

# Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

## A STORY ABOUT SOVEREIGNTY



I know it will be a difficult conversation before I even enter the building. Sometimes you can sense it like the weather. Not because someone has predicted it, but because it's in the air.

Plant 2 has been in a kind of limbo since the location decision: officially, a future through transformation, but emotionally still a farewell. I'm here today to present the new structure and explain the timeline. This is the plan.

As I enter the hall, faces are fixed on me long before I reach the front. Some are open, some closed off, some simply blank. I see the mixture of mistrust and hope that arises after momentous decisions.

We're standing in the large break room. The rows are packed, it's warm, and a few jackets are still hanging from shoulders. The works council representative is sitting at the front right. The plant manager is standing next to me, visibly tense.

I begin calmly. "Thank you all for being here. I know this is not an easy time. And today I want to tell you clearly how we will shape the next few months."

I'll explain the restructuring: which lines of work will remain, which departments will be merged, and how the training will work. I'm deliberately keeping the pace slow. I don't want to overwhelm anyone. I want to explain.

After ten minutes, someone in the back doesn't raise their hand, but simply shouts: "And where do you guarantee that this isn't just the next cost-cutting measure?"

A murmur rippled through the rows. I know this dynamic: when one person says it, the others are relieved that it's finally been said.

I feel a brief pang in my heart. Not from fear, but from that human reaction when you lose control. The old reflex would be to defend myself, provide facts, show toughness. Or to soften in order to gain approval.

I exhale. Sovereignty is not a feeling. Sovereignty is composure under pressure.

"I cannot give you a guarantee," I say calmly.

Quiet.

Some look surprised. Some skeptical. But they listen.

"What I can offer is a clear decision and a transparent path," I continued. "We are investing in Plant 2 because we need it as a center of excellence. And we are closing Plant 1 because otherwise we would jeopardize both in three years."

A second interjection, sharper: "That's what you say now. And in two years it'll be our turn."

I can feel the temperature in the room rising. The plant manager shakes his head slightly, as if to say: Oh God. I can see his fear that things will go wrong.

I take a step forward. Not aggressively. More presently. "I understand your concern," I say. "And I take it seriously. That's precisely why we're talking about it openly today."

I'll pause briefly so it doesn't sound like a cliché.

"You have seen in recent weeks that decisions can be made that hurt. It would be naive to expect you to simply place your trust in me now. Trust can only be built if we remain transparent and keep our promises. I will be held accountable for that."

The works council representative looks at me. Not friendly, not hostile. Scrutinizing. That's okay.

A woman in the third row raises her hand. "What about the people who don't fit into the new structure?"

"There's no one who fits neatly into a pigeonhole," I say. "During the qualification weeks, we'll work together to identify individual skills and determine where someone fits best. And if someone can't stay in Plant 2, I'll ensure a fair transition. I promise you that."

The atmosphere in the room changes. Not because they are suddenly satisfied, but because they sense that I am not backing down.

Then it gets emotional.

A man stands up, his voice husky: "I've been here for 27 years. I've seen three management teams. And it was always: 'We are important.' And then came the cut. Why should we believe you?"

I feel my throat tighten. It's not a personal attack. It's an old wound speaking.

Sovereignty doesn't mean staying cool. Sovereignty means enduring emotion without losing your way.

"Because you're right," I say quietly. "You've experienced too often that promises weren't kept. And I can't undo that." I hold his gaze. "But I can tell you what we're doing differently today: We're disclosing the plan, we're disclosing the investments, we're disclosing the criteria. And we're involving you in the implementation."

I point to the next slide: timeline, milestones, participation steps. No secrecy. No vague language. I notice how I myself become calmer the more clearly I speak.

The discussion lasts a long time. There is anger, sadness, and disagreement. I don't respond to every feeling with a solution, but I answer every question with clarity. I also say twice: "I don't know that yet today. I'll come back with an answer."

I would have avoided that in the past. Now I can handle it. Because it's more honest than pretending things are already decided, just to have some peace and quiet.

After almost an hour and a half, the discussion ends. No applause. But many remain, come forward, and ask questions. That's a good sign: they haven't left. They're still engaged in conversation.

As the hall empties, the plant manager remains standing next to me. He seems exhausted, but also a little relieved.

"I didn't expect that," he says.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"That you remained so calm. And... that you didn't try to sugarcoat it."

I nod. "Sugarcoating it is like a second insult."

He looks at me. "It was tough."

"Yes," I say. "But it was real. And I think they sensed that."

He exhales. "That's what kept us in the game today."

I'll go to the car later. It's cold outside, of course. And I realize: sovereignty doesn't feel like control. It feels like the opposite of escape.

# Takeaway inspiration

## Sovereignty

Sovereignty in leadership means remaining calm, clear, and present in tense situations – without devaluation or evasion. It combines composure with humanity and thus carries the space, even when emotions run high.

If your next conversation could turn sour, decide beforehand on your three anchors: truth, respect, and direction. And if things get heated, consciously exhale before you respond.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT SOVEREIGNTY FOR YOU

1. Where do I lose presence in difficult situations because I want to flee or fight internally?
2. What three sentences are my anchors when things get emotional?
3. How can I provide clarity without belittling people?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

Victoria Beckers

E-Mail: [beckers@energie-durch-entwicklung.com](mailto:beckers@energie-durch-entwicklung.com)

phone: +49 172 90 69 280

Energie durch Entwicklung GmbH

Hufeisen 13 | D-41352 Korschenbroich

[www.energie-durch-entwicklung.com](http://www.energie-durch-entwicklung.com)