack of initiative. However, by collectively persevering without complaining, these descendants of Japanese immigrants were embodying *gaman*. In an inescapable situation, they played for time. They remained composed – something Sasaki failed to do in his duel with Miyamoto.

In the spirit of one’s ancestors

Yoshindo Yoshihara’s swords are among the best in the world. “I make no more than ten a year,” admits Japan’s most renowned weaponsmith. He is 78 years old, and represents the tenth generation of his family to pursue this craft – his forefathers supplied the Imperial House. His family is so famous that Hollywood producers cast Yoshihara’s brother Shoji in the role of the blacksmith in the 2003 movie “The Last Samurai”, featuring Tom Cruise. “King Carl Gustaf of Sweden was here once,” Yoshihara mentions in passing. “He knew that patience is key when making a blade. I gave him a sword as a gift.”

If you are looking for a visual representation of *gaman* and *shinbo* in Japanese art, you will find it where manual precision and skill have unfolded in the shadow of stubborn perseverance over generations. In Japan’s master workshops, lacquer, fabric, paper, flowers, clay, wood, ink and iron are transformed into symbols of work ethic, harmony and reflection. “People think the older a sword, the better! For example, those from the 13th century Kamakura period. But that’s not true,” says Yoshihara. “Swords are no longer used today. So they have to be better than ever – more elegant, harder, sharper and more ornate. Otherwise, collectors wouldn’t be interested in them, and that would be the downfall of our guild.” Yoshihara unsuccessfully held iron in the embers thousands of times before learning to read when the flames had reached 800 degrees – without a thermometer. It is at that temperature that the blade becomes harder than hard, indicated by a color that is somewhere between cool cherry red and hot bright yellow. Failure followed failure, frustration followed despair. He did not want to disappoint his ancestors, he did not want to give up, now that the craft had been passed down to the tenth generation.
Perfection through to the end

While Yoshihara's battle of perseverance takes place in a sooty cave of a workshop, lacquerware artist Kenji Omachi (62) carries his struggle out in a dust-free studio shielded by plastic tar-paulins. As early as 6000 years ago, the Japanese used the bark sap they call "urushiol" to attach their arrow and spearheads. Irritating to the skin like poison ivy, it can cause redness and minor abscesses. In the 6th century, this technique developed into urushi, the Japanese lacquer art that emperors used as a way to show off their luxury and sophisticated tastes. Generally, it was wooden receptacles in vermilion, but also black cases and jewelry cabinets, quivers and combs, panels and screens – all with a gold-dusting and decorated with mother-of-pearl – that were created to delight the court. Nothing shines better than this lacquer – not even synthetic resin varnish or shellac.

Kenji Omachi is one of the well-known urushi artists from Kyoto. He works with modern style elements, and his clients include the international electronics and ceramics manufacturer Kyocera. "A single particle of dust can ruin everything if it gets caught in one of the up to 20 layers of lacquer that have been applied," explains the master lacquerer. This despite the fact that laypeople would hardly notice it among the thousands of tiny glittering particles of color and gold pigments that Omachi additionally places on his pieces with tweezers under a magnifying glass.

But that’s not the point – his art is about patient *kodawari*, about being more perfect than perfect. According to *kodawari*, there is no cheating. Not in art and not in everyday life. In Japan, banks iron money for free. (How embarrassing it would be to pay with a crumpled bill.) In bathrooms, the beginning of the paper roll is left folded to a point – to make it easier for the next person to pull it out. And if everyone wears a mask due to the pandemic, then one does not step out of line on that front either. So is it this patience, acceptance and conformity that have led to Japan’s characteristic minimalistic and harmonious aesthetics – an effort to ease the burden of patient acquiescence in everyday life? Urushi master Omachi’s perseverance as he agonizes over dust-sized pigments is nothing compared to the Japanese monks who practiced self-mummification until 1903. As part of the *sokushinbutsu* ritual, they would drink urushiol juice for years, causing them agony and slowly drying them out from the inside. When their end was approaching, they would retreat into...
a hole in the ground with a bell and a stalk to breathe through. When their fellow believers no longer heard any ringing, they would pull the monks out of their self-chosen graves and place them in the temple as mummies.

