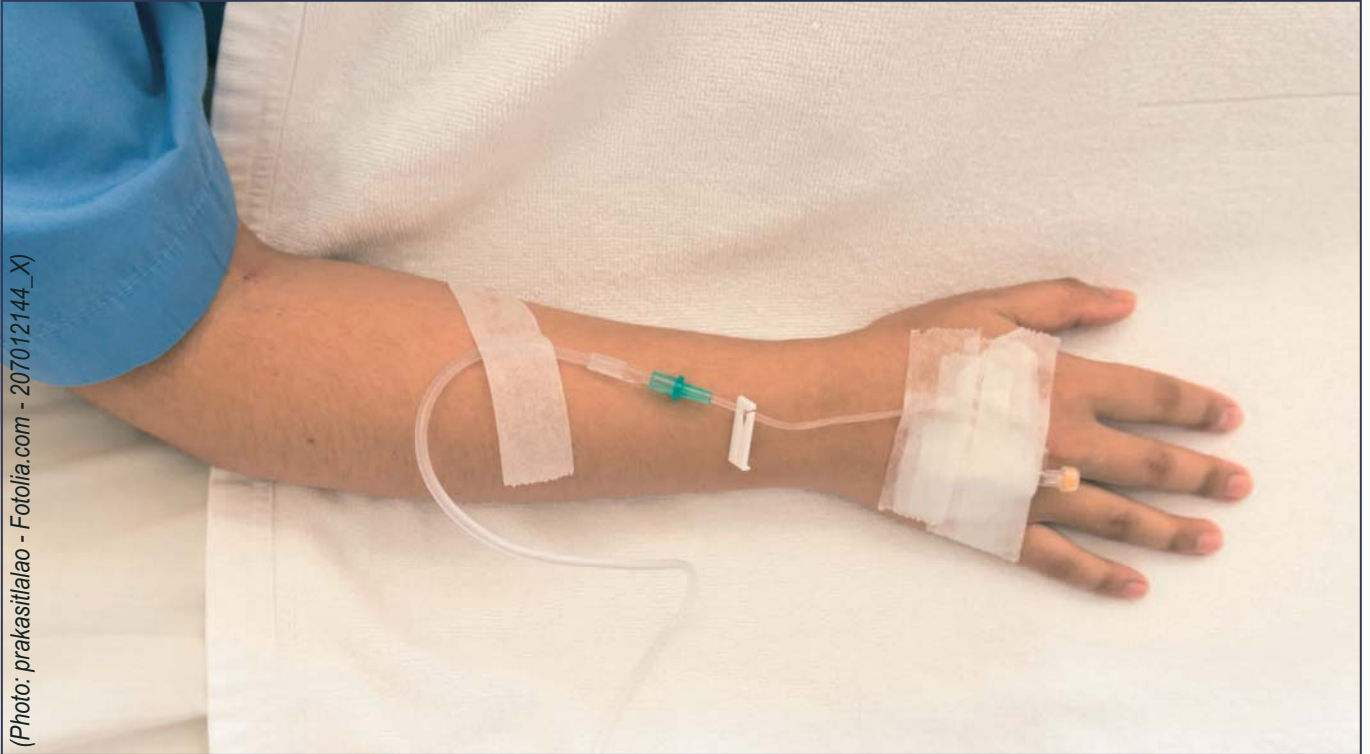




# BOWSPIRIT Kids



(Photo: prakasitlao - Fotolia.com - 207012144\_X)

**We want to turn children's tears  
into tears of joy**



(Photo: Shmel - Fotolia.com - 142735429\_X)

# Michael Speckenbach

## Why I went "all in" for Bowspirit Kids

*In an interview with Heinrich Wilhelm Driver, Michael Speckenbach (49), a lawyer from Lübeck (Germany), explains why he founded Bowspirit Kids, why he used everything he had for this purpose, and why this project will not only change the lives of potential little guests in the short run.*



The founder of Bowspirit Kids: Michael Speckenbach.

(Photo: Oliver Gloss | Foto Krause)

**Michael, we know each other for many years and we both had talked about your plans in advance. However, you seem to have surprised your family and friends by introducing Bowspirit Kids to the general public in early November 2018. For all those who have never heard of Bowspirit Kids before: In three sentences - what does this name stand for?**

Bowspirit Kids is a non-profit organisation. Our aim is to create a floating holiday and recreation camp for sick and traumatised children and teenagers on board an older passenger ferry. For this we have now started the crowdfunding phase, because we don't have the "big unknown" who finances and makes this vision come true, but we rely on many small contributions from many very ordinary people like you and me, who are inspired by our vision and help out.

**What exactly do we have to envisage under a floating holiday and recreation camp?**

Perhaps let me answer your question with a play on words that Erich Kästner may forgive me for: We want to create a "floating playroom". A ship on which, in addition to the cabins and the areas necessary for physical well-being, such as the kitchen or restaurant, there is everything a child's heart desires. A place where our young guests can finally be again what they were temporarily denied by illness and/or trauma: kids.

**How do you come up with such an idea?**

I don't think you can come up with such an idea.

**What do you mean by that?**

Such an idea comes to you. I don't think something like that comes about through thinking or something similar. At least that's how it was in my case.

**Tell me.**

Fate has thrown me this "ball" several times and very persistently. And I did not catch it just as persistently. It was a bit like a child learning to catch a real ball. The parents throw the ball again and again and the child reaches into the void again and again at the beginning. But at some point it grabs the ball and from then on it knows how to do that and will be able to catch the ball again and again and throw it back.

