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# «Fuck-up» rounds, flaming cocktails and a curious hound

Interview by Timo Albiez  
with Samuel Röthlisberger



Samuel (right) is Managing Partner at FE Agentur and, through his FE Motion, designs hybrid and digital events that make brands emotionally engaging.

### **Dear Samuel, who are you?**

I am a 15-year-old boy in the body of a 53-year-old man – and that's not a marketing line. I'm being serious. I am driven by fun, always hunting for something new. My colleagues compare me to a young dog: curious, playful, full of boundless energy. When something grabs me, I dive in completely. I want to understand how it works – not just on the surface, but right down to the very first idea. I imagine, like in an Asterix and Obelix village, someone selling their first fish and eventually building a trading empire. These flights of imagination help me explain complex things so everyone can understand – and that is precisely my job.

### **What defines your creativity?**

My creativity is like a dog with its nose in the wind. I chase every exciting trail – sometimes several at once. It makes my job thrilling, but also unpredictable. I can burn with enthusiasm – yet still let go if it no longer fascinates me. What remains is this basic attitude: the glass is always half full. Even when something goes wrong, I find a positive spin. I've developed this mindset through my work – because I inevitably have to be interested in other people, their topics, and their stories.

### **You actually have two clients – the commissioner and the audience. How do you see your role?**

I am essentially a translator or mediator. The commissioner comes with a message, the audience with expectations. My task is to package the message so that it rea-

ches the audience – often without a single explanatory word. It could be a stage design that instantly evokes a feeling, or music that carries an entire mood. I love the moment when the audience feels something without knowing exactly why.

### **Was there a moment when you realised: this is my thing?**

Yes – I was twelve when I had the chance to accompany the Tagesschau news reader Hansjörg Enz on live television. I sat in the control room, watching the clock, listening to the director count down: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 – we're live! Those words stuck with me. Live means: it's happening now. After that, I desperately wanted to be in television. I trained as a photographer and became a cameraman. But it was only when I stood at an event in front of a live audience that I knew: this is my home.

### **Do you still get goosebumps after 25 years?**

At every single event. I stage openings almost like a director making a film. The lights dim slowly, the music gets louder, the audience quiets down. I'm in the control room, holding all the strings, waiting for that one moment when the tension peaks. Then comes my «Go!», and everything starts moving. It's like a rush – only without a hangover the next day.

### **What happens if something goes wrong?**

Mistakes are part of it. We even rehearse mistakes – in our «fuck-up rounds» before each event. Everyone can say: «What could

go wrong?» and we run it through. It takes away the fear. I myself become remarkably calm in those moments, almost stoic. I analyse, decide, act. Only when it's all over do I realise how tense it actually was.

### **Do you have a recipe for a successful event?**

Yes – and it's like a five-course meal:

Course 1, emotion through all senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. An event must be sensory. A corporate anniversary doesn't start with a speech for me, but perhaps with a scent filling the room – for example, freshly baked bread if it fits the theme.

Course 2, dramaturgy: An event without a narrative arc is like a film without a plot. I plan the flow so there is a climax – usually in the final third. It could be a surprise guest, a stage that transforms, or a light show turning the hall into another universe.

Course 3, risk: This can be taken by the organiser – like an open-air event with weather risk – or by the audience, like at an event with locusts: 1,200 guests, and we thought hardly anyone would try them. But after 30 minutes, they were all gone. People didn't just eat; they took home a story.

### **And the last two points?**

Course 4, surprise: I want guests to think: «I didn't expect that.» It could be a sudden pause in the music, ending in a choir from the audience, or an actor rising from the crowd and becoming part of the show.

Course 5, images and stories: People remember stories, not facts. I embed every message into a story – like the «hero's journey.» The audience recognises themselves, becomes part of the journey – and leaves with a feeling, not a list or a brochure that ends up in the bin.

### **Is there a dream project you'd like to realise?**

The opening of the Olympic Games – just to be part of this gigantic clockwork. Months of rehearsal for a moment that reaches the whole world. But until then, I'm particularly excited to surprise people who didn't even want to come. When they then say: «That was better than I expected,» that is my Olympics.

### **Is there a particular moment in your career that stays with you?**

At the Swiss Economic Forum, a guest spoke against the mutilation of women in Africa. He spoke for twelve minutes – without images, without slides, only his voice. Afterwards, there was a long-standing ovation. The applause lasted almost longer than his speech. It wasn't polite applause – it was a collective «We stand with you.» I had tears in my eyes.

### **Now here are my standard questions for you – are you ready? What cocktail would you be?**

The cocktail would be: alcohol-free, colourful, fruity – with a surprise effect. My daughter, a trained bartender, once set a cocktail on fire. Perhaps I'd be like

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that – first colourful and friendly, then a small flame that changes everything.

**And which film genre would you be?**

Action – but with depth. Countdown, show-down, story. As long as everyone is captivated.

**And what does your perfect party look like?**

20 to 35 guests, a venue with atmosphere, and many surprising elements. Perhaps a room that transforms over the course of the evening. And everyone leaves with something – a gift, a thought, or simply the feeling

of having been part of something special.

**If you could press a button and travel to the past or the future?**

I'd gladly travel to the future. The past is gone. A look ahead could make many worries today entirely unnecessary.

**I can imagine you might write a book someday. What would this «volume» be?**

«So ticks the human mind» or provocatively «Ways to Influence.» I am fascinated by how people can be positively influenced and inspired without them noticing.

Thank you for this wonderful conversation, Samuel! And you, dear readers, can learn more about FE Agentur and their extraordinary range of offers here:

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