**A steadfast push for change**
The original meaning of samurai was “those who serve in close attendance to nobility” – as stewards and valets in 10th century Kyoto. Slowly, they advanced to the position of bodyguards, adopted the lifestyle of the nobility and eventually became warriors. Samurai served their leader until their death and were the guarantors of military dictatorships and feudal rule until the mid-19th century. After that time, Japan set out to catch up with the West through reforms. Because this left nothing in the country to fight over, the samurais became masterless, so to speak, which is why they were then called ronins.

Loyalty, being a member of a clan, strict hierarchy, self-discipline, patience and a well-developed appreciation of the fine arts were the principles according to which samurais lived their lives – and this remains so for the Japanese today. “Not necessarily to the advantage of a nation facing the challenges of the 21st century,” says Nozomu Yoshitomi, 61, a former major general in the Japanese armed forces and currently a professor of risk management at Nihon University in Tokyo. “We need *gaman* and *shinbo* today, not to uphold the status quo, or the old ways, but to usher in and implement change. Under the aegis of the US, we have become comfortable, relying on a big brother to protect us for far too long, postponing reforms time and time again. Young people don’t know what is happening out in the world, and they are not interested in finding out. And yet we are facing many new challenges: cyberwar, intellectual property theft and social media disinformation.”

Yoshitomi sees China as a serious external threat: war could break out at any time over the Senkaku Islands, which both countries claim belong to them. As a first countermeasure, the former soldier is calling for a new, self-written constitution. The existing constitution was drawn up by the Americans in 1946. In a second step, he feels the security treaty should be renegotiated. Why? Because it says the US “would” defend Japan in an emergency, but not that it “will”. The third measure, in Yoshitomi’s opinion, would be an educational campaign for the entire population about the actual state of the nation. He compares this with the situation during the natural disaster and reactor meltdown in Fukushima ten years ago. Everyone kept going, showed *gaman*. Workers at the power plants even risked their lives, otherwise half of Japan would be uninhabitable today. Everything
happened as if guided by an invisible hand, according to the old model of acceptance. “But in an unexpected crisis situation like Fukushima or the pandemic, this behavior is useless, because everyone is waiting for decisions and solutions from the top, but they wait in vain.”

Preserving knowledge for future generations
This makes private initiatives, which in Japan often come from women, all the more important. One of these women is the renowned textile designer Reiko Sudo (68). In 1983, she founded her company *Nuno* (fabric), which blends cutting-edge technologies with centuries-old manufacturing methods. She also sits on the Advisory Board of the textile giant Muji. “Fabric companies require a continuous, 24-hour power supply,” she says. According to Sudo, when electricity was rationed due to the Fukushima disaster, there were production stoppages that small and medium-sized businesses were unable to wait out. As a result, skilled workers and master craftsmen with traditional expertise emigrated to China, where they are in high demand. “That knowledge has been lost there due to mass production,” Sudo explains. This is a historical irony, since much of Japan’s craftsmanship originally came from China and is now migrating back. “That makes it all the more important for us to do everything we can to keep our country’s remaining small businesses alive. Expertise, patience and precision are the guarantors of Japan’s survival in a global future,” she says.

The country’s powerful neighbor is also something that Dr. Oussouby Sacko (54) concerns himself with. Since 2018, he has been President of Kyoto Seika University, and is the first person in Japan with African roots to hold such a position. Raised in Mali, he studied Mandarin Chinese in Beijing and architecture and engineering in Nanjing. Among Chinese students, he perceives a certain pride in their country’s long cultural history. At the same time, they are surprised to see that artistry and craftsmanship have also survived for centuries in Japan – “out of sheer admiration,” says Sacko. “Money is secondary. It’s more important to pass the art of calligraphy on to the next generation than it is to make money. It’s more important to save the profession from extinction, even if you can’t make a living at it and have to keep your head above water with side jobs, than to give up because you’re not needed. That’s shinbo. In China, on the other hand, people are more focused on the business aspect.”

