

# Shchekinoazot: An Incubator of the Best

## The Secret Lies in Cutting

ABOUT THIRTY years ago I came across John Grisham's *The Firm*. What impressed me was not the detective component of the novel but the head-hunting method described in it, where the firm started preparing potential workers from a young age. The firm shaped the talents and abilities of candidates when they were still at school, then "guided" them through college and sent them a lucrative work offer, provided, of course, they still met their requirements. Back then, it seemed a real example of know-how to me. It turns out this method had been applied by efficient businesses in Tula for years. However, there are different approaches to it.

When the Russian President Vladimir Putin mentioned in his Message to the Federal Assembly that we needed to implement the best career-orientation practices in schools to prepare young specialists capable of breakthrough changes in different areas of life, it became clear that it was one of the state's top priorities. Shchekinoazot realised the importance of quality human resources long ago. That's why we treat personnel training with more responsibility and innovation than Grisham's firm. The lyceum—college—university—company chain has been in operation for years refined over this time.



For instance, the company's representatives sent **Kristina SHUBINA** an offer to enrol in the Tula State University for a specialisation they were interested in when she was a student at Shchekino school No. 6. She was not

the only case. Four of her classmates decided to obtain degrees in a profession required by the company. At first, one of our experienced workers gave them a tour around Shchekinoazot. The guide told them about the past, present, and future of our chemical company in the on-site museum of labour achievements. This excursion was the first spark that ignited their interest in Shchekinoazot. It was further reinforced during practices, discussions with the team, and working under the supervision of caring instructors.

Upon obtaining her bachelor's degree, Kristina received an offer to work as a project engineer at the plumbing section of the Water Supply, Heat, Gas, and Ventilation Division.

"I've been working for four months. My instructors, Andrei Viktorovich Filchev, Head of the Bureau, and S.S. Kartyzhov, Head of the Sections, trust me enough to let me work on my own," Kristina says. "I love how friendly my team and other sections are to me. Shchekinoazot is an advanced company that evolves and grows rapidly, introducing new facilities that are unique in Russia. And of course, the company needs the personnel to match their frontline technology. I, too, am continuing my studies towards a master's degree. This is greatly encouraged." Incidentally, all young specialists are entitled to an assignment allowance of two minimum monthly wages as established by the regional agreement of the Tula Region. They also receive various social benefits, which is unsurprising because the president of the company B.A. Sokol sincerely wishes the best for Shchekinoazot...

Kristina's example is not the only one. All people whom we interviewed — managers,



**engineers, workers — mentioned how responsibly and carefully the company approaches recruitment. They apply the best world practices. It all started with a conversation with the director for HR management and social development of Shchekinoazot, I. E. PODCHUFAROVA.**

The First Dozen, the Next Dozen. When the number of worker dynasties that Irina Podchufarova mentioned approached the third dozen, it became clear that the HR policies of Shchekinoazot are more than just good — they are amazing. The company celebrated its 64th birthday, meanwhile there are some families with a total work experience spanning hundreds of years. If we put together all the years that all dynasties have dedicated to Shchekinoazot, it comes to thousands. It means one thing: there are generations of people who are loyal to their company, they believe in it and want their family to work there as well. They consider Shchekinoazot their second (sometimes, even first) home.

There is a simple explanation for this. The company has got a strong technical, economic, and investment potential, and it aims for the future. The company's team is launching hi-tech plants with other projects in mind and are getting ready for the massive reconstruction of existing facilities and implementing other, entirely new ones. This September, a model of an interplanetary rocket was the memorable symbol of the celebration held at the presentation of the world-class methanol and ammonia plant. Nowadays, Shchekinoazot is even more than a speed train — it is soaring towards the future at the speed of light, supported by ambitious and talented people.

In her interview, I. E. Podchufarova was adamant that professionalism, advanced skills, and knowledge of their team must match the huge scope and novelty of the tasks they intend to solve.

## Two Sides of the Same Coin

"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE for a company to work efficiently without a team of well-trained, enthusiastic specialists who want only the best," Irina Evgenyevna says. "There are two sides to this coin. It is hard to fit in with the rhythm of our company, that's why we treat personnel training very seriously and stick to modern methods and requirements for the selection and recruitment of top-class professionals."

