



Leitha Matz – Co-Founder and COO of fintech startup Zuper GmbH & CSO at verify-u

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May 2, 2019 - Meet Leitha Matz, an impressive technology leader, fintech expert and mentor who has nearly 20 years of experience in developing teams in FinTech, eCommerce and IT. Learn more about her early start in the online and tech sector and why we need to be honest about our mistakes.

Can you give us three adjectives that come to mind when you hear the word technology?

Connected; Creative; Experimental.

What role does technology play in your everyday life?

Like so many of us, I wake up with technology and am in touch with technological wonders across the course of my day. I go from custom-ground morning coffee to my online German classes and then I get a digital ticket on the BVG app. I use another app to enter the Factory where our team is coworking. I spend the morning with email and VoIP calls on Slack to distant co-workers, and then I order lunch using a tap-to-pay card... it's technology everywhere, all the time. I see it as a challenge, and a conscious decision when I unplug in the evening and wind down for bed with an old-fashioned book. But of course, books were considered technology at one point as well.

Tell us a bit about your journey? How did you get to where you are now?

My university studies were in media and design, and that's where I started developing my own little websites. When I graduated in 1996, there were interesting jobs in online business, but they weren't in demand. So I got some great opportunities to run important projects simply because nobody else wanted online work. At the time there were very few "experts," so it was kind of like the wild west. I taught community courses in JavaScript and did freelance web development.

After the big US tech crash in 2001, a lot of people were saying that e-commerce was over. That's when I joined an online grocery startup. It became profitable a few years later, so in retrospect, all those people were wrong, but it certainly didn't feel like a sure thing at the time.



When I moved to Germany, I joined a team and we built Zuper, a really wonderful personal finance manager. Now I'm also advising verify-u, an identity verification company, founding Mind the Gap, a group that promotes women's financial education, and I act as a mentor for younger startups like CoWomen when I have the time.

Please finish this sentence: I have failed in and these were my learnings...

I think we need to be honest about our mistakes, figure out what went wrong, and then set up systems so we don't repeat the errors.

For example, I sometimes notice something that's flawed (a clunky CMS system, a poor process, an awkward task) but dismiss it as "just a temporary inconvenience." Later on, after I've wasted countless hours making the temporary inconvenience work, I realize I should have just invested the extra time at the beginning to fix it. It's analogous to cooking. If you just spend 10 minutes now to sharpen your knife, you'll ultimately finish the job better and faster.

What are three tech trends you see happening in the next 5 years?

In the financial sector, there continues to be a lot of work in the battle against fraud and data breaches. That's an ongoing arms race, and there needs to be constant development. But there's also a lot of catch-up that the financial industry needs to do with regard to user experience and bringing customers more of the life-changing improvements we've already seen in other categories, like mobility and personal computing. It's going slowly, but I think we'll see the fruits of that work in the next few years. We're already seeing big tech companies like Apple, Google and Amazon going into "bank-like" technology and payment systems.

I'm sure people could be tired of hearing about AI by now, but I do think that we should be able to eliminate a lot of routine, error-prone work by using robotic process management. When I think about the number of hours that people spend doing dull tasks that could easily be taken care of by an algorithm, it seems like a great opportunity to focus human effort on innovation, creativity and more human-adapted tasks instead.

And naturally, whenever there are regulatory changes, tech trends follow, so we all need to keep an eye on what's happening in policy.

What has been a moment of fame this week?

I do a lot of behind-the-scenes work in setting up partnerships, systems, relationships, structures and events, but this week I'll be giving a talk on how AI/ML has the potential to help us make better financial decisions, so I will be out there in the public eye.



Who's your superhero aka 'Shero'?

I really love Simone Giertz, aka "The Queen of Shitty Robots." I think she makes creative innovation funny, interesting and accessible for a lot of people who might otherwise find engineering off-putting. Also, my friend Kate Darling is an expert in human-robot interaction, robot ethics, IP theory and policy, as well as a working mom. She is awesome and highlights the ways in which our interactions with robots can make us better humans.

If you could travel back in time and then into the future, what advice would you give your 23-year-old self and your 75-year-old self?

I don't think I have much to say to my future self (she could probably advise me!), but for my younger self, it took a long while before I realized that people were rarely, if ever, going to notice when I was doing good work. So it's important to make sure that the good work you do is visible. Now I always advise young women to spend at least 10-15% of their time making sure that their efforts are obvious. If you're part of a team, that also really helps your manager and your teammates to understand how you support them.

Leitha currently leads operations at German fintech startup Zuper GmbH and supports verify-u AG, a leading identity management firm. In her free time, she mentors startups and is part of the advisory board for the CoWomen community. She also speaks around world on topics surrounding Financial Wellness, Data Management, Decision Support and Applications of AI/ML and Gamification in Financial Betterment. Leitha co-founded a nonprofit community organization, "Mind the Gap (MtG) e.V." and she previously worked in the US building up online customer service operations for FedEx as well as a 20-person team and ecommerce front-end systems (including AI-driven recommendations) for FreshDirect.com (now a \$600 MM rev/yr business).