**Nice picture. When did fate throw you the "ball" called Bowspirit Kids for the first time?**

Oh, that was more than fourteen years ago. And the "ball" didn't yet have the name Bowspirit Kids or the specific shape that our project has today.

As you recall, as a legal advisor to entrepreneurs I was pretty much on the road in that time. After my studies I was eager to use my knowledge in business administration and laws and to help companies succeed. I was - in self-critical retrospect - a completely brain-bound person. Feelings - so my life experience at that time - were better put into a deep pit and a concrete slab was laid over it.

**I can remember. You were logical through and through. Yes was yes and no was no with you. And two and two were four.**

Right. And then one fine day I was travelling in the country by car again - probably to a client or coming from a court hearing. I don't remember that anymore. What I do remember is that a report about a holiday camp for sick children was suddenly broadcasted on the radio. In that, the children themselves had their say and told what this camp stay had done to them.

*IT SIMPLY TORE ME APART ...*

**And?**

It simply tore me apart ... I had to stop the trip immediately, because I could see nothing more ...

**What happened there?**

I have no idea - not even today. As I said before: I was a completely brain-bound consultant to companies. It was about figures, data, facts, employment relationships to be settled, court cases to be won. There was no room for feelings or sick or weak people. People had to function.

**And then you hear some kids talk about themselves and that does something to you. What exactly?**

First of all, I was terrified. In your mid-thirties you

have been living with yourself for a while and think you know yourself - and then that.

But this shock lasted only amazingly short. It was replaced by a positive thought.

### **What thought was that?**

That makes sense. That is right.

### **You mean the organisation that had organised the holiday camp there.**

Yes, that's what I actually thought at first: "Great thing - you have to help there". But you know, I do think - sometimes to the sorrow of my fellow men - extremely fast. Still on that country road there was the thought "That can be done much better - at the sea".

### **And that's how Bowspirit Kids was born?**

Nope. (laughs) It would have been nice. There was only the thought born of organising recreation camps at the sea for sick children. But we already talked about the brain person. So this thought got a footnote, because I knew that this thought wouldn't work for small cash. And the footnote was "If you ever win the lottery".

### **Sounds reasonable.**

Not if you don't play the lottery ...

### **What does that mean?**

I have tied the thought to a condition that could never happen. That is not reasonable, but - forgive me - neatly stupid!

Fate obviously saw that the same way, because I hadn't caught the "ball".

### **What happened then?**

Nothing at first. Business as usual - figures, data, facts, but no feelings, please. A camp for sick children? Disappeared slowly in the "fog" ...

But as already said: Fate is a buddy and throws you the "ball" again. This time a little more violently.

### **I guess what you mean ...**

In the summer of 2006 my father was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer: Diagnostics, search for the world's best surgeon, hope, anxiety ... He died in the summer of 2007. While my sister took over the medical-technical part, I tried to accompany him "psychologically" - without knowing how to really do it. And, of course, I was only able to do this extremely suboptimally - with my current knowledge. My father was nevertheless grateful for this dedication - and that was the main thing.

### **The death of a close relative is always an incisive event. How did you deal with it?**

Fortunately I had psychotherapeutic accompaniment. And I was self-employed, so I could always plunge into work whenever I could, and if I couldn't, take a break.

But the actual "problem" only came after the acute mourning phase.

### **What do you mean?**

I have always seen my father as a role model - perhaps more than many other sons. I always wanted to be like him. That's how my career choice went - even though he tried to shake me up within the scope of his powers.

Through very circumscribed conversations with him during the illness and through conversations with his environment - friends, work colleagues - I got to know someone whom I had never known before ... he has made out much with himself.

### **What has that done to you?**

Well, the more the acute event of the illness and his death became a thing of the past, the more the question "Who really was your role model? Do you really want to live like that?" came to the fore with me.

### **And your answer to that?**

No - a crystal clear no. I didn't want to function and to make out feelings with myself and I didn't want to be harassed professionally either - and as a labour lawyer I'm VERY careful with this term -, but to work with people who value me, my know-how and my commitment.

### **And then you founded Bowspirit Kids?**

No. That would really have been too easy. I knew what I didn't want. But I had no idea how I would do it ... I did not catch the "ball" again.

### **But you make it really exciting.**

Sorry, the idea for the script of my life didn't come from me.

### **Let me guess: Your buddy named fate threw you the "ball" again?**

Yes, but this time it got more personal and was for my health. I didn't seem to react to psychological triggers.

In the late summer of 2013, a cascade of retinal detachments began on my left eye, which culminated in nine surgeries until February 2015 - some every three or four weeks.

### **Phew. There is little time to recharge your batteries ...**

Right. It felt as if I was being overrun again and again by huge freak waves. And since the retina of my right eye is also pre-damaged, there was simply pure fear in the phases without freak waves.

According to a WHO study, illnesses

that can lead to blindness are as drastic and psychologically stressful for the patient as AIDS or cancer.

I knew rationally that I was in very good medical hands. But these very good hands filled my eye at times with gas or silicone oil to press the retina back to its base. And then there were "exciting" position instructions so that the gas or oil bubble would develop pressure in the right area: "Please left side position with slightly angled head" ... there you lie on the sofa in left side position with slightly angled head, cannot read and cannot watch TV properly - and you are afraid ... but at some point you're through being afraid - because you simply can't do any more. But "it" naturally thinks on - at least with me.

### **What have you done?**

I wondered what I was actually doing here.

### **Suicide for fear of death?**

No. Suicide was obviously the solution for many people around me. But I actually only thought of that when my family expressed corresponding fears. Too bad that my life was considered so worthless that I could throw it away.

