

#WueHearYou

Family-friendly Leadership

The Podcast by the Office of the University Women's Representative

Episode 3: Prof. Dr. Brigitte Burrichter



*Hello and welcome back to **Family-Friendly Leadership**, our WÜkit podcast, which is all about balancing family life and career at the JMU. In this episode, we have Prof. Dr. Brigitte Burrichter as our guest, who works as a senior professor in the Philosophy Faculty at the Institute of Modern Languages. She was elected as the University Women's Representative from 2021 to 2023. Prof. Dr. Burrichter will give us*

exciting insights into how she creates a family-friendly working environment in her day-to-day work and what is most important to her. We look forward to many exciting moments and hope everyone enjoys listening!

Natalie Nikolaus (Office of the University Women's Representative): Dear Prof. Dr. Burrichter, we have come to know you as a family-friendly manager from your time as university women's representative in our office, and we are delighted that you are available for a short interview and willing to tell us something about your family-friendly management style. Could you give us some insights into how you make it easier for your employees to combine academic work and family life? (01:10)

Professor Dr. Brigitte Burrichter: First of all, by trying to balance the different time demands. Many of my employees have a teaching role, which is particularly challenging, but with a little effort it works. So, I think the first thing is to let the employees know that this is perfectly normal for me, that they have families and that we should work together to find the best possible solution.

NN: That shows a certain attitude on your part. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of a manager's attitude in order to be able to lead in a family-friendly way? (01:53)

BB: I think you have to communicate that you are aware of the difficulties. I'm a mother myself and I can still remember how difficult it is sometimes. You have to create the trust that allows you to address such issues. Even if it comes to short notice absences and similar things.

NN: What would you say is the biggest challenge when it comes to reconciling the interests of all employees? That is, employees with and without care responsibilities. (02:25)

BB: I think you need to be careful not to favour one over the other or give the impression that you do. If conflicts do arise, you have to try to anticipate them and take countermeasures, especially when it comes to free time or care time or similar, because very often you need both. I think you have to arrange this well.

NN: You have also mentioned this before. Trust is important so that employees can reach out to you. What would you suggest, what approach would you recommend to young academic staff in terms of how they articulate their needs to managers? (03:08)

BB: I think it very much depends on the relationship you have with the manager. But it's certainly good to say early on that there will simply be some changes when a child is on the way and simply discuss with the manager how it might work. There may be different views on this. That has also happened to me, because I have to take into consideration and respect not only the support but also the demands. If someone doesn't want to be challenged but simply says they need a lot of time and then you have to give it to them. But I think you have to articulate what you, as a young individual, imagine. What you believe. I don't think you know what to expect when you're pregnant for the first time anyway, but you do know what you think might happen. And as a manager, you have to signal that you are open to changing needs.

NN: There will always be changes.

BB: You just can't foresee that.

NN: Have you noticed any gender-specific differences when it comes to compatibility?
(04:17)

BB: At the beginning, of course. Mothers are simply more challenged at the beginning. Also, they are not always physically fit. That is also very different. Whether there are significant differences later on, I would have to pass, because I didn't have that many male employees who were affected. But I think it's also a question of communicating at an early stage for example when parental leave is due or on which days there is care time, so that you must take that into consideration. So from that point of view, there are no differences. Apart from this first six months or so.

NN: Can we as a university contact point, the office of the University Women's Representative or the Family Services support them well, both managers and employees? Or which kind of support should we provide? (05:15)

BB: So, I think it's very important for employees to know that they can come here and especially if they don't have the confidence to approach their manager straight away. That they can first play it out here and discuss it. From the manager's point of view, I would rather like to see support on the legal side. For example, it is not easy to deal with the teaching load and similar things. It can also be difficult to compensate for a period of absence. I come from the Faculty of Philosophy, so that's not a problem there. There's a different program for that. But it may be different at other faculties and that's where the Office of the University Women's Representative has to step in.

NN: Yes, we are happy to offer our support. As mentioned, you have a very family-friendly management style, do you have any idea how you've come to this management style so that it's family-friendly? (06:12)

BB: First of all, of course, my own experience. What it's like to be in a scientific workplace with young children. I've always had a supervisor who was very considerate of that, and that's had an impact so far. I roughly know, where the problems are. I can still remember it very well. And when I became aware of this as a manager, for example when I put a photo of my children in the office, not because I couldn't bear it without the photo, but to signal that it was possible. You can have children and still be a professor. But sitting down and making a plan was never the case. It was always a case-by-case decision.

NN: It's always been like that.

BB: This has already been considered but not planned in advance

NN: What advantage, what benefit do you see in a family-friendly management style? So why should other colleagues also adopt a family-friendly management style? (07:11)

BB: So, from a manager's point of view, because you obviously must keep good employees. And you shouldn't lose them because of a, more or less, short-term absence and a somewhat difficult time, when children are still very young. And, of course, it's a manager's responsibility. You have to support young people. No matter what. It's not just family-friendly, which usually implies that there are children. It's also in the case of an illness.

NN: Do you see any influences from the scientific system in Bavaria or Germany in general that restrict or promote a manager's family-friendly behaviour? (07:55)

BB: The biggest problem is of course the Part-Time Limitation of Employment Act, which is something you have to think about as a manager. For example, if I have a project and a person is absent for a certain period of time for whatever reason. What can I do? I can't hire replacements at will. That's a severe problem. It's handled very rigidly nationwide. That's the German law. So I would say, it might scare off some managers to know that: *it's going to be difficult for me to make progress with my project because I simply don't have the personnel.* That should be regulated a little better.

NN: Is there anything you would like politicians and/or the university management to do in order to improve the compatibility of science and family? (08:50)

BB: I don't think the university management has all the options either. The expectation should rather be placed on politicians. To make these personnel laws more family-friendly in the sense that they become more flexible. I can't hire someone for a whole year just because someone takes parental leave for four months. It should also work for four months, but it's difficult.

NN: Would you like to address any other points on the subject? (09:18)

BB: We are lucky here that we can put our children in daycare or with the Studikids at a very early age.

Here are a few facts: Studikids is a childcare facility at the University of Würzburg where children aged 2 to 18 months are taken care of on an hourly basis. This service is available to both students and academic staff at the University of Würzburg. The children are taken care of by a qualified teacher and two teaching assistants.

BB: But it is certainly a space problem that parents, I deliberately say parents, can be at the university with young children. Even outside of childcare hours.

Speaking of family rooms, it's worth taking a look at the UFB website. There you will find an interactive map with all the important service rooms at our university, such as all-gender toilets or toilets with period products, as well as breastfeeding and changing rooms and many more.

BB: So there's certainly something that should be done there. Although I know the space situation here. I'm not very optimistic, but I do see a problem here. Not just changing facilities, but rooms where you can spend some time with a young child.

NN: We are definitely already providing some support with this and will continue to do so. It's an important point in any case. Then I would like to thank you sincerely for your valuable time. (10:50)

BB: I thank you!

NN: And thank you for your honest answers!

*That was our interesting conversation with **Prof. Dr. Burrichter** about family-friendly leadership & the problem with the Part-Time Limitation of Employment Act. For further information on the topic of balancing family and career, it is worth taking a look at the WÜkit website or contact us at: unifrauenbeauftragte@uni-wuerzburg.de. Be sure to visit the website of the University's Women's Representative and take advantage of the offers. Interested in a specific topic? Or do you have an opinion on the podcast topics? Just send us a message! Special thanks to all listeners for tuning in - see you next time!*