Taking inspiration from nature
Ikebana, the art of flower arrangement, has a different focus, as spending hours positioning plants in a vase is not a lucrative business model. Ikebana also originally came from China – 1500 years ago, as a way of decorating altars – and was a simple affair. The Japanese, however, turned it into a science, just like tea drinking – with a system and rules. Kimono manufacturer Chiyo Yamamoto (80) from Kyoto practices both rituals in her spare time. “The greatest inspiration for patience is nature,” she says in her teahouse, overlooking the greenery. “Take this plum tree here. My great-great-grandfather planted it 220 years ago. It still bears fruit. Only ten or twelve a year now, but that’s enough for me to make plum wine, which we drink on special occasions.”

Roland Hagenberg grew up in Vienna and has been living in Tokyo as a freelance writer, artist and photographer for over 25 years. His travel reports, essays, interviews and photos have been published in Architectural Digest, NZZ, Vogue, Wallpaper and other international publications.
"Patience and precision are the guarantors of Japan’s survival in a global future," says textile designer Reiko Sudo.

**Gaman and shinbo**

Gaman and shinbo, which mean patience and perseverance, are words that the Japanese use on a daily basis. As is "ganbaro!" (let’s get through this, let’s do our best!). The terms are interchangeable, but have different nuances: it is more appropriate to use gaman in cases where it is unclear when the difficult situation will end, and there is little that can be done to influence it. In the case of shinbo, the time span is more foreseeable, the demanding situation is often self-inflicted and the chances of influencing it are greater. The logic behind the Japanese characters reflects these differences. Gaman can be read literally as "I am lazy" — I will do nothing because I can’t change it anyway. Shinbo, on the other hand, is more poetic: "holding bitterness in your arms" — you could drop it, but that would mean giving up.

我慢 = Gaman
辛抱 = Shinbo
Moving at your own pace

Back when the magazine in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” still featured the famous questionnaire that Marcel Proust is said to have completed twice, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered the question “What is your biggest weakness?” predictably: “Impatience”. Apparently, impatience was the kind of flaw that people were most likely to admit to having. It enabled overperformers to cast themselves in a good light without giving too much away. One might thus conclude that patience is a virtue for less ambitious people, for those without big goals, for the nice but also harmless. Why? Because patience is seen as an ability to endure. Impatience, on the other hand, is considered a heroic character trait.

However, one could also opt for another narrative, according to which patience is a hallmark of those who act with foresight; who do not immediately lose their nerve just because they encounter obstacles; who are sure of themselves and are therefore able to wait; who do not look for quick returns on their investments, but trust in the long-term return; who do not flail around frantically, and instead stick to their strategy.

In 1983, the writer Sten Nadolny brought another narrative into play: his international bestseller “The Discovery of Slowness” is not explicitly about patience but about speed versus slowness. In his book, Nadolny recognizes slowness as a success factor in the context of strategic patience, or what sociologist Max Weber referred to as “the boring of hard boards” with regard to politics.

Differing speeds

Nadolny’s book comes across like a historical novel. His protagonist is the historical figure John Franklin, a rear admiral in the British navy and a polar explorer. In the first half of the 19th century, Franklin went on three major expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage. In 1847, during his last expedition, he met his death among the ice floes of the Arctic Ocean together with his crew. Although Nadolny stays true to the facts and biographical events of this historical role model, he makes an emblematic literary figure out of him by giving the explorer a special character trait. Ever since Nadolny’s John Franklin could think, he has been slow. Very slow. So slow that as a child, his schoolmates mock him. Because his reaction time is so bad, he is only allowed to hold the string over which the ball is thrown when the other children play. Although this earns him contempt and no thanks, he performs this task with extreme reliability.

John realizes early on that he has no hope of keeping up with his peers when it comes to speed. He understands that his motor skills are no different from his speech, that his thought process will always be slow and that he will always be trampled
Sten Nadolny's novel highlights many of the positive aspects of slowness, but he does not treat it as an absolute. Even John Franklin's slowness and patience are no match for the impenetrable ice of the Arctic Ocean. He combats against the ice floes and will ultimately be immortalized in the imperishable ice. But his tenacity in finding the Northwest Passage has given his life meaning. And his failure to accomplish this goal in no way diminished his posthumous reputation.