No. My question went in the direction of the meaning of my life. But not in the sense of not seeing anyone and therefore giving it up. But in asking: What does life / fate / God want to tell me?

### **Found Bowspirit Kids!**

Patience, my dear friend, patience.

No. Before you can take new paths, you first have to see for yourself clearly where you stand and whether you are on the right path.

### **And?**

I stood there as a labour law consultant. Had acted as an external HR executive, gained experience as an entrepreneur with my own specialist publishing house and was able to participate in the executive management of a shipping company. But in the end I felt empty. Especially the legal advice seemed to go well, my advice was gladly accepted as far as court proceedings were concerned. But over the years, I had come to realise that I was merely treating symptoms and not the real causes of the legal dispute.

### **What do you mean?**

Let me give you an example: If an employee is caught stealing, then - after appropriate consideration processes - he is usually dismissed without notice. The employee complains. The lawsuit is carried out and the claim is rejected. End of story.

But if theft occurs again and again in a company, then one can believe in a





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random statistical accumulation. Or one asks the question, whether these thefts are possibly only the symptom for a completely different "illness" in the organism "enterprise".

This awareness requires some professional experience. However, when I tried to share this with my clients, they usually declined. "We won the case after all. Let it be good." I felt more and more like a foreign legionnaire who could successfully fight foreign battles but never really contribute to peace.

That has hollowed me out mentally.

#### **Burnout.**

No. Apart from the collapsing retina, I was physically fine.

It was rather the feeling of senselessness of one's own actions. But that was not clear to me.

The former investment banker Rainer Voss once said in an interview about our society, "We have an incredible amount of know-how. What we lack is the know-why." When I heard that, I thought - excuse the choice of words - "Fuck, he's talking about you".

I had spent days and weeks pondering what was wrong, why I didn't feel well ... I did not get it, only saw the symptoms. Voss's short statement opened my eyes in the truest sense of the word.

**So did you decide to get socially involved and come up with Bowspirit Kids?**

No. It took two more throws of the "ball". One was in the form of a conversation with a friend. In the Eurojackpot a huge sum had accumulated and I expressed the wish for this lottery win. He looked at me in amazement and asked what I wanted with it, I had a job and a house. Why the lottery prize? I told him about my vision of a camp for sick and traumatised children at the seaside. He took note of it - I really can't describe it any other way. Okay, I thought to myself, the topic doesn't have to inspire everyone.

#### **THAT MUST BE DIFFERENT - CROWDFUNDRAISING!**

A few months later, however, he threw a ball at my chest: "You with your camp at the seaside, if you win the lottery. That must be different - crowdfunding! And if you do, then not at the sea, but on the sea. We know how well sea voyages have done us again and again. We can share that."

#### **The birth of Bowspirit Kids?**

Yes, you could say that. Even if under another name and thought by him rather as a floating hotel with small Baltic Sea trips and not as a cruise into the future. But the idea came to a halt again. Even for crowdfunding and the necessary start-up costs the necessary amount of money was missing. So: the end of the story.

#### **But then something must have happened?**

That's right. Buddy fate sent me back into the horizontal. This time it were double prolapsed intervertebral discs and the renewed task "Think again!"

#### **You obviously did?**

What else was there to do? If you suddenly can only crawl with your mid-forties, then at least I start to think "What are you doing here?"

#### **So what?**

I was about to sell my house. I decided to put the surplus from the mortgage to be repaid into the venture. I revised the concept, discarded the old technical name, created our mascot, met people who listened and were inspired by the idea and the possibilities it would create for the children ... and my back became straight.

#### **You don't want to tell me now that you invested all the money from the house sale in Bowspirit Kids?**

Exactly that. I went "all in" - as the saying goes so well in poker. Everything that I have and everything that I am and everything that I know thanks to an excellent education that my parents kindly made possible for me, has flowed into Bowspirit Kids in 2018.

#### **You are crazy.**

When it's crazy to stand up for the weak. Yes, then I am crazy.

If it's crazy to follow your belly knowledge. Yes, then I am crazy.

If it is crazy to put everything on one card, because good always wins in the end. Yes, then I am crazy.

If Walt Disney is right with his statement "If you can dream it, you can do it." - Sorry, then I'm not crazy, but at best a person with a vision. A vision that - unlike a dream - can become reality.

*"If YOU CAN DREAM IT,  
YOU CAN DO IT."*

**Okay, you hung up your lawyer's robe and also used the proceeds from the sale of your house. Now let us please talk about what you have initiated so that the readers can understand why you are going this way.**

I would love to. Bowspirit Kids - this name stands for helping sick and traumatised children and teenagers. We want to do this by giving them a very special time to "recover from illness". They should spend this time on our floating holiday and recreation camp - a passenger ferry that has everything on board that makes children's hearts beat faster.

**You're talking about sick and traumatised children. This means**

**that you have doctors and nurses on board and want to carry out therapies there.**

Yes and no. We are not a hospital ship. If you want to come to us on board, you must have completed the hospital therapy or a therapy phase. At that moment the patient-child is no longer in hospital or, in the case of trauma patients, no longer in intensive therapy, but it is not yet healthy. And that is exactly the problem. Follow-up treatment or rehabilitation measures are available for children and youths in Germany only under very limited conditions, because these are usually measures of vocational rehabilitation of the pension insurance institutions, but the children do not exercise a profession. On the other hand, if there are, they are linked to a clinical picture that can be treated during the rehabilitation period. But when it comes to integrating something that has happened into one's own life and learning how to deal with it, our social systems fail at this point. And if we look abroad in Europe, then there are no corresponding measures for adults and certainly no measures for the sick children or their siblings.

