



The mission of celebrity chef Sarah Wiener: healthy food and sustainable agriculture.

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# I am where my feet are

CHAPTER 12 /  
TALK OF FAME

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CHEF AND  
ENTREPRENEUR

It was just by chance that she discovered her passion for cooking. Today, Sarah Wiener is the most well-known celebrity chef on German TV, has her own foundation that teaches children about healthy food and also finds the time to run an organic farm. A very personal essay about success, failure and good resolutions.



Sarah Wiener celebrates her successes – and has learnt from her defeats.



I've made  
every mistake  
you can  
make.

I started out really unconventionally. Without any college qualifications or formal training, I found myself travelling aimlessly around Europe. I couldn't expect any financial support from home, where my mother, who was bringing us up on her own, was run off her feet with three kids. But she always had faith that I would find my own way in life. She supported every single one of my ideas – although not always with the same level of enthusiasm!

When I was 23, living in Berlin and also a single mother of a newborn baby, I had no choice but to claim benefits. That really brought me back to reality with a bump and I realised it was high time I finally got my chaotic life in order. Before becoming pregnant, I was working as a kitchen help and assistant chef at Exil and Axbax in Berlin, my dad's restaurants frequented by the local artsy crowd. That was more by accident than anything, simply because I needed the money. I loved looking over the shoulders of the chefs and bakers and asked a whole load of questions and learnt a lot. And I noticed that my heart skipped a beat whenever I was cooking, baking, tasting or trying anything.

I then went on to work in numerous other kitchens. I was fascinated by the joy that the tastes and smells of dishes, seasoning and good ingredients brought me. But most of all it was the act of creating something independently and creatively that gave me a huge sense of satisfaction. But of course the incredibly long working hours and the stress were often exhausting.

The decision to establish a film catering company was spontaneous and I had no idea where it would all lead. With my first loan I bought an old East German army truck, drove from film set to film set and cooked all day and night. And that's the way I have tackled pretty much all my projects to date. You have to have a good idea, listen to your gut instinct and do whatever it takes to get into a profession you're passionate about. I can't help but do it any other way; after all, I didn't learn how to write business plans or put them into action. I'm a pragmatist.

The most important thing is the people you surround yourself with. As the jobs increased in size, the more helping hands joined my team. My wild determination has often been rewarded with success, but not always. I think I've made every mistake you can make: with my staff, with jobs, with estimates and with money. They were wild, tough and exciting times. Just like life itself.

A lot of other things also happened along the way, but to tell you everything, I'd have to write a book. Ten years ago, for example, I set up a foundation: the Sarah Wiener Foundation, with the aim of advocating a healthy diet and providing teachers with the right tools and expertise to teach children in schools and nurseries how to cook.

In 2015, together with two partners (and the bank), I purchased Gut Kerkow, an organic farm located an hour's drive from Berlin. I think there's always been a little farmer inside me, just waiting to come out! Or at least a gardener who loves nature and who needs to dig around in the soil. Being able to grow my own food is the most rewarding and satisfying thing for me!

As far as the farm is concerned, there's one thing that motivated me more than anything: in an ideal world, I wanted to grow everything that I eat myself. And I wanted to do myself what I asked of others: to farm in harmony with nature, people and the animals. I wanted to create a counterexample to the agricultural industry, which is unfortunately putting all of our futures at risk with factory farming, soil erosion and groundwater pollution.

I decided to take this step because I thought it was important. And I was enthusiastic about the challenge. Getting my hands dirty, making a change, getting to work, learning by doing, but also learning from others, delegating and trusting people. I never studied organic farming or did an agricultural apprenticeship, but I've taught myself a lot of the theory over time. And my ideas of right and wrong, i.e. my ethical beliefs and responsibilities, also come into it. We meanwhile have 100 Aberdeen Angus cows, 90 dairy

cows and 40 Saddleback pigs. We slaughter the animals ourselves at the farm, and also run a farm shop and an online shop.

The farm, my employees and the animals are teaching me a new skill: patience! Well I'm trying to, at least. This is a project that lives in harmony with the seasons and nature. Here there aren't any quick emails or ad-hoc decisions that you can just deal with at the drop of a hat. There are a lot of factors involved, such as the weather, my partners, employees, the animals, the cycles of nature...Changes take time here.

My mantra this year is "concentration, clarity and consistency". And I'm taking a very practical approach to it. In my office, for example, I've introduced a media-free afternoon with my consultant and my assistant, who organise my business and private life. This means we have at least one chance a week to sit down and chat to each other about new requests, projects and ideas.