Ijoma Mangold is a cultural policy correspondent for the weekly newspaper Die Zeit. He is a recipient of the Berlin Prize for Literary Criticism and is a member of the quartet of literary critics featured in the TV program “lesenswert quartett” aired on SWR. Following his literary debut with the publication of his autobiography “Das deutsche Krokodil. Meine Geschichte” (2017), his second book, a political diary entitled “Der innere Stammtisch. Ein politisches Tagebuch”, was published in 2020.

Sten Nadolny was born in Zehdenick, a town in Brandenburg, Germany, in 1942, and grew up on Chiemsee. After undergoing training as a reserve officer, the son of two writers studied medieval studies, history and political science, and earned his doctorate in Berlin with a thesis on disarmament diplomacy. He worked as a high school teacher for several years, but that was not to become his destiny. He gave up the profession, drove a cab and tried his hand at screenplays. He actually wanted to work in the film industry, but his ideas for screenplays ultimately became novels. In 1980, he won the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize at a competition in Klagenfurt with an excerpt from the manuscript that later became "The Discovery of Slowness". The novel shot him to international fame in one fell swoop: a major, critically acclaimed bestseller in Germany, it was translated into many languages. With his playful rediscovery of past worlds, Nadolny had intuitively tapped into the postmodern spirit of the 1980s. Although he continued to write, including an epic about the Ullstein publishing family, he never again succeeded in matching the tremendous success of "The Discovery of Slowness".

A keen observer
In other words, John is a keen observer. He is drawn to the sea at an early age, despite the fact one might think that qualities such as speed and promptness would be especially important on board a ship. But John develops certain techniques: “He moved at his own pace.” The pace at which his companions and superiors speak overwhelms him. They interrupt each other, and the most quick-witted are the ones who dominate the conversation. John can’t keep up. So he builds a repertoire of well-rehearsed phrases that give him a moment to collect his thoughts during conversations: when he is addressed, he responds with an empty turn of phrase, giving him time to think about what has been said. His answers often come late, but they provide a new, enlightening point of view.

He is not a man made for multitasking, “for he never did or thought about two things simultaneously.” Navigation is something that fascinates him, also because the path of the stars has a predictability and invariability to it that suits John’s way of observing: it might take him a bit longer than his competitors to grasp something, but once he does, he understands it fully. During the Battle of Trafalgar against the French fleet in 1805, he succeeds in shooting an enemy sniper without giving up his cover by calculating the exact angle of fire in the midst of the battle: “‘Shoot, will you!’ someone shouted behind him. But John Franklin, who had held a rope in the air for hours, also had the time to take aim. He wanted to fire only if he was completely sure he could hit his target.”

Immortalized in ice
Nadolny’s John Franklin lives at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, a period that was being driven by England. Similar to today, the feeling at the time was one of sweeping acceleration. For a person like John Franklin who has his own, slow pace, this is a challenge. But he recognizes in it his opportunity: certain causalities remain hidden at first glance. His slow powers of observation can identify connections that elude others. And because he never loses his patience, he can stick to what he knows to be right and hold his course.

on by everyone in this world if he does not succeed in drawing strength from his calmness, living at his own pace and seeing whether there might not also be advantages to slowness. His teacher Dr. Orme is of the same opinion: “John’s eyes and ears retain every impression for a peculiarly long time. His apparent slowness of mind and his inertia are nothing but the result of exaggerated care taken by his brain in contemplating every kind of detail.”
Am I one of those people who wants everything right here and now? No, people who know me describe me as ‘patient’. For me, that means pursuing the right priorities with determination – until the time is ripe. For example, I recently planted sunflowers. There’s no use in being impatient and yelling at the flowers to pick up the pace: they follow nature’s rhythm.

Elisabeth Schirmer was managing 700 people at her family’s watch movement company when she was just 27 years old. She was used to channeling her energy into tackling projects and resolutely implementing them. That is, until her strength left her in February 2020. Since that time, she has become even more patient – and has reordered her priorities.