**That is the gap you want to close.**

That is the gap in health care that we as a society must close ... that Bowspirit

Kids offers a solution for.

We want to show these children that they can achieve (almost) anything in the rest of their lives despite or because of what they have experienced.

**So psychotherapy.**

To be honest, I struggle with the term therapy. Our potential guests have had various therapies and treatments before they come on board. I don't want parents, doctors or possibly children to say or think for themselves that there is this therapy ship - that's where I have to go now.

We will have very well-trained therapeutic staff on board. And if a child signals in any way that he or she has something on his or her heart, then everyone from the sailor to the female captain and especially the kindergarten teachers will be able to hear this wish between the lines. And then we will "do magic".

*WE WILL "DO MAGIC".*

**You will what?**

We will "do magic". You can work best with children if you playfully put the threatening things into a different perspective. So we will not "treat", but we will "do magic".

There are two beautiful examples in psychotherapeutic work with adults that



*Visions are built one brick at a time.*

*(Photo: Oliver Gloss | Foto Krause)*





(Photo: Shmel - Fotolia.com - 73653740\_X)

we will adapt to work with children. In the end, what has been experienced will not be gone - our "magic power" does not reach that far and it should not. But the experience will look different, because I have learned playfully to look at it from a different perspective.

**Sounds exciting. But why a passenger ferry? You could also play and "do magic" with the children in a mountain hotel?**

This question from yourself is surprising. (smiles) You have been a sailor for years. You know the attraction that the sea has had on us humans for thousands of years. The sea is like all of us - sometimes calm and sometimes rough, sometimes deep and sometimes shallow ... a mirror of our self.

In addition, all life on earth comes from the sea in evolutionary history. We want to use the sea - the origin of all of us - as a healing power for our young guests. We humans can only experience true freedom if we leave Mother Earth for a shorter or longer moment. Since flights into space are still reserved for a few people, we want to go out to the (infinite) sea.

**Couldn't this also be achieved with a trip to the seaside? Why does it have to be a cruise?**

That's how I thought at the beginning. A camp at the Baltic Sea coast. The more I thought about who should come and what should happen during the stay, the

clearer it was that this is not appropriate.

In addition to many detailed ideas for the implementation of the trips, which are still a bit of music of the future and would therefore lead a little too far at this point, our project is supported by two core ideas in this respect.

Some of our potential guests simply went through hell. We therefore think that just the best should be good enough in any case for these children and youths. And this is certainly a sea voyage even today - especially if it takes place with a "floating playroom" and one is allowed to get to know and visit areas of the ship that a guest would otherwise never have the chance to see. One never forgets this experience. I put a positive experience on the side of the negative experience of illness - it doesn't erase it, but it puts it into perspective.

Secondly, life itself is also a journey. We would like to offer our little potential guests a very special journey to start into a hopefully healthy future. If this journey would "only" go to a coast, there would be a border - the sea. However, our young guests have experienced more than enough barriers and borderline experiences. Just as we symbolize it with our name, we want to express that despite what they have experienced, (almost) everything is still possible if the children and teenagers learn to trust themselves again with our help and learn to integrate the foul that

fate has played for them into their future lives. We want to leave port A and leave what they have experienced behind us - unfortunately we cannot undo it. And we arrive at port B again. And even if they return home afterwards, our guests will be able to view their return to everyday life from a different perspective and return "upright" to their future lives.

**We are now talking all the time about the young guests on board - be it the sick and traumatised children and youths or their siblings. But what happens when they return home?**

You are addressing an important point. Our focus is clearly on working with and for the children. However, I am perfectly aware that our work would be a waste of time if the children returned to an unchanged environment after their stay with us.

We will therefore also work with the families, the parents. The departure and arrival days are perfect for this. On the departure day we will work out with the parents what we intend to do with the children. There will be a lot for the parents to think about ... there will be time and space during the child's stay with us. On the day of arrival we will talk to the parents and give specific suggestions for each child.

**This means that you discuss with the parents how the child has developed, what it has told you, where the shoe pinches especially?**

No - definitely not. I've been working as a holder of professional secrecy for years. What is said on board stays on board!

But we will give general hints on how to support the individual path each child has taken with us. This can range from "let it go" to "Anna wants to come back, we'll have time for her then and then ...".

**Well, the parents need to be able to afford to let their child come to you again.**

The stay with the Bowspirit Kids will be completely free for all children. I'm not building a luxury liner for wealthy families here. We don't care where you come from. We want to know who you are.

### *THE STAY WITH THE BOWSPIRIT KIDS WILL BE COMPLETELY FREE FOR ALL CHILDREN.*

**How will you find the children who should come on board?**

Not at all. Bowspirit Kids is an offer of the society, the crowd, to the children. We are just the organisers. And because we are supported by the crowd - ultimately, of course, financially - the families, the communities, the doctors treating them will know about us and will drop the keyword "Bowspirit" at the right time.

When the child then wants to come to us, he or she contacts us - with a letter, a picture, a video message - whatever, and tells us what happened.

Our onboarding team will then contact the child and its parents, because the parents of course have to approve the corresponding stay, and discuss everything else.

**And then they all come aboard from all directions?**

Well, it will be a bit more orderly, because on the one hand we want to avoid too long journeys. And on the other hand we will work with homogeneous groups on board. For the children it is important that they don't have to talk about what happened. If, for example, I have had cancer therapy, it will be easier if I know that my new playmate knows what that means. I can talk to her about it and how I feel. But I don't have to, because she already knows.

