



LIFE AND DRIVE

Alexey Markov, Hydrocarbon Marketing and Sales Director at SIBUR, speaks on extreme experiences, emotions, humour, and the film effect in choosing a profession.

On work

SIBUR is a huge part of my life, both in and outside the office environment. Urgent calls and emails that need some response are not infrequent. The hydrocarbon business is special in its own way and distinctive for the speed of developments and the need to make quick, yet informed decisions. Emergencies may also take place, giving rise to considerable operational risks and requiring active mitigating measures.

When promoted to a director, I had to change my 'I Know Best, I Do, You Watch' attitude for the 'You Do, I Watch, I Adjust if Needed' attitude. It is a new experience as my responsibility extends now beyond just managing traders and market experts to building business processes and information flows between the corporate centre's sales and marketing teams, export traders based in SIBUR International (our trading company), and related functions.



Courchevel, France. Freeriding, Verbier, Switzerland. Heli-skiing, Lech, Austria

On challenges and opportunities

Life challenges began to emerge at the dawn of my professional career. It was August 1998 when the first severe financial crisis struck and brought almost all imports in Russia to a halt. A fresh university graduate at that time, I was working in a furniture importing company and was again forced to look for my place in life. Primary industry was what I had long been interested in.

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Whether in everyday life, business or sports, I have always been determined to take every opportunity I came across and never avoided challenges even if chances were low. This is how you gain experience that moves you forward.

Many years ago a friend of mine was reading the Vedomosti newspaper and said, «Check it out. The Norwegian Embassy in Moscow announced a competition for students to study maritime logistics and transport in Norway. Looks like nothing serious." I said, «Let us give it a try and send our applications. We'll see what comes of it. In theory, it is an interesting thing...» This is how I received a grant to do a one-year course at the Norwegian Shipping Academy.

On travelling and discoveries

Travelling is a very good stress relief. It fills you with new emotions, but they become less intense, if you always travel for business. So, if the route depends on me alone, I include interesting or exotic places. Choosing a place is, to a certain degree, a trade-off between comfort and active leisure. For example, when I was staying at a good hotel in Thailand, I rented a car to drive to a local gym for Muay Thai training every morning. I did not expect to be so impressed with, for example, Cuba. Cubans are absolutely sincere in love to their leaders, Che Guevara in the first place. They see him as a symbol of a genuine fighter. Love shown to him and love of life are truly impressive, and so is a combination of the old and the new in Cuba. Cubans do not lose their national identity and integrity, but they realise perfectly well that their old life style belongs to history.



Kitesurfing spot, Le Morne, Mauritius. Wakeboarding, Bintan Island.

On freeriding

Skiing has been my passion since I was six. I take every chance to get to the mountain slope. I used to live and work in the UK — where there is totally no snow — and had to fly to Switzerland. When in Vienna, I found out that it took at least four hours to get to the nearest skiing slope although Austria is considered — in my mind at least — to be an alpine skiing country.

Boring European pistes are the main reason for me going in for free ride. I was looking for the same thrilling sensation like in my childhood.

Freeriding, Verbier, Switzerland.

Freeriding is more than a sport — it is a breath-stealing adventure. When you ski down a piste, you know that there have been 500 others before you on the same course down the slope. By contrast, freeriding is your own choice of the course and a feeling of unity with nature.

On the first extreme experience

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My first extreme experience was off-piste skiing at the age of nine because there was no choice — skiing on Cheget and Dombay slopes was all off-piste. If you wanted to ski down, there was no way other than through moguls, bumps, and overall chaotic terrain — a kind of fight for life.

On the like-minded

In London, I found a freeriding community set up by professional guides who followed you off-piste. It is very important because one should not ski off-piste alone; there must be an experienced companion who knows the landscape. Once in Switzerland, we had to walk up the mountain to a certain point and were given rock-climbing gear. I said, «Why? Will we climb a mountain?» The guide answered, «No, we won't. But it will help us take you out if you fall into a crevasse." My question was, «Are they deep, these crevasses?» He answered, «Well, like 50 meters maybe.»

My goal is to make three to four mountain trips each season. You can enjoy freeriding only when the weather is good. If avalanche risks are high or visibility is poor, I ski on piste as others do.



Mauritius. Shooting range, Moscow.

On emotions

I am looking for new emotions, not an adrenalin rush. They are brought about by new impressions and memorised to become heart-warming images from the past. I remember all my free rides much better than those 'groundhog days' when I was skiing on piste. A typical day at a ski resort looks like any other, while each off-piste ride is different. There is always something sudden and unexpected. When off piste, you can ski down slowly and take a look around. And memories left in your mind are brighter and clearer.

On the sports that failed

I am a very poor football fan. When I was a kid, football games I watched did not catch me. Even when I lived in London, my female colleagues knew more about football than I did.

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I do no snowboarding either. I do not play it down, but when I made my first attempts at skiing no one knew about snowboards. Of course, I could have learnt snowboarding, but I think that skis set you free while the snowboard makes you feel constrained. All my summer activities are related to boards, though. I do wakeboarding, windsurfing, and kiting, but kiting is more difficult to do as it needs suitable weather and other conditions.

On fighting and safety

When in London, I grew interested in martial arts. I used to live in the eastern part of the city, a cosmopolitan but not very safe place. Training in the gym right across the street helped me feel much more confident when going to English pubs. Martial arts relieved stress and improved my overall physical condition.

I used to spend my holidays in Thailand and exercised a lot in local fight clubs. The atmosphere in there is absolutely incredible, likely supported by the feeling of staying in the homeland of Muay Thai, not to mention professional martial arts trainers. Then I changed my residence again, and since then I have exercised only from time to time.



Morning fitness training, Cuba. Wakeboarding, Cyprus.

On time

Twenty-four hours are not enough, if tasks are many. It means you should relax and take an unbiased look at your tasks, then prioritise them and do what is important within a tight schedule. Many of us are perfectionists who want everything to be flawless. But striving for perfection, you may miss the overall picture of the situation. It happens that, after a pilot run, minor adjustments here and there transform the entire concept. It might happen both in business and life.

HUMOUR IS IMPORTANT TO REMAIN SANE – YOU CANNOT DO WITHOUT IT IN A PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT, DURING TALKS OR IN RELATIONS WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES.

On humour

Humour is important to remain sane. Humour helps to ease tensions — you cannot do without it in a professional environment, during talks or in relations with your colleagues. And I am lucky enough because I seldom meet people with no sense of humour.

On movies

Wall Street filmed in 1987 was the first picture that left a very strong impression on me. I watched it with my parents while we were waiting for our flight in a large regional airport. From the first seconds, I was taken away by the magic, drive and action accompanied with the words like quotes, changes, conflicts and political games unknown to me at that time. Much later, when I was thinking over my profession, an idea came to me to become a trader. So, the film had a delayed effect on me.

I like watching movies, ideally in a cinema. But sometimes I want to watch a classic movie or a film that is not shown in cinemas or watch an old Soviet picture once again. Then I do it at home or on the plane. Genres can be absolutely different — thrillers, action films, dramas and, of course, comedies because humour, as I have said, is an important part of our life.



Muay Thai training, Phuket Island, Thailand.