“What is your greatest weakness?” is a popular interview question. Executives like to respond saying: ‘impatience,’ without providing deeper insights into their personalities. As soon as an idea is announced, they want to see it implemented. And if something doesn’t work right away, they keep pushing and criticizing – until the desired results are achieved. Impetuous people are often admired as doers.

Elisabeth Schirmer

After studying economics and spending time in the US, Elisabeth Schirmer (63) joined her father William Mosset, founder of the Swiss manufacturer of precision watch movements Ronda, as his assistant. When he died unexpectedly in 1985, she had to take over the helm. She was initially supported in this role by her husband, and not long thereafter, by her brother. In order to have time for her three children, she gave up her position and became a member of the Board of Directors. Over the years, Schirmer has also served on the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, on the Council of the University of Applied Sciences and as Chairwoman of Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank. The operational management of Ronda AG is now in the hands of the third generation.
Although I grew up with the tick-tock of watch movements – my father was the founder of Ronda, a watch movement factory – I don’t want the passing of time to put me under pressure. Time moves forward relentlessly. And unlike some management experts, I don’t consider impatience to be a success factor at all.

I started to shadow my father at work early on. When I joined the family business at the age of 24, he was already 73. It seemed to me that he ran his team as if he were in the Wild West. Lenience was not really one of his strengths. That led me to ask myself which values I would introduce at the company. Three years later, my father died – and I found myself at the helm of a company with 700 employees.

My father was one to lay down the law, but I wanted the people around me to share their ideas and take responsibility for things. The change in leadership triggered a transformation that required perseverance. You can’t transform a corporate culture from one day to the next: the company’s leaders have to set the example.

A fateful day
A long-term approach is especially important in the watchmaking industry. Chasing after quick profits is counterproductive, because the industry is subject to fluctuations and has weathered structural crises. Building up reserves during the good years is essential for getting through the lean years. We are a family-owned business and compete with major listed companies on the international market. That can be challenging, but it gives us more freedom and we don’t have to publish quarterly financial statements to keep shareholders happy.

However, patience also has a downside. As a boss, for example, I was sometimes too lenient when it came to personnel decisions. On some occasions, I should have acted more quickly and more consistently. But I wanted to give people a second and third chance. In the end though, no one benefits if the wrong person is in the wrong place.

On 28 February 2020, my relationship with patience intensified. The snow was glistening in the sun that day, the sky was a brilliant blue – there wasn’t a cloud in sight. But at four in the afternoon, while I was working in the kitchen, I had a cough attack. All of a sudden, I felt pain. I immediately understood that it was serious – I hadn’t just thrown my back out. I dragged myself to the bed, dialed 911 with the last of my strength, and breathed: ‘Jesus, stand by me.’ Then all the energy left my body and overwhelming pain set in. I was paralyzed.

First, I ended up in emergency at the hospital in Liestal. Four hours later, I was at University Hospital Basel. The doctors did CT scans, but remained at a loss. They decided to cut open my back. I took the hands of the two surgeons attending to me and prayed out loud with them. It was important to me to place myself under the protection of the Almighty. I wanted God to have the last word, not the doctors. I gently sank into the anesthesia, and the spinous processes of my vertebrae were shaved down.

When I woke up, I was informed of what had happened to me: a blood vessel had burst close to my spinal cord. This had caused blood to enter the spinal canal, which then clotted and pressed on the central neural pathway. Thankfully, I could feel my limbs again. But I had no control over them. Like a baby, I had to learn how to stand, keep my balance and put my right foot in front of my left again. Every bit of progress I made required the patience of a saint.

Focusing on what’s important
My strong willpower was very helpful during that time. I continuously set goals for myself – and combined that with a lot of perseverance. I was inwardly triumphant when it no longer took me ten minutes to make a small movement, but only five.

When I was transferred to REHAB Basel, I met many patients who had resigned themselves to their situation. After two weeks, I switched from a wheelchair to a walker. After another month, I started to use canes. The fact I can now walk again without any assistance seems like a miracle to me.