**Does the ship that you want to buy actually already exist?**

Since we are talking about an older passenger ferry, of course it already exists. But we have deliberately not yet talked about which ships we have in mind, because we do not want to drive

up the price unnecessarily.

The ship that we have chosen for our public relations work is in any case only a symbol. It is the silhouette of two ships, which the people of Lübeck, in particular, will be familiar with, because they sailed from Lübeck to Scandinavia for many years.

**You speak of Lübeck as your home port ...**

We speak of Lübeck as our base port. Whereby in your question lies a correct assumption: We would also like to see Lübeck as our home port, because we do not want to operate our ship under a flag of convenience. All employees on board will be in contact with our young guests. And from my point of view therefore it is completely forbidden to employ "cheap labourers". Our employees should be valued for their work - regardless of their nationality. This requires remuneration at our remuneration level.

Whether we can really sail under the German flag, however, also depends on whether the German authorities will actually allow us to have the ship that we have actually purchased flying the German flag. But the future will show that.

**But such a ship costs enormous sums in acquisition and maintenance, doesn't it? With the money you could do a lot more directly to the children in a different way.**

In your question, the words "enormous sums" already contain a judgement. Please let us look at the project without judgements.

Yes, the purchase of even an older passenger ferry costs millions of Euros. For this I get a finished hotel with gastronomy, kitchen, rooms and lounges. If I built this in a comparable size ashore, the costs would be just as high. But the project would then have a major disadvantage - at least from our point of view - because it would be immobile. With a passenger ferry I am not bound to a specific location and can - in addition to the therapeutic effects on travellers described earlier - act from different starting points. I can come to the guests and do not have to fly them through half of Europe.

To make it clear: Bowspirit Kids is a European - North American project. We do not know any national borders for sick children.

And also the maintenance of such a ship costs money - without question. But the costs per day and guest are within the limits of the daily rates for rehabilitation or follow-up treatment in Germany.

### *THE COSTS PER DAY AND GUEST ARE WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THE DAILY RATES FOR REHABILITATION OR FOLLOW-UP TREATMENT.*

So it is correct to say that we need a lot of money for our project. However, it is wrong to say that it is "too expensive", not feasible or something similar. That's exactly not what it is. Our cost approach is completely comparable to other forms of health care.

By the way, there is a nice story from the history of LEGO®: LEGO was founded in 1932 by the Danish carpenter Ole Kirk Kristiansen. Nobody bought his furniture during the years of economic crisis. So he changed his saddle and produced wooden toys. After the early death of their mother, his children also had to help out with the business at an early age, and so one day his son Godtfred was in the workshop, while his father drove across the country and sold toys to the retailers. When he came home in the evening, his junior was waiting for him, bursting with pride. He did have an ingenious idea and painted all the toys only twice. Everything was already packed at the station. What Godtfred didn't suspect was that he would now receive the dressing-down of his life. Ole made clear to his son that he didn't like it at all and told him: "Det bedste er ikke for godt" (The best is just good enough). Godtfred had to take the whole load of toys back to the workshop, unpack it and paint it a third time, repack it and take it to the station. Then he set to work and turned a small wooden sign with the above-mentioned inscription, which can still be viewed in Billund today.

### *"DET BEDSTE ER IKKE FOR GODT."*

We have borrowed from this LEGO motto and believe that only the best is good enough for our clientele.

When we start saving on the children, we "save away" the future of our world. I don't think that's very smart.

**You're certainly right about that. But perhaps some people might say that we see pictures of starving children almost every day in the news, for example in Yemen or at the Horn of Africa. There the money is needed much more necessarily.**

It tears my heart when I see such pictures. And unfortunately you can only spend every Euro you own once.





(Photo: Shmel - Fotolia.com - 65370444\_X)

But I personally associate Bowspirit Kids with a long-term hope. It's not really part of the concept because we can't "control" it. But I have made it sound clear in the description of our mascot Bowie.

We've known hunger in poor regions of the world for as long as I can remember - and that's been a few decades after all. And have we got the problem under control? No. Would we have the means - financially or in the form of food? Without any question yes.

The problem is still that we do not want it. Everyone will scream and protest at this point. But as societies of the rich countries, we have to put up with the accusation that we are still watching our fellow humans starve to death - you as well as me.

With disaster relief or local assistance for self-help, we will always be the famous drop in the ocean. What we need is a radical rethink in our societies - here and there - otherwise we will one day smile softly at today's migratory flows. The more knowledge spreads in the digital world, even in the furthest corners, the less it keeps people there if we deprive them of naked life.

Every Bowspirit Kid on its way to us on board will have experienced that it needed and got help from others. We will discuss this with the children on board. And the annual meetings of all Bowspirit Kids will focus on this idea of "only together we are strong".

Consider it a medium-term project. But

fifteen or twenty years after their stay with us on board, Anna and Peter will have completed their training and will be looking for their first employer. And I bet my last shirt that the two of them are not interested in the highest salary or the coolest company car, but in the social responsibility programme of A, B or C.

Yes, we currently have a lot of misery in the world. But therefore we must not lose sight of the problems children face here. And in whose breast two hearts beat, he or she simply divides the amount he or she can spare - one half into disaster relief and the other half into disaster prevention by many, many generations of Bowspirit Kids at the nerve centres of our societies.

**"ONLY TOGETHER WE ARE STRONG."**

**You are an idealist.**

No, I believe in the good in people. Otherwise I wouldn't have to get up in the morning. Sometimes good only needs a good pilot to get there.