The Russian President Vladimir Putin believes that to achieve a breakthrough in science, economics, and effective ideas, we need excellent education, qualifications, and competence above all. They are our "ticket to the future" that Vladimir Putin mentioned in his message to the Federal Assembly. And these are the goals we focus on in our HR policy. New plants and progressive technologies demand excellent specialists. The goals for this year are to launch four new projects. It means that we have hired about 300 new workers. We are progressing further forward. We are building a methanol-500 plant, working on projects with nitric acid and ammonia nitrate, ammonia and urea. We are planning to hire 500 more employees for them. These workers are going to need specialised training. That's why we are actively working with colleges and, of course, universities.

We, people born in the USSR, have heard plenty of empty slogans and promises of a good life that were never backed up. No wonder that these days when high-ranking officials announce their programmes, however good and reasonable they may sound and look, you can't help but take them with a pinch of salt. Have we got the resources for it — material, psychological, and human? Will our community gather enough enthusiasm and drive, the kind where you are ready to move mountains?



Launch to the Future. September 7, 2018.

— **Ms. Podchufarova, please tell us more about it.**

"Recently, Shchekinoazot initiated and supported the opening of a chemistry technology class in lyceum No. 2 in Shchekino. We signed a four-party agreement between the administration of Shchekino, Shchekinoazot, the Institute of the D. Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology in Novomoskovsk, and the lyceum. It is a long-term agreement that will allow us to prepare students to attend the Institute and acquire the degree in the area required to become a highly-demanded position in the company. Shchekinoazot is hoping that approximately 20–30% of all graduates will become part of our team!"

We have to think about the future of Shchekinoazot, build an education chain, starting from schools to professional colleges and universities. The company also signed several agreements with educational institutions," I. E. Podchufarova continues. "In the lyceum and schools we monitor engaged students with an interest in technology, chemistry, and our company in particular. It is especially typical for kids whose parents work here and those who actively participate in various competitions (in painting or writing) and contests that the company organises. Also, kids get free vouchers to spend summer vacations in recreation camps, and there are those that attend sports classes at the Sports Centre in Pervomaysky that the company helped to reconstruct according to the latest standards. The younger generation is involved in the life of Shchekinoazot — their parents and grandparents often share with them the prospects of working there. Dynasties play a huge role in bringing "fresh blood" to the company."

— **You mentioned agreements with colleges and universities. What's their purpose?**

"Well, our agreement with the Shchekino Polytechnic College signed by the company management and their director will help to train the specialists the firm needs. Existing employ-

ees and top-class professionals will take an active role in the process. They give practical lessons, help young people with internships at the plant, sit in committees for state exams and thesis defence. In turn, teachers can upgrade their qualifications at the plant, learn new technologies and methods to pass on to their students. The company cooperates very closely with the Shchekino Polytechnic College. Their graduates join our team every year and, I have to say, deal with the tasks we set for them quite successfully."

— **Do you work with higher education institutions in the same manner?**

"Just last week our representatives participated in the Russian Chemistry Forum, Chemistry and Chemical Technology. A few federal ministries attended the event, which emphasises its importance, in particular — the Ministry of Industry and Trade, as well as directors of several successful businesses, leaders in education and science. We learned a lot at the plenary session dedicated to the topic, Education, Science, and the Future. The moderator was the president of the D. Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology, A. G. Mazhuga. Incidentally, our company also has an agreement with them in mutual scientific work and personnel training. We actively cooperate with the D. Mendeleev UCT in Novomoskovsk — they prepare good specialists."

For 20 years, we've had great relations with the Ivanovo University of Chemical Technology; many of their graduates work with us. As a rule, all of them are experts in high demand...



The company counts on them to suggest new ideas and initiatives. They do their best to meet expectations. For example, graduate of the Ivanovo State UCT, **Tatyana KATYSHEVA**, considers herself a full-

fledged member of the team, although she was hired just three months ago. She realised that

Shchekinoazot is a good platform for professional and career growth when she was doing practical work at one of our divisions — the lab of physical and chemical analysis. Here she can put her knowledge into practice and polish her skills. And also improve her practical skills. Besides, experienced supervisors help newcomers enter their new team smoothly.”

“Lyudmila Vasilyevna Pravdina, the lab assistant for chemical analysis at the central QC department, supports me and helps me to gain a more in-depth understanding of the profession,” says T. Katysheva. “I can compare their attitude and interest in young specialists with other companies. At my third year, I did practical work for another firm. Nobody cared about students there. It was just a formality for them. Shchekinoazot treats young people as members of a big supportive family, they help us grow professionally, adapt to the team, and what’s more, offer great social benefits. For example, the company helps me with 10,000 RUB towards my monthly rent. I’m happy that I believed the teachers at my university and representatives of Shchekinoazot who offered me and my coursemates positions in the company. I want to pursue my career at Shchekinoazot...”

