

Thomas Weidenheimer (*1965) is an architect and works in Department 6 Construction and Facility Management. He lives in the Sauerland region with his wife and son Konrad (*2000).



Source:
private

The friend and contact person

Thomas Weidenheimer has made his way to my office and, despite his thick cotton hat and winter coat, arrives somewhat chilled. To warm up, he therefore first wants a hot coffee. After the steaming cups are placed in front of us, we begin the interview.

Planning is everything

Mr. Weidenheimer has now been working at the TU Dortmund for six years. This was a big step for his personal career. "Before I started at the TU Dortmund, I worked as a freelancer for ten years. At some point, however, I said, 'This won't work anymore.'" He shakes his head in disillusionment. "Freelancing is always a financial risk. It goes up and down, either you have too much to do, in which case you are financially secure, or you have nothing to do at all and have to see how things go. At that time, the university had advertised this position at 30%. That fit in well with my planning."



**"And then homework is done.
Then it's back to the grind."**

Although these ten years were an exciting and enjoyable time for him, he wanted to create greater continuity and security in his professional life, says the architect simply. Above all, he says, the position was ideal in terms of timing: "That way I could coordinate things quite well. After all, an office continues to run, because you have to keep things on hand.

Even if the construction work is completed, then you still have a five-year warranty on the normal construction services. So I'm still reworking the projects that took place a long time ago." Now he works part-time four days a week and feels, what the flexibility and security of his job, "very much at ease."

In his current daily routine, he can easily combine his duties as a father with those as an employee of TU Dortmund University. Not without a certain amount of planning, of course. "At the moment, I get up every morning at five o'clock and then read my newspaper to wake myself up," he explains. Along the way, he makes sure that everything is prepared for his son Konrad's day. A little mischievously, he explains: "Konrad should actually do that himself, but a few things are not yet running smoothly, for example, that the Torister is packed properly, etc.". Afterwards, he is responsible for waking up the 12-year-old, and his wife takes care of the rest. He himself heads off to work, which currently usually starts at half past seven and ends at 4 p.m. "After that, I make sure that I'm ready to go to work," he says. "After that, I make sure I get home quickly." The father laughs. "And then the homework gets done. Then it's back to the grind."

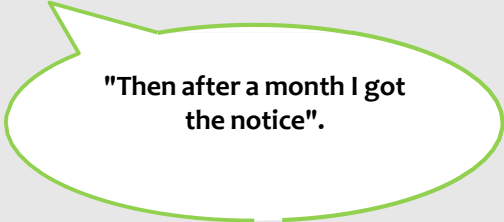
"Well, I can say that some of us are busy until six-thirty or seven o'clock, even though Konrad is at an all-day school, where the homework is supposed to be done." He pulls

shoulders up. "Some kids just need more support, some need less." Because his wife is an executive at a bank, she usually doesn't get home until late. "Back then, 6 months after Konrad was born, my wife immediately went back to work full time. Although she has Fridays off today, but in her industry it's still very difficult to cut hours as an executive."

Suddenly freelance

When Konrad was born, Thomas Weidenheimer himself was still an employee in an architect's office. He and his wife had the desire, that at least one of them is on parental leave. was to be built. "For me, it was very clear that I wanted to do this," the architect recounts euphorically. "I thought it was a good thing to do. My wife would have liked to do it, too, but it's not like I necessarily wanted to make a career out of it. An employee in an architect's office is paid differently than an executive bank employee. That was for economic reasons, but also for other reasons." He still remembers how he looked forward to the coming time with his child. His expression darkens noticeably, however, when he talks about the reaction of his boss at the time. "I went to my boss with the good news and said 'So and so it is, so and so I imagine it' and also thought that would work out. After a month, I then got the notice."

The father seems composed and calm. But there is a clear lack of understanding in his tone. "Of course, there was another reason - 'operational' - in the notice of termination. My boss knew about my attitude towards parental leave, but could not accept it in a small architecture office with only five to six people. It would not have been economically viable for him." He lets out a sigh. "In retrospect, I think I should have just said nothing."



"Then after a month I got the notice".

Instead of taking parental leave, Thomas Weidenheimer was then suddenly unemployed. "At that time, it was very difficult to find work as an architect. It wasn't that easy. That's when I first sat at home and we thought about what we would do." This time was not easy, Thomas Weidenheimer remembers seriously. "We are also still and Konrad was on the road and my wife could no longer work. That was already difficult. So I said, 'Listen, if this doesn't work out at all, then I'll help you. I'm going to go out on my own and make myself independent.'" His expression brightens abruptly. "And then I got lucky. I wrote my thesis for the Archive of the city of Iserlohn made. This had

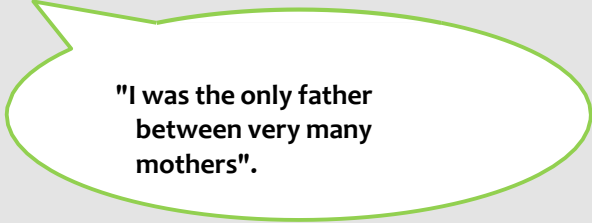
I made a few contacts." And the right idea, as he enthusiastically reports: "In the time fire protection was increasingly requested by schools and other organizations. That's when the city gave me three or four orders. I was able to use those for myself and make it a freelance business."