**You really believe that ...**

Seriously. You know me well enough that this was not a question and also no surprised statement by you. I really believe that. If I wouldn't do this, I wouldn't have invested a clear six-digit amount together with my teammates, whom I motivated accordingly, and at the same time thrown my entire financial

future into the scales. I am not naive. And I haven't lost a single one of my rational abilities because of the events we talked about earlier. Other abilities have been added for which I am extremely grateful. But I am still a paragraph rider and a fox for figures.

And yes, I always meet - also in this project - people who deeply shake me in my view of man because of their fears, their unreliability or even ignorance. On the other hand, I meet so many people who just stand there with their mouths open "Oh how great! Why didn't someone think of it earlier?".

**Fine. Let's talk about the ship again, please. So my daughter would never have left her son alone on such a ship. Especially not if he had just survived a serious illness ...**

... and would have deprived him of the experience of his life!

But please let me answer your remark seriously. My answer is divided in two, because we must now distinguish between ratio and emotion.

We both know your daughter very well. A very loving woman, but also a very fearful person. Maybe she's scared of what she can't control. And she cannot control the sea. Nobody can do that. Here you have to trust in the abilities of ship and crew. For parents who have similar fears as your daughter that means that they have to trust us. And so





that this "us" does not stand so intangible in the room, I make it more specific: They have to trust **me!** A ship that sails for an organisation in which I am responsible will only be operated according to the highest safety standards and my crew has a clear order not to take any risks. We do not have to keep to a timetable or anything like that, and we can, for example, wait for a storm pass by in port in complete relaxation.

Let me take this opportunity to mention one point that I have been asked about elsewhere, namely what would happen if a child suffered a recurrence or the like. Here, too, the command situation will be clear. During our tours with the children around Europe or along the North American east coast we will always be in so-called coastal waters. If a child needs medical assistance that is not immediately available on board, he or she will be flown out immediately. We will have very good contacts to the maritime armed forces of the Federal Police and Navy through non-prescribed exercises on board our ship. The corresponding SAR flights are organised for us by the corresponding partner organisations within minutes.

But let us come back to the fears of your daughter. As I said, we are moving on an emotional level here and I can say what I want here in case of doubt, I may not be able to reach her.

If parents of potential guest children should feel similar fears, I ask only three rational (!) things to think through. First of all, every ship licensed to carry passengers must be designed in such a way that the passengers are not harmed. And passengers do not mean adult passengers, but all passengers. This means that a ship for passenger transport must, like a building on land, comply with appropriate structural measures so that small children, for example, cannot slip between stairs or similar. Secondly, the children are never unattended. And thirdly, when was the last time they heard of a child or youth who went overboard from a passenger ship? I am not aware of a single case.

And every year thousands of children and young people go on a cruise and are by no means permanently "on a lifeline" with their parents.

**However, the fact that ships are the biggest dirt catapults should argue against the use of a ship for your project in any case. The BUND has concluded this several times.**

Oh, I love such generalisations!

The alleged statements of the BUND have been sufficiently relativised by the weekly newspaper DIE ZEIT and on the part of the BUND it had to be admitted that apples were compared with pears.

The corresponding discussions in Hamburg and along the river Elbe on the loads from ship diesel engines fail to recognise that the ships on the Elbe operate in port mode and thus in an unfavourable load for the engines, which achieve optimum combustion values only in sea mode, i.e. the usual engine load at sea.

Last but not least, please consider the entire ecological footprint when, for example, comparing a cruise ship with a holiday home village on land. The cruise ship is a self-sufficient small village, while the settlement of holiday homes would have to take into account the long-term consequences of radiant waste or destroyed landscapes from coal mining.

Nevertheless, I don't want to deny that every combustion engine - be it that of a moped or a ship's diesel engine - has an impact on the climate.

But where in our concept does it say that we want to operate what you called a "dirt catapult"?

**JUST PUT 50 CENTS ON TOP AND WE'LL TURN THE BOWSPIRIT KIDS' SHIP INTO A MODEL SHIP.**

**You want to use an old ship.**

That's right. But old is not dirty per se, especially since we will be operating mainly in ECAs (emission control areas). And we are happy when our

supporters give us the order to install the most innovative environmental technology in the ship. It's all a question of the financial resources made available to us. Just put 50 cents on top and we'll turn the Bowspirit Kids' ship into a model ship.

**50 cents for an environmentally friendly ship?**

Yes, 50 cents. We are 82 million Germans. Let's assume that half of them can't support us because they are really poor, still young, too old or just can't stand children. That leaves 41 million Germans, of whom I would actually only like one Euro per capita. If everyone gives one Euro and fifty cents, the purchase, conversion into an environmentally friendly flagship and operation of the first few years are secured.

**That's a milkmaid's bill, isn't it?**

Maybe so, but you shouldn't think milkmaids are stupid. The calculation becomes even easier when we think of the 512 million inhabitants of the European Union.

Individuals are all too happy to underestimate the power of individuals. This is a sum of money that none of us will have at our disposal without a lottery prize or inheritance in life. But if we do it together and each of us gives half of what she or he may spare for children who have been fouled by life, that goal will be achieved in no time. Every single one must only - if you will pardon my saying so - get his ass up.

**NO. IT'S NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT MONEY RIGHT NOW.**

**So let's keep in mind: It's about a large sum of money that has to be raised before you can really take off.**

No. It's not primarily about money right now. This is a typical German way of looking at things, shaped by what our fellow men abroad call "German Angst". The view on the sums of Euro, Dollar, Pound or Rouble, which we need, completely blocks the view on the

essential.