And I've also decided to stop applying other people's standards to my own life. But sticking to that isn't always easy. I receive lots of requests that I think are important and interesting or would be a lot of fun. But if I want to stay in charge of my time and what I do, I need to make sure I don't give in too easily. I don't need to have a new project in the press every single year. I'm not worried about having to make the most of every single opportunity and offer because I never know what tomorrow will bring.

I'm currently finding out who I am and whether that is congruent with my actions. It's not always so easy. I often tell myself: I am where my feet are – and that helps.

A stress-free life: Cows at Gut Kerkow.



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### SARAH WIENER AT THE "RED SALON"

Sarah Wiener was a guest at this year's 10th Red Salon in Berlin, an event format devised by the Serviceplan Group for top female managers. The Red Salon was initiated five years ago by six dedicated women from the Serviceplan Group and offers a platform for intellectually stimulating and hugely inspiring meetings in small groups. Surprising and sometimes controversial speakers from different fields and professions beyond our marketing-driven everyday lives are invited to provide a female managerial elite from the field of marketing and communication with valuable food for thought, encouraging them to change their perspective, widen their horizons and come into contact with people and ideas that challenge them in new ways. The circle of participants is handpicked and limited to 30 women at each event to ensure an intimate, trusting atmosphere.

Who are the brains behind the "Red Salon"?

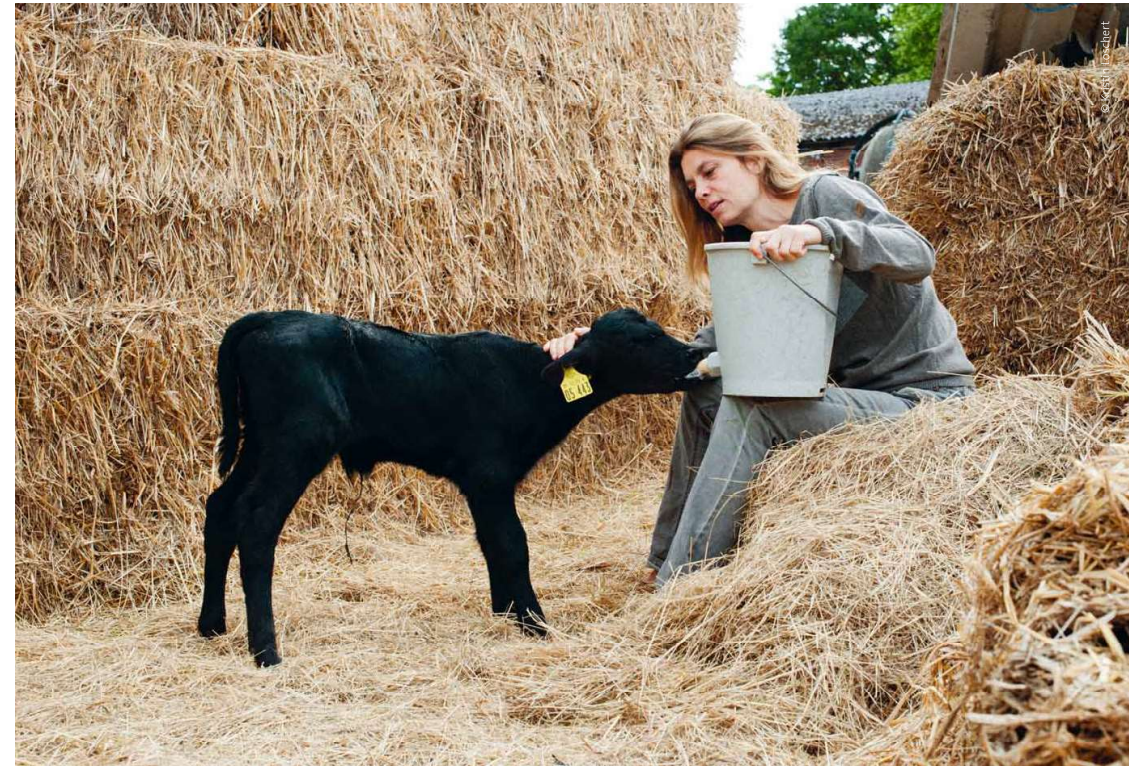
Four members of senior management from the House of Communication who believe in human qualities and want to elevate the value of our encounters in the business world:

Constanze Rohrmann  
Head of Business Relations  
Serviceplan Group

Karin Maria Schertler  
Managing Director  
Serviceplan Group

Regina Schwob  
Managing Director  
Mediaplus Group

Christiane Wolff  
Chief Corporate Communications Officer  
Serviceplan Group



Down on the farm: Sarah Wiener and an Aberdeen Angus calf.

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The farm,  
my employees and  
the animals  
are teaching me  
a new skill:  
patience!



Culinary pleasures with a clear conscience: Sausage from the farm shop.

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