

Solidarity that supports you

A personal report on over 18 years of NAV membership, by Stefan Tügend. “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” (Helen Keller)



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In a world of work that is increasingly dominated by speed, competition and self-improvement, it's easy to forget what really makes us strong: community spirit, sharing ideas, supporting one another – or simply being humane. If you struggle on alone, you may win in the short term. But people who act together achieve lasting success – for

themselves and for the organization as a whole.

I have been a member of the NOVARTIS EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION (NAV) for over 18 years – and have seen for myself over those years just how much experiencing a sense of solidarity can not only support you through difficult times but also create fertile ground for personal and collective growth.

A reliable partner at critical moments

When I became seriously ill about 4.5 years ago, undergoing many difficult months of chemotherapy and ultimately having a stem cell transplant, it was not only an extremely challenging time for me both physically and emotionally, as I spent nearly 250 days in hospital in just 13 months, but it was also a period of great uncertainty regarding my job.

My recovery went well, but to start with I was very worried about various kinds of “collateral damage.” During this time, NAV proved to be – alongside my outstanding Novartis Well-being team – a most dependable partner, offering expert advice, friendly support and clear guidance amid the many uncertainties. In this situation, NAV was not just “there for me” – it was actively at my side. Whether it was organizing my gradual return to work, clarifying issues of employment law or accompanying me in talks with my managers, I experienced a genuine partnership of equals. I was not a supplicant, simply a person with a back story.

A strong partner – even when I changed direction

Once I had recovered, it was clear to me that I wanted and needed to take a different path. The physical consequences of my illness left me in no doubt that it would no longer be possible for me to resume my previous workload in the long term.

Once again it was NAV which gave me detailed and individual advice when I took the decision to apply for early retirement under the 55+ pension scheme during the company restructuring. Throughout this process the association was

again active, professional and solution-focused. NAV showed me how to see this start of a new phase in life not as a “retreat” but as a transition – and treated me with dignity, respect and vision.

Here, too, it was about far more than just legal advice: it was the feeling that I was being seen, that my concerns and boundaries were taken seriously – and that I was not alone. Even now, during the interim period before I can draw my pension at 58, thanks to NAV I remain in contact with colleagues and with Novartis – sharing experiences, chatting, a feeling of togetherness.

Community spirit as a force for innovation

My relationship with NAV was never a merely passive one. In my roles as GLOBAL MINDFULNESS LEAD and CO-FOUNDER OF THE “BE MINDFUL!” ERG, I have myself done a great deal to promote a more caring, humane workplace culture. NAV shared my concern, amplified my efforts and extended the approach into other areas. This all shows that solidarity isn’t just about protection – it’s also about action, development, progress.

When people link up and share ideas, innovation happens. Not by using sharp elbows but by offering a helping hand.





Responsibility and dialogue – mediation not polarization

I find it particularly encouraging that NAV does not position itself in opposition to the company but as a constructive, mediating partner. That's a great strength, especially in times of growing social and economic tension. Today, the ability to listen, build bridges and negotiate workable solutions is more important than ever.

In a working world where being egocentric and competitive is often promoted as the secret of success, NAV shows us a different approach: one based on treating people as equals. On working together instead of in opposition. On taking responsibility instead of withdrawing.

It acts decisively to support employee rights, without being confrontational. It raises issues for discussion without dramatizing them. And it brings people together – through its professionalism, experience and negotiating skills. This mediating approach is a model that many could learn from, not only in the company but in society at large.

Solidarity – responsibility in action and a factor for success

NAV is open to all – regardless of your role, division or pay grade. It puts into practice the idea that cooperation is more successful than fighting alone. That mutual support is ultimately more effective than short-term self-improvement.

For me, NAV is an example of how practical solidarity in the workplace not only strengthens individuals but also lays the foundations for a sustainable corporate culture. A culture in which you don't find yourself alone in difficult times. A culture that offers a fresh perspective – regardless of your stage of life or position in the company.

And perhaps our task today, above all and more than ever, is to build bridges. Between employees and the company, between generations, between different situations in life.

Solidarity is not an abstract thing – we can see it in the way people behave. And for me, it's exactly this way of behaving that makes NAV an essential companion on my journey.

One thing is certain: NAV is more than just a lobbying body. It's a place where responsibility is put into practice. Where solidarity doesn't come to an end when times get tough – that's when it really begins.

I can only urge everyone from the bottom of my heart to join this successful association because "By and in himself, man can do very little and is like Robinson Crusoe on a desert island; only in company with others is he great and can achieve a great deal." (Arthur Schopenhauer)