### Such as?

The question that every individual has to ask himself is a completely different one. The question is not whether the sum for the start and then also in the future year after year can be collected. The right question is rather what the idea we have painted on the wall as a large picture does to you. Would you want there to be such a place for sick and traumatised children? Or do you think they shouldn't be helped?

If everyone thinks "Oh my God, oh my God, what a huge sum of money", this project will never become reality.

But if everyone who considers the idea wonderful gives a Euro or three and talks about it, then we will reach our goal faster than anyone thinks.

### You mean the anxious look at the size of the project is like the rabbit's look at the snake?

Yes, exactly. Of course we can all wait until the knight in golden armour turns the corner on his black horse, puts down a box full of gold and rides away. But we can also simply take each other by the hand. Everyone can make a small contribution that does not hurt her or him, and hand in hand do something

big.

By the way, I would also appreciate that much more, because what do you think that means for the children, if they know that tens of thousands, even millions of people have stood up to help them, although they don't know each other at all?

And also from the perspective of the supporters it is great to know that everyone with a small contribution becomes part of a community that moves a great thing.

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### Okay, that makes sense. How can one help you? You need money ...

I don't know how you can help us (smiles) ...

Everyone has to find out for himself how he or she can help us. As a result we need money - that's true. We no longer live in a direct barter economy. The exchange is made possible today by the

intermediate step "money".

But I don't know what you can achieve.

Maybe you sing in a choir. Then you might organise a concert and give the proceeds to the Bowspirit Kids.

Or you could organise a flea market and give the stand fees to us, as Kathrin and Monique did.

Or you have collected something all your life, but nobody in your family is interested in the topic. Then you could sell your collection to get it into good hands and donate the proceeds to the Bowspirit Kids, just like I'm doing with my big collection of ferry literature.

Or you're the world's best cheque issuer, then just issue a cheque.

Or you have a barrel organ - then stand in the pedestrian zone of your city on a Saturday and play for the Bowspirit Kids.

Maybe you also have something to celebrate, maybe a special birthday or just that you and your loved ones are well. Then share your joy with the Bowspirit Kids.

We are happy to help you with your public relations activities and logo material.

### How can you be supported actually?

On the one hand there is the possibility to support Bowspirit Kids with a classic



(Photo: Shmel - Fotolia.com - 76332586\_X)



donation, for which we can issue a (German) donation receipt. Online donations are possible via our website. Alternatively, you can find our account number there if a supporter would rather make a physical transfer.

For the fast, spontaneous help the possibility of Charity-SMS is available in the German mobile network.

In addition we invented a first social event on the internet in the format of our world record attempt "the world's largest floating pinboard". Here it is about filling both sides of our future ship at first virtually with posts which are subject to charges. As soon as we have bought the ship, the posts will be transferred to the hull of the real ship by means of foils, thus creating "The world's largest floating pinboard". This has never happened before and it will be a world record.

### **But there is no donation receipt for that, is there?**

No, this form of support is attractive for all those who do not need a German donation receipt, because there are no tax effects for them, or who simply like to combine the fun of helping with a small challenge. Also for entrepreneurs with heart this way is interesting, since they are not subject to a fiscal amount restriction as with donations due to the return service.

Further support campaigns will be added step by step. Just have a look at our websites.

Finally, our current needs can also be supported via the donation platforms [betterplace.org](http://betterplace.org) and [GoFundMe](http://GoFundMe).

### **Say: Aren't you afraid that the project won't succeed and that you have completely ruined yourself financially?**

Of course, there are moments when I ask myself "What have you done?". I am not a saint, but a man. And if something really goes wrong - and of course it does with such a project every now and then and of course always completely unexpectedly - then there are also dark thoughts with me.

But then I see Anna, Peter, Shirin, Thomas and Johanna in front of me, who look at me with wide eyes and ask "Are you giving up now?" ...

### **Who are Anna, Peter, Shirin, Thomas and Johanna?**

Anna is six and has blood cancer.

Peter is eight. His family had a horrible car accident on holiday. His knee was smashed - and he wanted to become a football player so much. But the broken knee is nothing against the gap Dad left, whom the doctors couldn't help after the accident ...

Shirin came to Europe with her mother because there is war in her hometown.

She is happy that Mom and she are well and that she can even go to school and learn a lot. But they haven't heard from Dad for almost twelve months ...

Thomas has fallen ill with cancer and he will die. He is 15 and he cares about his little sister, because he already understands that his illness and the worries of his parents and friends have taken childhood of his beloved sister.

Johanna is nine. Her little brother has been in a coma for over a year and Mom and Dad take turns so that someone is always with him. The other day Johanna asked her mother if she had to get sick so that she would be there for her ...

When I see the Five in front of me, the dimensions are re-adjusted. The fears of the Five and all the children they stand for ... It may be that the venture fails, but not that I give up!

### *IT MAY BE THAT THE VENTURE FAILS, BUT NOT THAT I GIVE UP!*

### **Fuck ...! But you just made that up?**

No. It would be nice. Three weeks reading the newspaper. I changed the names and alienated the biographies to protect the real people. But they are as real as all the other children who need a commitment in the way we suggest. I can no longer disregard that.

### **But wouldn't it be better if all this was done at home by the children's families?**

Theoretically that would be true. But unfortunately that doesn't work with us humans. We know from care that relatives try again and again because they want to create a particularly loving atmosphere for the loved one who needs care. As a result, these attempts are always doomed to failure because the relatives are not adequately qualified. Well meant is unfortunately not automatically well done. A good professional can be loving and professional at the same time. The family member cannot do that at a long distance.

