

# Promoting women and young talent at Maiwald

**Maiwald is one of the few IP law firms in Germany having a very high proportion of women on the staff at every level, including at partner level. The percentage of female partners – as well as the percentage of other women professionals – is around 45 per cent. Why is that?**

**Eva Ehlich:** At Maiwald, equality and diversity are fundamental to our corporate culture. Empowering women is very important to us, believing as we do that gender equality and equal opportunities for career advancement are the key to success – both within our teams and concerning our work on behalf of clients. This is why at all levels we foster a culture where women can and should pursue a career. At Maiwald, women move quite naturally into areas previously dominated by men.

**When did women’s career advancement take up such an important place at Maiwald given that most law firms only began showing an interest in the topic (if at all) several years ago?**

**Sophie Ertl:** From the very beginning Maiwald has given bright, talented women the opportunity to rise to management positions. The conservative attitude that still prevails in some law firms that women cannot become partners has never existed at Maiwald. The firm’s working environment is characterised by mutual respect and openness, regardless of gender. Individuals are recognised and valued solely on the basis of their abilities and character.

**Eva Ehlich:** At Maiwald, women have always been taken as seriously and have received the same support as their male colleagues. Gender equality was very important to Walter Maiwald, the founder of our law firm, something that today is more or less taken for granted. Twenty-three years ago, when the firm was still in its very early days, Regina Neufeind was the first woman to become a partner at Maiwald.

**How do your clients feel about the comparatively high proportion of young talented people and women in the teams?**

**Eva Ehlich:** Our clients generally very much welcome mixed teams. Unlike in the past, they want to see the people making up the teams, and it is no longer just the senior partners who take centre stage. Thanks to team project work, our young professionals have the opportunity to fulfil their potential very early on and to shine at doing what they are good at.

Both our very diverse range of clients and the team participants themselves reap the benefits of this approach.

**Martina Boidol:** If you are introduced to clients by the partners and it is clear that you enjoy their trust and wholehearted backing, clients accept that and trust you to do your job well – regardless of how old you are and whether you are a woman or a man.

»At Maiwald, equality and diversity are fundamental to our corporate culture. Empowering women is very important to us, believing as we do that gender equality and equal opportunities for career advancement are the key to success (...)<«

Eva Ehlich

**Does this also apply to clients in countries such as Japan or Korea, where society and the workplace are still very male-dominated?**

**Eva Ehlich:** Yes, our mixed teams, some of which are headed by women, are also proving very successful in these countries. Our female partners working with clients there have no problems being accepted – indeed quite the opposite. They have even succeeded in acquiring a substantial number of new clients and have contributed much to our successful business development there.

**Sophie Ertl:** Our female partners are shown a great deal of respect by all clients, and they have no problems asserting themselves. I would go so far as to say that the most self-assertive partners we have in the firm are women. In our dealings with clients, we often purposely present concentrated womanpower in a female leadership tandem. My feeling is

that this boldness is an advantage - not only in a country like the USA, where professional gender equality is already much more the norm than it is in Germany, but also in more traditional societies such as Japan and Korea.

**Does Maiwald take any specific steps to encourage talented women to join the firm?**

**Sophie Ertl:** No, that's not necessary at all. As we have always grown organically in terms of the number of women on our staff, there is no need to beat the gender drum. Word has got around in the sector that we strongly value and support talented women, so we attract enough applications from highly qualified women.

»(...) the emphasis is on individualised progression, the aim being not to create attorney clones, but instead to encourage diversity. What is needed is a high level of talent, motivation, a sense of responsibility and team spirit.«

Martina Boidol

**Does Maiwald have special mentoring programmes or networks for women?**

**Martina Boidol:** At Maiwald, it is taken for granted that women can make a career and rise to management positions, including partnership. Special career development programmes are therefore not necessary. Rather, the emphasis is on individualised progression, the aim being not to create attorney clones, but instead to encourage diversity. What is needed is a high level of talent, motivation, a sense of responsibility and team spirit.

**Anja Fux:** Special women's networks are also not necessary because it's all about working together as a team, regardless of gender. The team concept is an integral part of Maiwald's corporate culture. All of the firm's teams are notable for their diverse and inclusive mindset.

