

Interview with the 2022 CEEMAN Leader of the Year - Andreas Altmann



Andreas Altmann

Živa Žmavc Thongvanh: Your nomination for CEEMAN Leader of the Year Award states that in just 25 years, you have built a university from scratch complemented by a thriving and impactful scholarly community in the heart of the Alps. This is a tremendous achievement. What would be the advice to your 25 years younger self, just starting on this project?

Andreas Altmann: Be even more courageous. Don't be afraid to boldly focus on strategy and leave the details of execution to others. Invest your energy in gathering the right team around you, encourage them to think big, invite them to dream together, do your best to create opportunities for others and remove potential hurdles they may face.

ŽŽT: You have also built a strong network beyond the organisation and the region, including strong ties to research communities, political and thought leaders as well as business leaders across the globe. What is your approach to building and maintaining relationships with external partners?

AA: If you don't enjoy meeting and working with people, you can't build fruitful and lasting relationships. You have to enjoy the closeness, interaction, inspiration and emotions of fellow human beings. And - perhaps more importantly - you have to be open to sharing your thoughts, plans, dreams and feelings with others. It takes trust in others, a willingness to share with others, the joy of helping others, and the satisfaction of seeing others grow and succeed.

The simple question is: How can I help others to solve their problems, overcome potential bottlenecks, and achieve goals? Based on these principles relationship building is easy and also highly enjoyable.

ŽŽT: One of the outcomes of your engagement as the Rector is Mental Health@MCI. Can you tell us more about this service? What kind of support options are available to students?

AA: When we think of health, we usually think of the body. We try to protect it from environmental influences, from accidents, from illness. But do we pay attention to our soul and mind to the same extent?

If someone falls down on the street, we call for rescue. But if someone next to us cries, has tears in his eyes, seems apathetic or desperate, how do we deal with it? Almost one in three people will suffer from a mental illness requiring treatment in the course of their lives.

We, therefore, have established a broad range of activities and measures and to support the mental health of our students and their social environment (e.g. family and friends, at university, at work and in society). This includes different ways to create awareness, workshops, seminars, coaching sessions, information & contact points, on-site and/or online consultation and more.

ŽŽT: In 2001 you have initiated the Distinguished Guests Lecture series which was supplemented by digital format in 2020. You have interviewed an impressive list of individuals. Which one surprised you the most and in what way?

AA: We had really amazing people on campus, like whistleblower Edward Snowden, who exposed the crude policies and capabilities of the intelligence agencies. Or the longtime mayor of the city of Palermo Leoluca Orlando, who had survived six assassination attempts, prompting mothers to put their own children in the car with him and let the mafia know that they would now blow up innocent children as well, hoping they wouldn't dare. Or the future Polish president Lech Walesa, who organized the strikes at the Gdansk shipyards that cost the lives of more than 50 people in the first week alone. It's great factually every week to meet exciting personalities from science, business, art and politics who change the world and inspire young people.

ŽŽT: What is your vision for the future of MCI Innsbruck, The Entrepreneurial School®? What would you do, if you had unlimited resources?

AA: Bring the world's most promising students to MCI, let them work together with the most inspiring faculty, open their minds, and provide them with the best opportunities to realize their dreams.

ŽŽT: What does the CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you personally and for your institution?

AA: I felt humbled and almost a bit bad because I think there are many others who would deserve it more.