It is the same with children. The parents are far too much involved and busy with their own fears about the child to fully recognise what the child really lacks.

### **What do you mean?**

I'm overdrawing a little now to make clear what it's all about. And I don't mean that as criticism, but only as a description of the state. There are two classical reactions of parents or the surroundings of a sick child.

Either the child is wrapped in cotton wool after having survived the illness. Helicopter parents to the power of three arise and crush their child with their

care.

Or the child is celebrated as a "hero". The relief of the parents about the overcome illness exponentiates itself upward, thereby the child does not feel at all as hero, but completely misunderstood.

As I said: Both extreme examples and both completely comprehensible from the parents' point of view. For the child however we need a "neutral", fear-free, but understanding setup, which perceives and classifies fears of the child and at the same time strengthens the self-confidence of our young guests again, cracked by their experience.

### **You can talk well. You have no children.**

That's right - unfortunately I don't have any children of my own. But your argument that I therefore don't know how parents feel or what such children need is extremely short-sighted.

### **Why?**

You should know that best.

### **I don't get that.**

Your father died when you were two. Your mother tried as hard as she could to get you and your older brother through. Being a single parent was an even bigger problem than it is today. And you missed your father all your life, even if you couldn't have an active memory of him.

You are a Bowspirit Kid - just like me.

### **You?**

I was a heavy forceps birth. My father had already been asked who should die, my mother or me.

When I was two years old my father had to reorient himself professionally and was "away" during the week.

When I was three years old, my grandfather died. Nobody really talked to me about what that means "dead". Grandpa was just "gone". I could only mourn him at the age of 47.

I grew up in a very fearful environment, especially after my sister came to us after many attempts.

We all tend to think, just because a person is going straight through life, everything went well for him. We all too easily misjudge the fact that such incisive events are recorded even before the time of our active memory and usually break out at "inopportune times".

My best qualification to implement this idea is simply the fact that I myself have been a child and know exactly what I missed in the challenging moments of my life - as a child and as an adult.

### **Everybody has to carry their parcel.**

Sure - that is part of the "game of life". But some parcels are just so misshapen

that it's good when someone shows me how to carry them best so that they don't hinder me on my way.

It was not by chance that we decided to get Bowspirit Kids off the ground with the help of entrepreneurs. Our Board of Trustees member Ingo Kock can sing a song about what sometimes comes to light when working with trainees and young adults, for example, if you take a close look at everyday friction in the working relationship.

Of course we hope for generous sponsoring from entrepreneurs with heart. But in the end it is also about working together to ensure that in the long run fewer young people with bulky packages end up in the companies and cost much more money there than the support of the Bowspirit Kids will ever cost.

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**Company is a good keyword that I would like to pick up. You have founded Bowspirit Kids as a group of companies with currently two companies, Bowspirit Kids gemeinnützige GmbH and Bowspirit Management GmbH. Why is that?**

The reasons for this lie in German tax law. I don't want to overwhelm anyone with a small tax law lecture at this point. We have briefly outlined the reasons on our website. If you would like to know more details, please do not hesitate to contact me. As a result, the division we have undertaken, which is ultimately an outsourcing of the administration, is financially advantageous for us. In short, we can do more with the single Euro than in a single non-profit organisation.

**When I look at your websites or just look at the clock to see how long we have been talking, the whole project leaves an impression of being both extremely complex and extremely well thought-out.**

Thank you for the flowers. That was the goal. I am aware that our websites contain far too much text for some people. Some people might have wished for a website with the text "We want to help sick children" and a donation button.

But that's not my way of thinking and working.

I advertise an idea with my colleagues - and I have to sketch it as detailed as possible.



(Photo: Oliver Gloss | Foto Krause)

Someone close to me has put it somewhat nastily with the words "You only sell hot air". On the one hand, this is true because we are not yet able to work with children and youths. On the other hand, it's wrong because every new idea and every new product sees the light of day like that. We just don't usually hear about it, because such presentation meetings take place behind closed doors within the companies that develop a service or a product.

We now do all this in public, because Bowspirit Kids is not a closed shop, but a platform of hopefully many grown-ups who want to help kids who have been fouled by life.

**What I still haven't understood is your personal transformation. From lawyer to Robin Hood for children?**

No - rather from lawyer to kids' advocate. I hung my lawyer's robe on the wall next door in the office - as a reminder.

**As a reminder?**

Yes, I don't want to work again for people who don't value my work and me. Children are mercilessly honest. They tell you right in your face that you are stupid or cool. Or they suddenly sit down next to you in the middle of their game, while you pluck weeds in the garden, start plucking with you and start telling stories ... and the parents' eyes fall out because the four-year-old son has never done anything in the garden before ...

**Why you of all people?**

My mother asked me that as well. The answer is very simple: someone had to do it. I just came down the road - and I had the possibilities.

*THIS CHANCE IS  
BOWSPIRIT KIDS.  
AND I STAND WITH MY  
NAME FOR IT.*

**But it is still a drastic change.**

Actually not at all. We lawyers work with language. Our subject is related to linguistics. And when you take a closer look, we are storytellers. In court I tell the story from my client's point of view, but with my words and using my (perhaps already well-known) authority as a lawyer. My fellow lawyer does the same, probably with a slightly different focus. And in the end the ladies and gentlemen on the judge's bench tell us what they have understood and kept of our stories and how it will continue.

I do nothing else now, only that my "clients" are a little younger, have no economic interests, but simply need a chance.

This chance is Bowspirit Kids. And I stand - as I did in court at the time - with my name for it.

**Thank you very much for the inspiring interview.**

You are very welcome. That was fun.