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Andrey Guryev: "Social responsibility comes as an absolute priority for domestic business"

On March 26, in the course of the annual Congress of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE), Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that the focus of Russian business is increasingly placed on the environmental well-being of cities and regions, the quality of life of company employees, and the improvement of territories. We approached Mr. Andrey Guryev, member of the RUIE Board of Directors and head of the RUIE Committee on Sustainable Development and Demographic Policy, and questioned him about social responsibility which is becoming an integral part of Russian companies' development strategies.

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During the RUIE Congress, Russian President Vladimir Putin highlighted the businesses' particular accent on the development of human capital. Why is this happening, and how is it manifested in corporate social programs?

There is now a universal understanding that human capital, which embraces competencies, ability to gain knowledge and skills fast enough, and the effective application of technology and innovation, has become the primary source of competitive advantage.

In the context of deep technological transformation and demographic challenges, knowledge, information, and innovation have become key factors in boosting production capabilities. Research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that up to a third of the difference in labor productivity between countries is due to the level of skills and knowledge of the general population. Without finetuning human potential, even the introduction of the most advanced technologies will not have the expected outcome. According to an analysis by Bain & Company, global companies lose between 30% and 50% of their productivity potential if they do not invest in new technologies.

Without a strategic approach to staff training and support, industrial and high-tech sectors risk squandering their growth momentum. For this very reason, responsible employers are already changing their approaches, starting from the very beginning of the recruitment process. Increasingly, companies are focusing on specific skills and competencies rather than just a university degree.

As a result, the development of human capital is becoming not just a social responsibility, but a strategic necessity, reflected in real corporate programs aimed at training, adaptation, and long-term support for employees.

Has business in Russia become more actively involved in the direct training of talent?

Yes, according to a study by the ANCOR recruitment agency, about 62% of Russian companies already provide internships to students, and for large enterprises, this tool has become a key channel for recruiting staff. Leading Russian companies vigorously cooperate with universities and secondary specialized educational institutions; they conclude contracts for targeted training and participate in the creation and shaping of joint educational programs.

The dual training model when students simultaneously study at an educational institution and gain practical experience at an

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enterprise is becoming popular. Such graduates adapt to job environment fast, and companies can then count on ready-made specialists. The prospects of this model were personally emphasized by President Vladimir Putin during his visit to the Cherepovets Chemical and Technological College specializing in training personnel for the mineral fertilizer industry.

Career guidance and training programs are rapidly shifting emphasis on early engagement, meaning leading corporations are getting involved with future specialists from a very young age. This is fully justified for Russia, since there is a worrying gap between the level of training of young professionals and the actual requirements of the labor market.

Companies map out specialized educational programs, sponsor Olympiads and contests, and organize summer camps and schools to identify and attract promising young people. These projects introduce young people to in-demand professions in the regions of the Russian Federation, contribute to the reproduction of the human resource pool, and set comfortable conditions for young people to participate in full in the life of their local communities.

Thus, the formation of human capital is launched long before young professionals enter the job market and encompasses education, health, sports, and family support. Companies that invest in their employees and the next generation are not only more sustainable, but also more competitive in the long run.

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As part of the RUIE Congress, the winners of the National Award "Leaders of Responsible Business" were awarded. For the third consecutive year, the highest award of the competition, established by order of the President of Russia in 2023, was given to the companies PhosAgro and Norilsk Nickel, which are implementing a number of significant social projects. What are the chances to scale up their positive experience and enrich the business environment as a whole?

First of all, the growth in the number of award winners from year to year is a clear sign that companies are increasingly involved in the domain of social responsibility and recognize its strategic importance. The success of the award is not just a reward, but an indicator of the growing involvement of businesses in sustainable development.

To promote the widespread adoption of best practices, it is advisable to support their dissemination through government incentives. In this regard, I would like to highlight the introduction of the Business Social Capital Standard in February this year, which incorporates the best practices and international standards for discloser of non-financial information – it has been supplemented to reflect the business's contribution to achieving national development goals, with a focus on social aspects of activities.

The Standard will allow us to measure the real impact of companies on public welfare, rather than just note the formal compliance with reporting requirements. It opens the way to transparent assessment of the effectiveness of social initiatives, and it will enable government agencies and the public to appreciate responsible business, provide support, and make the most of the accumulated experience within national programs.

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