Playpen and desk

"In this context, I also had the romantic or, in retrospect, "naive" idea of looking after the child on the side. A playpen next to my desk!" The father laughs self-deprecatingly. He was quickly proved wrong, he says. "The idea that you could sit at your desk with a baby on your lap was, simply put, naive. But I had believed at the time that it could work out that way." He remembers taking Konrad with him on inspection visits to construction sites, in a sling. Today, he can only shake his head in disbelief. "Of course, that came across as totally weird and ultimately didn't work out either."

Unlike originally planned, everyday life for Thomas Weidenheimer and his son ultimately turned out in such a way that Konrad also stayed with his grandparents more often. The father smiles somewhat bashfully: "In the end, it was quite a lot. It was then that he had to spend four

days a week was half with my mother and half with my wife's mother, but as I said, it was first considered differently." Then, when Konrad started kindergarten, things fell into place again more happily and more predictably for the father. "Then I was lucky enough to get a small office right next to the kindergarten. I took him to kindergarten in the morning and picked him up again at noon and drove him to his grandmother's house. There he spent the afternoon. That went on for the entire kindergarten period and went quite well."



**"I was the only father
between very many
mothers".**

However, this constellation enabled him to be on site more quickly if something happened. He was also able to take an active part in the kindergarten's community events. He remembers with amusement: "I was the only father among many mothers.

"With my son, I did crafts in kindergarten and participated in many other activities. We did a lot of things. I could just go over there. That was easy to combine with my work." Of course it was also exhausting, admits the father, "but it was a great time that I will never forget!"

University as an island

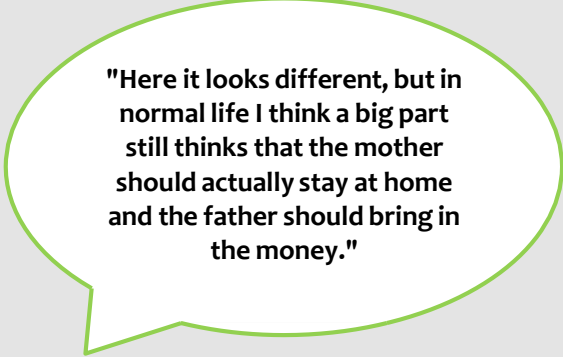
In his circle of acquaintances, he was able to exchange ideas with other fathers and parents who had children Konrad's age, he recalls himself. But the type of care that he and his According to his assessment, his choice of wife was quite unusual for the circumstances of the time. In kindergarten, he said, he was already very noticeable as the only father. "Well, that's polarizing." He ponders for a moment. "There were mothers there who thought it was good and some who found it rather peculiar. It was very different. You could tell some women had a conservative idea of family, where roles should be structured very clearly. The father goes to work and the mother stays at home and takes care of the children."

Thomas Weidenheimer rolls his eyes. He sometimes had the impression that some women were not at all positive about the advent of such role reversals, and he doesn't like to swear that this ambivalent perception has changed very much overall. "It's different at the university, this is an island," he says with a smile.

"It's a different story here, but in normal life I think a large portion still think that the mother should actually stay home and the father should bring in the money."

Whether it is good or bad for the child when the father is at home in place of the mother may be

Thomas Weidenheimer. My wife would also have liked to stay with Konrad, but because my wife wanted to keep her good job as an executive, after studying for it for years, she couldn't take a longer break.



"Here it looks different, but in normal life I think a big part still thinks that the mother should actually stay at home and the father should bring in the money."

Then she would automatically have been out. We didn't want to risk that in the situation at the time. Ultimately, however, he emphasizes, it is always the circumstances that are decisive. Neither parent's life was ever about a classic career. "Is it really important to have a job that pays a lot of money, or is there perhaps more to it than that? also things that represent a career in a different way?" The 47-year-old looks at me questioningly and pauses briefly. "For example, knowledge, life experience and satisfaction. You don't necessarily have to gain these things through a career," he finally says thoughtfully. "I believe that a career has a lot to do with inner satisfaction. That was also the reason for me to take advantage of the time with Konrad.

zen. Everyone has to have their own goals." In retrospect, Thomas Weidenheimer says that his life was set on a different course by the birth of Konrad. "I was forced into freelancing, more or less.

"I believe that career has a lot to do with inner contentment."

Otherwise, I'd probably still be in an architecture firm." So he is not at all sad about the real development. "The time back then was super exhausting, but I learned a lot there, too." Through his son, he has not least He also got to know himself in a completely different way, he says confidently.

Bouquet full of role expectations

Nevertheless, it is difficult for him to assess what kind of father he is. "Yes, that's not so easy," he says uncertainly and thinks again for a moment. "That's quite a colorful bouquet you have to cover. I couldn't say what dominates: you have to be strict, you have to educate, you have to be a friend, you have to be a friend, you have to be a friend, you have to be a friend, you have to be a friend, you have to be a friend, you have to be a friend.

need to be the point of contact for all things." He had never asked himself this question and therefore delegated it to Konrad before the interview.

"The time back then was super exhausting, but I learned a lot there, too."

"My son said that maybe I was a buddy or a friend." The father laughs. "I thought that was quite sweet of him, but that doesn't cover everything." A little more seriously, he adds, "I really just hope that I can live up to everything to some extent; especially Konrad, of course."

The interview was conducted by Debora Rahma in spring 2013.



**A well-rehearsed team: 6
Thomas Weidenheimer and his son Konrad**

Source:
Private