



## ROLLING WITH THE PUNCHES

SIBUR's CEO **Mikhail Karisalov** on avoiding burnout and making sports part of daily life.

### World Cup and the chemistry of football

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THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR INNATE ABILITIES AND STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, SURE, BUT I FIRMLY BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF CULTIVATING THE QUALITIES OF A LEADER.

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After our team was out of the tournament, I rooted for the French and was glad to see them win. I would have supported our Slavic brethren too, but the politically charged comments from their side gave me pause. I prefer to keep sports and politics separate. Overall though, it was an amazing and unforgettable World Cup. Our guys put up a great fight, and the French took a well-deserved win. A game of football is like a chemical reaction of sorts. I think it is the almost chivalric rivalry that makes it so appealing; the non-aggressive drive to find out who is the strongest. The French won out this time, but once the game was done and the final whistle blown, the opposing sides shared a hug – both the players and fans. This ability of football to bring together people from very different backgrounds is what its chemistry is all about.

### Football: on a personal note

The courtyard in front of a St Petersburg house where I grew up was where I started playing – first with my granddad, and later with the boys. I was never particularly athletic, but I was still a good goalkeeper thanks to decent coordination and speed, as well as not being afraid of the ball. As a goalie, I lucked out: our corporate centre team has excellent defence and offence. The enemy team just cannot reach the goal! (Laughs.) We have yet to lose a match.



## Need for sport

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I consider physical activities a crucial part of child development, so my kids are also into sports. When she was younger, my daughter spent 10 years playing volleyball. The eldest son is in great shape, very lean and muscular – all thanks to his CrossFit and HIIT routines. My second son has long been practising martial arts and has recently won a medal at the hand-to-hand fighting world cup. My two youngest sons are also not far behind – the seven-year-old likes to swim and cycle, and the one-year-old for now just eats healthy.

I work out 20 days a month, and a single session lasts around 1–1.5 hours. As a kid, I did a lot of swimming and running, which is also how I train today. I go to a gym and use a treadmill and an exercise bike for my cardio. I am also into trekking and mountain hiking. Walking is a big part of my life – on vacation I rack up over 10 km daily. Finally, I am a big fan of the Russian steam bath. Regular exercise not only helps me stay in shape, it also keeps me performing at my peak efficiency at all times.

## On healthy lifestyle

Sensible eating habits, sports, and good rest – that is all there is to it. Physical activity provides a great energy boost to your work. Unfortunately, back in the day I was not so smart about my health, so I put on extra weight. Had to cut down on some products and eat more healthy foods. I am now well-versed in matters of nutrition, which helps me maintain my fitness (not to mention health and general well-being).





## On gambling and attitude to defeat

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I am a bit of a gambler when it comes to sports, yes. Used to be like that in life too, but with age you have to start being more mindful of your actions, relying on cost-benefit analysis a bit more. In Bulgakov’s play *Flight*, one of the characters says during a game of cards: “Eh, Paramosha, you’re a gambler! That’s your weak spot!” Being a hotshot and a daredevil means not being in control. I hope I am not like that. Defeat is fleeting in sports: you bounce back and try to even the score. In life, you have to live with (and in spite of) your failures. That means reflecting on the situation, not beating yourself up about what comes to pass, and not resorting to cynicism or indifference. Rolling with the punches is a valuable skill, and one that I keep working on.

## On the nature of leadership

I think leadership is a skill that can be learned. There is something to be said for innate abilities and strength of character, sure, but I firmly believe in the possibility of cultivating the qualities of a leader. To do that effectively, you need to surround yourself with positive influences: your seniors will give you valuable advice, spiritual mentors will teach you patience, and your spouse will help you better understand compassion.

## On following and breaking the rules

“Rules are made to be broken” – people usually take this quote and run with it, thinking it gives them a free rein. They do not attempt to analyse the situation and weigh the options in order to find a solution that will be in line with the said rules. Do I bend rules sometimes? Yes, if the situation call for it. But I still acknowledge them and do my best to comply whenever possible. When dealing with a body of staff, you need to observe best governance practices: let your subordinates make the call – even if doing it yourself would save time, let people speak – even if you know the answer. A system of rules is an integral part of effective governance, and if they were broken left and right – chaos would ensue. At the same time, managers should utilise different governance styles.





## On priorities and deriving pleasure from work

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The trick is getting your priorities straight. For example, holding a meeting first and then calling my son to give some advice, or vice versa. Of course, the bulk (and sometimes even more) of my time is taken up by work and work-related communication, as well as business trips. Thankfully, I like what I do, and those closest to me accept and support my lifestyle. Being on the same page when it comes to work and hobbies is very important for keeping the family strong and happy.

## On art

I take interest in the 18th and early 19th century Russian art. It is not so much a hobby as it is just a side activity, one that was instilled in me at an early age by my mother. I continually read books, go to exhibitions and learn new information about this topic. The world has grown very pragmatic and materialistic, with readily available information and everything being streamlined to the max. In a world like this, people seldom find time for art. I remember spending several years learning marquetry (the craft of applying pieces of veneer to a structure to form decorative patterns). I was fascinated with broken chairs, tables and cabinets. (Laughs.) Would any young folk want to do something like that now? Hardly.



## On avoiding burnout

It may sound strange coming from me, but I do not think people should let work take over their lives. Balance is essential in maintaining peace of mind. My dear colleagues and co-workers must know – I do want them to spend time caring for their families, doing sports and hobbies, going to church, and enjoying barbecue with friends out in the nature. Life is so interesting and versatile – blink, and you miss something special. Putting your nose to the grindstone is good and all, but you need to know what you are working toward. Keep your eye on the ball (and on the prize!), and that way you will never burn out.