

German woman boss puts back clock to outlaw fun

JUDITH MAIR insists that her staff wear uniforms at work, has banned words such as "flexitime" and "team spirit" from the office and refuses to allow employees to make private telephone calls or chat for more than five minutes during strictly enforced business hours.

Der Spiegel magazine called her "Germany's toughest woman boss" last week while other publications identified her as leading a "counter-revolution" in the workplace by championing a return to traditional German values of discipline, hard work and rigid punctuality.

Miss Mair, 30, who has been running her Cologne-based advertising and web design company for less than four years, has propelled herself into the limelight through the publication of a controversial new book, *Schluss mit Lustig* (End the Fun). In it she delivers a withering attack on what she sees as the American-inspired "enjoyable" approach to work that dominated Germany's now shattered internet-based industry during the mid-1990s.

Managers have snapped up the title because it appears to offer a way out of Germany's present economic misery. Last week the publishers, Eichborn Verlag, announced that just a month after it went on sale a second print run was being ordered.

More than 50 per cent of Germany's "New Economy" companies in the dot-com industries have gone bankrupt over the past six years, contributing to the country's record unemployment of more than four million.

Germany's post-war "economic miracle", founded on consensus politics, a broad social safety net and restrained market forces, has failed to respond to the faster, more ruthless economic demands of the computer age. The nation described for more

The 30-year-old businesswoman leading a revolution against management gurus talks to **Tony Paterson**



No frills: Judith Mair, 30, left, and her three uniformed staff at work in Cologne

than 40 years after the end of the war as the economic motor of Europe is now more often seen as a drag on the global economy.

Miss Mair, the daughter of a university professor, argues that her rediscovery of the puritan approach to business is one of the main reasons why her Mair and Others agency has survived. "The fact is that work has nothing to do with fun. I began running the company on this principle three years ago and the system has decreased rather than increased the level of stress at work and at home," she said.

Her credo is that fashionable notions such as weekend company get-togethers, "flexible working hours" and "team spirit" have led to a disastrous erosion of the boundaries

between work and private life, which has crippled company efficiency and exploited staff.

Mair and Others started business in a tiny office - a converted staff lavatory in the former Cologne branch of the German electronics company Siemens. She has since moved to a former fruit shop on the edge of the city centre which last week seemed less like an advertising agency than a Lufthansa bureau stripped down to its bare necessities.

Miss Mair and her three female colleagues were all dressed in identical tight-fitting blue tailored jackets and skirts and sat obediently at computer screens working out advertising and product designs. No pictures, posters or calendars were to be seen on the office walls, which are kept bare to

prevent staff from being distracted.

Company rules state that uniforms are to be worn at all times, with a rigid 9am to 6pm working day and five-day week, no private telephone calls and no chatting about private matters.

It is forbidden to take work home and half-hour lunch breaks are compulsory. The company's golden rule is: Those who think that good work is only work that is fun do not belong here.

"When we started out we ran the company according to the so-called 'cool' approach adopted by most of our competitors. This meant that we started work at around midday and drank beer in the office. We ended up working most weekends and half of most nights. In the end we were all exhausted and ended up with a lousy product," Miss Mair said.

She blames, for this "laissez-faire" approach to work, the New Economy management gurus of the 1990s such as Matt Weinstein, the American author of *Managing To Have Fun*. In his book Mr Weinstein states: "Are you having fun is a pioneering question that will have to be asked in business. Only when we ask this question can we begin to change the nature of our work."

Miss Mair cites such ideas as examples of the "management twaddle" that has encouraged employees not to work hard unless they feel that they are having a good time. She is equally dismissive of concepts such as "flexitime" which she says is an excuse to make people work until midnight and at weekends. "Team spirit", she argues, allows employees to think "someone else will do it".

Her dislike of Americanisms including "deadline", "workflow" and "brainstorming" has led her to ban the use of such terms in her office and she charges extra to clients who insist on her using them in their work.



Judith Mair, who runs a successful web design company, believes in discipline and punctuality