



NOTES ON THE ROAD

Oleg Makarov, SIBUR's Management Board member, talks about control over his own life, and about future, travels and dreams.

On his career path

I've been with the company for 13 years now. We began almost as a pioneering movement: the company's reorganisation started in 2004, shortly after Alexander Dyukov joined SIBUR. Those were tough but interesting times. Everything needed to be changed. We built a team and worked literally day and night on the company's first strategy, drinking gallons of coffee just to stay awake. Some people were sent to bed though, so that early in the morning they could get back to work and proofread whatever the overnights drafted. That was hard, but incredibly exciting.

Our goal at the time was to overcome the challenges the company had faced, and it looks like we have succeeded. Now there is a name everyone in the industry knows. The company is perceived as one living organism that operates for the benefit of its customers. Of course there is still a lot to be improved. We should take a closer look at other industries, such as retail, which is way ahead of us in terms of customer focus. Certain aspects from those industries, though they might need some rethinking and transformation, can also be adopted in SIBUR.



One of the first trips to London in 1993.

On making impossible possible

At SIBUR, we are constantly learning something new, not only broadening our outlook, but also acquiring practical skills. The corporate university offers a variety of courses, and the training process never stops. For example, right now I am exploring digitalisation: it is important to understand the challenges and opportunities that come with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. So far it is all very complex, and answers aren't that obvious. For one thing, I don't think robots will be able to fully replace humans. It's more likely that people will be spared of routine operations and have more time left for creativity. It's also possible that something completely new will emerge – something we can't even imagine yet.

On familiar faces in unfamiliar settings

For me, the best thing in an office party is the employees' talent show. Everyone wants to know who will perform what. With regular actors, we always know what to expect, and here we have familiar people, but in new, unfamiliar settings. I believe that at a good company, managers should also participate in such activities, so that employees could be sure their superior is not a robot.

I am a terrible singer, but when I am alone in the car, I sometimes sing along with the radio. Once my colleagues and I decided to create a band called EBIT-DA and perform at one of SIBUR's parties. I thought of attending a singing class before we record our music at a real studio, but it turned out I didn't have to. The show was actually a lot of fun, and I think we could get some credit for that: we took the preparation really seriously and were rewarded by an enthusiastic audience, which, however, expected us to play again next year.



Photo with Dmitry Malyshev, head of Fuel components and Alcohols division, one of the EBIT-DA band members.

On his travels

It recently struck me that crazy journeys no longer attract me as much as they did. The most memorable travels I ever had happened when I was a child and the whole world was opening its doors to me. My father served as a Russian consul in Nepal, and this country was like a parallel universe for me. Back then it was like flying to the moon. These memories will stay with me as long as I live, and I don't think that anything will ever beat them. Well, unless I ever go to Mars, of course.

Ever since I was a little boy, I have been travelling a lot, first with my parents, and then on my own. It turns out like this too can become boring. I know for sure that beach vacations are not for me, I need to always be on the move. But no matter how active I am, I also prefer to stay safe, and extreme sports are not my thing. This is also a reason I would never become an independent businessman: all the responsibility would drive me crazy.

At the same time it's hard for me to tune out work even on holiday. I have to constantly stop myself from checking my email or thinking of work-related issues, but I usually fail and do that anyway. Certain basic things must always remain under control.



Portuguese vacation (Madeira, February 2017).

There have been countless times when I missed my train or my flight, so I've become a bit of a fatalist, thinking that whatever you do, it's for the best. I do my best to strike the right balance: on the one hand, I want to be shaping my own destiny, and on the other, there is only so much you can do. If you were late, that means somebody wanted you to be, but it is OK as there is always a next flight. Besides, our today's world is so convenient that you can just check into the airport hotel and wait there comfortably. The important thing is that everyone is alive.

When travelling and exploring life in other countries, I sometimes start trying it on myself, wondering whether I could live there. For example, last year I went to Mexico. The landscapes there are amazing, as if we were in the Avatar movie. It was an unforgettable experience. Or Peru, another terrific destination. A colonial train with brass railings and an open-air observation car is running through the jungle, taking you to Machu Picchu. But the most surreal feeling comes when you realise all of this is built by a totally different civilisation. Although when you get back to your hotel, you feel the craving for a dinner at a nice restaurant, not for another jungle adventure.

On artifacts

From my travels, I always bring some authentic souvenirs, so there are plenty of them in my apartment and my country house. But now I've started seeing these objects in a different light. It's when you are a child that you need to own all the seashells and souvenirs from foreign lands you can get. I remember a friend of mine having a tiny dried crocodile, and another had an ostrich egg. As kids, we saw all those things as objects from other planets, but now we can go to any store, perhaps to an Indian one, and buy whatever we want – from spices to mounted animals.



Delhi, India. 1979.

On Russia

We have a very weird climate here, but on the other hand, Russia is so rich in unique natural areas. I personally resolved to travel around Russia once a year. This year I visited the Urals, the Dyatlov Pass, a place with a mysterious story. The incident there was widely covered by press, but what strikes me most is that so many years have passed, and yet no one has figured out what happened to the tourists. But a visit to the place only raised new questions in my head.

A very special city for me is Pskov. If I didn't work in Moscow, I would definitely move there. I am still deeply impressed by both the city and the surrounding landscape. I was most amazed by Pushkinskiye Gory. I think I understood there why Alexander Pushkin wrote the poems he did. The environment must really frame the person then, as the environment, the scenery there is unbelievably, extremely beautiful.

At my previous job, I had to spend a lot of time in the Far East. It is a very unusual and exciting region.

Of course I would also like to visit Kamchatka and Sakhalin, but the logistics is a bit tricky.

On childhood dreams

Before I finished school, I dreamed of becoming a civil aviation pilot and fly large aircraft. But in the end my parents' influence, perestroika and other factors combined brought me to the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

However, I believe that pilots have a beautiful uniform, fly awesome jets and are always on the cutting edge of progress. I still feel a little bit of regret that I am not one of them.

Another dream I had was to become an archaeologist. Unlike flying the skies, this one can still be made true. Perhaps when I am tired of everything I do, I work up the nerve, enter a distance programme in History at the Moscow State University, and then leave for some excavation. When we studied Ancient Greece in fifth grade, I promised myself to visit Athens and Acropolis. I did keep my promise, one of my first journeys was to Greece.



School outing in 1984.