“ETH has shaped my life”



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Christian Buess turned a small project into a company with a 60-strong workforce. By including the ETH Zurich Foundation in his will, he wants to enable talented individuals at his alma mater to enjoy similar success.

You’ve been working on equipment that measures lung function for over 30 years. How did you first become involved in this field?

Christian Buess – I more or less stumbled across it by chance when I became an assistant at the Institute for Electronics at ETH after finishing my degree in electrical engineering. I was tasked with enhancing a prototype spirometer and gave myself three months to do it. The result was the first ultrasonic flow sensor, the foundation for our current products which allow better early diagnosis of chronic lung disease. Now, 30 years later, I am still working with the same technology, along with a team of 60 ndd Medical Technologies employees in Switzerland and the US.

From modest beginnings, the company has become a world leader in pulmonary function diagnosis. How did that come about?

First of all, I’m a very persistent person. Once I’ve got an idea in my head, I won’t let go, even when things get tough. And secondly, I have been lucky to work with people who had a great deal of faith in me and gave me the freedom I needed to pursue my project – from Walter Guggenbühl, my professor at ETH, to Professor Karl Harnoncourt in Graz. I am particularly indebted to Professor Harnoncourt, because it was through his support and

vision that we were able to set up ndd.

What sets your company apart from the rest?

We believe in steady, continual development rather than rapid growth. Our focus at ndd is on medical innovation – our technology even made it into space on board one of the Space Shuttle missions!

A lot of our employees studied at ETH, like I did. If we want Switzerland to remain an important innovation hub, it is vital that the university continues to nurture talent.

You have already decided to include the ETH Zurich Foundation in your will. What prompted that decision?

I have enjoyed a lot of support throughout my career and I see it as my responsibility to give something back. To this day, I am still enjoying the benefits of my time at ETH Zurich; it enabled my career and shaped my entire life. I would like to play a role in ensuring that the university continues to offer future generations topclass research and teaching.

What do you do to unwind from your demanding work?

My partner is an artist and I grew up in a very artistic household. As a child, I loved making things and I still find an outlet in art. I enjoy creating things – at work and in my leisure time. I used to work with various artists on interactive sound installations. Today I am very involved in photography. Art and research are not so very different – you can come up with breakthroughs in both provided you're given enough space to think.

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> "I see it as my responsibility to give something back."
>
> **Christian Buess**

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