**As a mentor, how do you support talented women who aspire to management positions at Maiwald?**

**Eva Ehlich:** Team leadership plays a very important role at Maiwald. The aim of the mentors is to get the best out of each

individual team member and help them to blossom, each in their own way. To do this, you have to find out where the particular talents and strengths of these up-and-coming female professionals lie so that you can then give them the support they need. We give our accomplished young people a lot of freedom and responsibility relatively early on so that they can prove themselves and thrive in their chosen career. This requires a great deal of trust. But we find that the time and effort invested in this kind of approach is generally handsomely repaid.

**Sophie Ertl:** The role of mentor does not end the moment our young women take over as team leaders or become partners. Rather, as mentor your role is to support these young professionals over many years so that they always have a trusted contact person and can rest safely in the knowledge that someone is behind them - even after they have become well established.

**What support do you receive as a mentored future manager or as a mentored emerging talent at Maiwald?**

**Naho Fujimoto:** At Maiwald, mentees receive a lot of flexibility. Our mentors are not overly concerned about when and where mentees work, but rather what the end result is. Once mentees have gained the trust of their mentor, they are largely given a free hand. This is an extremely privileged position which is not to be lightly taken for granted in our sector.

**Martina Boidol:** A close look is taken at the strengths each individual brings to the table - whether woman or man. From the very beginning, my team leaders placed a lot of trust in me, gave me responsibility and quickly allowed me to work autonomously and in direct contact with clients. You can always be assured of support and advice when you need it, something which makes me feel appreciated and which I find empowering and rewarding.

**Anja Fux:** You feel you are taken seriously at Maiwald, even while you are still very junior. As part of the team, you are involved from the very beginning in every telephone call and in all important correspondence. New knowledge is explained, and you always have the chance to look over your mentor's shoulder, which enables you to learn as you go along.



**Maiwald offers a variety of ways to work flexibly. What are they?**

**Eva Ehlich:** At Maiwald there is no rigid framework to follow: flexibility is the name of the game. This applies of course not only to women, but to the entire workforce and ranges from remote working and the freedom to organise one's own individual working hours to a highly digital approach that permits a high degree of flexibility. We have introduced guidelines for digital and collaborative working, which we use to strengthen the digital communication and media skills of our people. We work on the trust principle and take individual needs and circumstances into consideration.

»At Maiwald, we take family needs into consideration and try to cater to the individual needs of both mothers and fathers as far as possible.«

Sophie Ertl

**How can a demanding and responsible job as a partner be reconciled with the demands of a family?**

**Sophie Ertl:** Balancing both calls for discipline and good organisation. Women in particular generally manage this balancing act very well. Indeed, some of our female partners have several children. The good working conditions certainly have a part to play here: At Maiwald, we take family needs into consideration and try to cater to the individual needs of both mothers and fathers as far as possible.

**Naho Fujimoto:** As a parent, finding the right balance between work and private life requires a high degree of resilience and flexibility. At Maiwald, people are very open and honest in their approach to the subject. There is a consensus that a balance must be found between a high level of professional commitment and a regard for personal and family circumstances. In other words, there has to be mutual give and take. By acknowledging this fact, and through discussion and mutual recognition of the challenges, we are already making enormous progress. What can be said is that as a young parent at Maiwald you don't have to choose between career and family.

**Maiwald invests a lot of effort in cultivating the next generation of talent. What role does the encouragement of young talent play and what does it look like in concrete terms?**

**Eva Ehlich:** In the long term, we can only meet the demands of our international clients by bringing young talent into our teams. We therefore support junior staff wishing to take part in training and development programmes and offer them flexible working hours so that they can combine work and professional training. This includes young career starters wishing to complete internships at law firms abroad.

**Anja Fux:** My mentor worked hard to ensure that I was able to spend several months in a US law firm after my patent attorney examinations. During my time in the USA, I was not only able to expand my knowledge as a patent attorney, but also had the opportunity to develop personally. I am very grateful for having had this opportunity. Maiwald also provides substantial financial support for placements abroad.



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