The worst thing was my sleepless nights. At a certain point, I no longer wanted to watch TV or read. To make matters worse, I had to take opiates for weeks. I wanted to be free of them. Withdrawal takes a lot of strength and perseverance. It took significant effort to resist the urge to take a pill. I raged, I struggled, I reached my limits. Today, I no longer take that medication.

These experiences have taught me to be even more patient. But above all, my priorities have changed. I’ve learned to let go and focus on what’s important. If I receive a request, it’s not hard for me to say no. When I look out at the view of the village from my garden, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude for everything I have been given – my family, my children, my grandchildren, the company. When I was lying in my hospital bed, I realized that in the end, it’s not products or sales that count, but relationships. Not what I accomplish, but who I am. That’s why I want to invest more time in my relationship with God and with people. I’ve become physically weaker, but mentally stronger.”

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A long-term approach is especially important in the watchmaking industry. Chasing after quick profits is counterproductive, because the industry is subject to fluctuations and has weathered structural crises. Building up reserves during the good years is essential for getting through the lean years. We are a family-owned business and compete with major listed companies on the international market. That can be challenging, but it gives us more freedom and we don’t have to publish quarterly financial statements to keep shareholders happy.

However, patience also has a downside. As a boss, for example, I was sometimes too lenient when it came to personnel decisions. On some occasions, I should have acted more quickly and more consistently. But I wanted to give people a second and third chance. In the end though, no one benefits if the wrong person is in the wrong place.

On 28 February 2020, my relationship with patience intensified. The snow was glistening in the sun that day, the sky was a brilliant blue – there wasn’t a cloud in sight. But at four in the afternoon, while I was working in the kitchen, I had a cough attack. All of a sudden, I felt pain. I immediately understood that it was serious – I hadn’t just thrown my back out. I dragged myself to the bed, dialed 911 with the last of my strength, and breathed: ‘Jesus, stand by me.’ Then all the energy left my body and overwhelming pain set in. I was paralyzed.

First, I ended up in emergency at the hospital in Liestal. Four hours later, I was at University Hospital Basel. The doctors did CT scans, but remained at a loss. They decided to cut open my back. I took the hands of the two surgeons attending to me and prayed out loud with them. It was important to me to place myself under the protection of the Almighty. I wanted God to have the last word, not the doctors. I gently sank into the anesthesia, and the spinous processes of my vertebrae were shaved down.

When I woke up, I was informed of what had happened to me: a blood vessel had burst close to my spinal cord. This had caused blood to enter the spinal canal, which then clotted and pressed on the central neural pathway. Thankfully, I could feel my limbs again. But I had no control over them. Like a baby, I had to learn how to stand, keep my balance and put my right foot in front of my left again. Every bit of progress I made required the patience of a saint.

Focusing on what’s important
My strong willpower was very helpful during that time. I continuously set goals for myself – and combined that with a lot of perseverance. I was inwardly triumphant when it no longer took me ten minutes to make a small movement, but only five.

When I was transferred to REHAB Basel, I met many patients who had resigned themselves to their situation. After two weeks, I switched from a wheelchair to a walker. After another month, I started to use canes. The fact I can now walk again without any assistance seems like a miracle to me.

The worst thing was my sleepless nights. At a certain point, I no longer wanted to watch TV or read. To make matters worse, I had to take opiates for weeks. I wanted to be free of them. Withdrawal takes a lot of strength and perseverance. It took significant effort to resist the urge to take a pill. I raged, I struggled, I reached my limits. Today, I no longer take that medication.

These experiences have taught me to be even more patient. But above all, my priorities have changed. I’ve learned to let go and focus on what’s important. If I receive a request, it’s not hard for me to say no. When I look out at the view of the village from my garden, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude for everything I have been given – my family, my children, my grandchildren, the company. When I was lying in my hospital bed, I realized that in the end, it’s not products or sales that count, but relationships. Not what I accomplish, but who I am. That’s why I want to invest more time in my relationship with God and with people. I’ve become physically weaker, but mentally stronger.”
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