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Dmitry Motorin: "Restaurant market is entering tight balance phase"

The restaurant market that earlier was concerned about staff shortages is now facing a different challenge: rising costs are outpacing the ability to increase prices. Moscow Foresight approached Mr. Dmitry Motorin, Director of the Restaurant Complex World Trade Center Moscow (WTC), to query whether staff shortages are no longer the industry's main concern, and ask in what way procurement, demand, and corporate events are changing business patterns.

Mr. Motorin, last year you highlighted the exacerbating issue of the growing qualified personnel deficit. Has anything changed in this domain since then?

At present, there is a premonition that the market environment is getting tough and it is focused on freeing itself from high costs. Employees are sacked, accordingly, and announced vacancies reap the highest responses. For instance, I am witnessing the emergence of a certain balance, since the market is no longer complaining about the shortage of personnel.

What constitutes the most burning issue is the burden of soaring costs triggered by the continuous rise of prices for food products, production inventory and equipment, which is happening against the background of declining demand.

Has anything changed in the WTC's approach to finding, motivating, and, most importantly, retaining frontline staff?

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We have strengthened our potential in recruitment of personnel by hiring a qualified specialist in human resources mechanisms who focuses on training and motivating frontline staff, who are directly involved in interacting with WTC's guests and clients and, on top of that, play a crucial role in creating a caring and welcoming environment.

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How does the government's migration policy, particularly related to the invitation of gastarbeiters from India, affect the restaurant business?

For the moment, we do not have the opportunity to involve these migrants in our business processes. As far as I know, the mechanism for organizing work visas and providing permits has not yet been fully developed.

You manage a system that purchases about 500 tons of products per year. How do you manage your suppliers in the face of constant increases in raw material and logistics prices? Are you able to maintain profitability without compromising quality?

Today, suppliers are not shy about indexing the prices of their products, but restaurants do not have the room for maneuver so as to up the prices on their menu.

It is especially important to constantly explore the choices of alternative products and new suppliers in order to reduce costs, but without compromising quality or taste of meals. Unfortunately, these searches often do not yield substantial results.

In order to save money, we purchase standard frozen products in bulk at many retail outlets through tender procedures to achieve the optimal balance between price and quality. Here we are talking about frozen meat, poultry and fish with the fixed delivery of volumes from five to ten tons in the time period of three to six months.

How we do it: we announce a tender, we receive commercial offers from companies, we take samples, we check the quality of raw materials, waste for cleaning and processing, we hold a taste test, and then we process the purchase making preference for the best quality for the best price.

First of all, such products are purchased for restaurants with a buffet format and corporate canteens.

- Against the background of a slowing economy and shrinking budgets, there is a trend towards simplifying menus while major corporate clients refuse to hold entertainment events. For how long do you envisage this decline in business activity?

- It's only getting more intense: demand for private events is still quite high, but they are mostly minor in terms of the number of participants and the allocated budget. Large companies are organizing events less frequently and with smaller budgets than before. Quite often, up-market customers pay for the business part of a forum or conference but reduce food catering to a minimum, leaving it up to the participants to take care of it.

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- Another global trend is the development of a healthy lifestyle and interest in healthy food, which you support. However, with the decline in purchasing power, is the focus of guests shifting from health to satiety and price?

- Nowadays, this topic is losing its former popularity and is becoming just a part of a business's marketing strategy. Yet, this does not mean that it should be neglected.

Those who truly embrace a healthy lifestyle do not switch to heavy, high-calorie meals; instead, they are likely to consider ways to save money and order from online retailers or do the cooking at home.

- The news agenda is full of reports about restaurant closures. According to various sources, about 35,000 restaurants were closed in 2025, and in Moscow alone, twice as many restaurants closed in January 2026 compared to a year ago. What do you attribute this wave to, and how resilient is the WTC restaurant segment?

- The reason for this trend is obvious: costs are rising, and demand is decreasing. For some businesses, the margin has become negative. This is reflected in the alarming statistics of closures. If the political and economic situation does not improve, this trend will persist.

The WTC restaurant business is largely focused on guests from the outside, but our key target audience, residents and guests of the complex, are not different and they have the same concerns. Therefore, our restaurants are just as sensitive to these challenges as others.

Only those institutions who can be flexible and motivate their team to maintain a solid look and endearing atmosphere and consistently maintain sustainability of all the restaurant's work processes, standards, and technologies, as well as can provide delicious and appealing meals, will remain in our business.

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