The company offers various great professional and career opportunities for graduates of the Tula universities.” I. E. Podchufarova believes that they have established good relations with the Tula State University and the Tula State Pedagogical University that will facilitate the training of qualified specialists.

“We have an agreement with TSU for professional training in several areas, while TSPU recently organised classes of advanced training for the company’s employees. The courses are available in both intramural and extramural form... As of now, there are 160 people studying in colleges and universities, 104 specialists-to-be are working towards a degree.”

## From Pupil to Director

– IT MEANS that the range of methods for personnel training is very broad. When do you start “guiding” promising potential workers?

“As a rule, our students participate in practical internships on multiple levels — from industrial to technological and diploma-related. During their final year they usually try working as full-fledged members of the team. Chemical technicians, electricians, mechanics, testing engineers — these professions are always in high demand. Our experienced supervisors participate in the development of training programmes for a number of specialisations and make sure that young candidates meet all the latest requirements for skills and knowledge. As a rule, those interested in working with the company try to do their best when studying. And they receive extensive support on our side. We have established a strong faculty of tutors and instructors. For instance, Elena Valeryevna Moseva, deputy head of the QC division, is also a wise teacher and caring tutor. She won the All-Russian Tutor Contest in the company. This is how we do it!”

– Irina Evgenyevna, what do you think is behind the desire of young people to establish their career at Shchekinoazot?

“Many come here with a set goal. After all, we have been working with them since they were pupils and students. Their first excursion

to our Hall of Labour Fame introduces them to the work of the company. Tutoring during practical work periods also helps. The team monitors potential candidates to determine how much they want to become a functional part of the company, ascertain their desire to learn more about us, and acquire new skills and knowledge.

Our specialists work with the visitors and students on work experience practice in order to notice which of them show interest in the company and who don’t care. This way they can conclude who will become a part of Shchekinoazot. Our head of the HR department, Tatyana Yuryevna Serebryakova, and her deputy, Angelina Yuryevna Matyushkina, have got a great eye for this kind of thing. Olesya Tikhonova, our head of the personnel development division, Lyudmila Prokhorova, head of the technical training and personnel training division, and Olga Guseva, head of the labour organisation and wages, work directly with young people, young specialists and potential candidates. They are great at communicating with young people.

Incidentally, our Hall of Labour Fame is a wonderful place to learn everything about the company, how it grew, the people we are proud of, our traditions and prospects. It is not something set in stone. We constantly replace and renew the exhibits, exposition, video, because Shchekinoazot is an evolving company that keeps growing, introducing new plants and fostering young experts.

Here is another thing worth mentioning. During excursions and meetings with future employees, the top management of the company answers their questions and talks about their professional life. Thus, the CEO of Shchekinoazot Anatoly Konstantinovich Surba, always recalls his own career path in his talks on the prospects of professional growth. Upon graduation from the Belarus Technical Institute, he worked for a year as a machine operator at Shchekinoazot in Grodno. He worked so well that they appointed him shift leader. Soon thereafter, he became a senior engineer at the company. Now he occupies the top spot at Shchekinoazot.

As you can see, it is an absolutely real prospect that today’s school pupils and students can start working and studying hard and become CEOs too if they want.”

## A Comfortable Environment

– IRINA EVGENYEVNA, how does the company encourage students to obtain a degree in the desired area. How do you stimulate them to stay at Shchekinoazot?

“The company can pay for the education of the students we are really interested in. According to our corporate agreement, young specialists are subject to a one-time allowance for the duration of their probation period. They also receive up to 10,000 RUB towards their monthly rent. At the moment we are designing a programme aimed at supporting our employees in purchasing their own flat. It is thought that the company can take up a portion of their mortgage...”

Social focus and caring about people are very important to create a comfortable working environment. Irina Podchufarova explains



Young specialists — recent graduates of colleges and universities — adapt successfully to the team.

that their corporate agreement describes the social aspects of the company in detail and they carefully follow them. Let us add: it’s even more than that! The number of employees who spent summer vacations in the best recreation and spa centres in Russia, for example in Anapa and the company’s boarding house, Shakhter, increases every year. Their children get free vouchers to summer camps. The same benefits apply to young athletes at the Sports Centre in Pervomaysky. This year — just think about this number! — Shchekinoazot provided free vouchers for 170 children of its employees and young athletes. They spent RUB 3.8 million on it. In total, the company paid out 12,000,000 roubles to organise summer vacations for its employees, veterans, and their children. I’d say that’s solid support! The company’s management want their employees to be rested, happy, and healthy to have the energy to work and learn efficiently.

Health care is an important social aspect here, and the company has got health units and an infirmary. For this, they hired professional doctors, even focused specialists, and qualified nursing staff.

Care about the health of their employees was the impulse that made the President of Shchekinoazot, B.A. Sokol, start a massive reconstruction of the Sports Centre in Pervomaysky two years ago, where the company’s employees traditionally live. The centre immediately became very popular. Hundreds of people visit the pool, and boxing, martial arts, gymnastics, sports acrobatics classes.

During interviews people often mentioned that they highly appreciate that the company cares about them so much. They speak with extreme respect about B.A. Sokol. His ambitions and enthusiasm combined with the latest world trends give them solid guarantees of the stability of their work positions and great prospects for the life of Shchekinoazot. Work here is interesting and stimulating, with healthy competition and wonderful professional training.

## Sorting the Wheat from the Chaff

BUT LET US return to the “ticket to the future” that Vladimir Putin believes must be earned in childhood.

“Career guidance is the cornerstone of recruitment,” I. E. Podchufarova continues. “Look,” she points at the walls in the lobby of the administrative building. “Kids of various ages drew them. They show Shchekinoazot how children imagine us and how we work. These drawings are full of life, emotions, spirit. This year, more than 150 children took part in the contest. We organised a big celebration for them. There was a concert, awards for all participants, and special prizes for the winners. For older children we organise a writing contest, also with prizes. Some of the essays are extremely interesting to read — you see that these kids can think critically, evaluate different phenomena, plan their future.

However, both we and specialists of the Shchekino education department are inter-

ested in the results of chemistry contests. We assembled a special committee to evaluate results. The award ceremony is held at the Hall of Labour Fame. Children come to the ceremony with their parents. People are rarely left unhappy with the prizes: the list of awards includes gift cards to electronics stores, books, corporate souvenirs. Girls may decide to choose gift cards to cosmetics stores. And we don’t just leave it at that. We stay in touch with the winners, “guide” them to deepen their knowledge further, and encourage them to join us at Shchekinoazot as soon as they obtain professional education. In a way, we sort the wheat from the chaff.”

– How do you evaluate the results of established specialists? What incentives do you use to encourage further education and training in the team?

“We have got licenses to teach more than 100 blue-collar jobs. Our employees are eager to master a secondary profession with the help of more experienced instructors. Further education courses are obligatory for many categories of workers. Both young specialists and their supervisors need to learn new skills and programmes. Right now, for instance, we benefit from our contract with the Tula State Pedagogical University and send our employees to study Operational Management. There are other courses: Financial Management, Lean Production, where theory is strengthened by practice.”

– Do you organise on-site training?

“Of course. In Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Before the launch of new plants, we invite foreign specialists to exchange and learn the best practices. For example, our testing engineers learned to manage new technical procedures at the recently launched methanol plant in Siemens.”

– Your team composed exclusively of professionals and well-thought HR policy are proof of the company’s efficiency. Besides, you have raised so many working dynasties — another indicator, because no one would want their child to work in an unstable business...

“Yes, respect for blue-collar jobs and fair assessment of their attitude are a tradition at Shchekinoazot. And dynasties are the best proof of it, you’re right. We have got famous families here: Korneev, Dorogavtsev, Savushkin, Ilyichyov, Kiryukhin, Dikaryov, Stefankov, Starostin. Some of them can boast more than 300 years in total job experience with us. I’m sure this number will grow as well as the number of dynasties and our amazing team, where every member is the best. You just need to meet our young specialists, talk to them — and you’ll see that I am right.”

**We did exactly that. Young people who just started their career at Shchekinoazot confirmed every word that Irina Podchufarova said. We have already mentioned some of them in this article. Our readers can learn more about the topic in one of our future issues.**

Tamara GOLOVINA.

Photos by the press service of Shchekinoazot.



These drawings made by pre-schoolers and junior school pupils depict Shchekinoazot as they imagine it.