

PROJECT

NEXT GENERATION

In the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin "The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope." Malika Shermatova speaks to Olga Vysokova, the founder of Next Generation Forum, a non-profit venture that she set up in 2017, about the next generation and the very reason behind the project.

In the day and age when gender equality, glass ceiling and stereotyping are still major topics of discussion naturally a myriad of initiatives have emerged over the past years in support of women in business, women in leadership and women in almost every other thing to help drive the conversation and change perceptions. It is overwhelming to see how many inspiring women there are, who are equally strong, smart, intelligent and capable as their male counterparts, and Olga Vysokova is no exception. Originally from Russia's Rostov-on-Don, Olga arrived in London in 2002 to study for Masters in Banking and Finance at Cass Business School and worked in banking until 2014.



Olga Vysokova

A loving mother of two, Olga is an accomplished entrepreneur in her own right, with a series of exciting projects on the go.

Determined to break down the stereotypes and the typical perception the world has about Russians and Russia in general, Olga explains, "The main idea [of Next Generation Forum] was to promote the image of young Russians in the UK. The negative stereotype is hanging over us - people are often ill informed and assume negative things about us."

Founded in June 2017 Next Generation Forum is a spin-off from Olga's first successful venture -

Women Who Inspire, which she set up back in 2016. Realising the importance of a robust support network, in addition to qualifications and knowledge, in order to build a successful career or business, the Forum aims to bring together enthusiastic and bright young talent from Russian speaking backgrounds to share their experiences, learn and help each other to set up companies, launch careers, take the reins of their family business, manage inherited wealth and make a positive impact on society. These are also the children of entrepreneurs and business leaders, who equally face the unique challenge of finding their own path to success.

Each event of the Forum focuses on a particular theme from a diverse range of topics and includes anything from investing in longevity, to next generation VCs and PEs and family art collection management.

What prompted you to set up Next Generation Forum?

Next Generation Forum was a logical next step after my Women Who Inspire project. Women are great leaders and successful in business, but they

are also caring mothers who naturally worry about the future of their kids. It didn't take me long to come up with an idea of creating a platform for the next generation of Russian wealth creators, who have UK education and are pursuing their projects here in the UK. I was surprised that there wasn't such network already and that no one had thought of uniting these prominent young people. Of course, there are many clubs and societies for the Russian people in the UK, but this [Next Generation] is very different.

How does it work and what is the main purpose of the Forum?

Next Generation Forum is a platform which unites like-minded people. One has to be between the age of 25-35, have a startup or a project and be a Russian speaker. Each forum is organised with tremendous support from sponsors such as prominent private and investment banks, law firms as well as impact investing companies. Attendance is "by invitation only" and each profile is carefully screened before being granted an invitation - I believe it is important to create a comfortable environment for people. No one likes to be chased or pitched, so the similar background of people is important.

The atmosphere at the Forum is always warm and friendly. All guests have the opportunity to present themselves and their projects in 30 seconds "elevator pitch" style. It's a very useful tool because it allows one to get to know 60 people at the forum and not only two or three with whom you are stuck from the beginning of the event. I call it "efficient networking". I am proud to say that some interesting ventures and friendships have come out of these forums.



What has been the success story of the Forum so far?

The success came from the very first Forum when Touker Suleyman - a judge from Dragon's Den - made a motivational speech on the subject of entrepreneurship. It was interesting to hear him say that we all can become entrepreneurs if we just take an existing product or service and modernise it to the needs of today's consumers. It can be very simple but revolutionary at the same time.

The success of the Forum is also measured by the calibre of sponsors, their belief in this project and enthusiasm to support, as well as the sheer amount of interest from guests who are always eager to attend. The sponsors of the last Forum were Bank Julius Baer, who supported us for the third time now, Memery Crystal, one of the UK's leading law firms, Falcons Wealth and Ayaltis AG, to name a few. I feel very lucky to have the support and interest from such reputable companies, who believed in the purpose of this project.

What trends are you seeing among the young generation? Are they different to their parents/previous generation in terms

of mindset, values, wealth generation, management and preservation?

Yes, they are very different indeed. We often say that our kids would be ten times better than their parents - normal evolution rule, but these kids are twenty times better. They are very well educated, extremely smart, polite with the right values and mindset. They had a very solid foundation and can dream and aim high which is fantastic, but they are also down to earth. Their incredible confidence and goal-oriented attitude is very encouraging. I believe that the latter one is the most important. If you have a goal or passion in life, then you have a life! Otherwise, it's difficult to be happy and mentally healthy no matter how much money you've got.

In terms of investment and attitude to wealth, there is a researched evidence showing that financial return is least important to the next generation, who are evidently more mindful about their impact on society and the world that we live in, because they will live longer than us. Our parents focused more on accumulating wealth while the next generation today cares about saving the planet and eliminating the problems in the world. Banks and wealth managers are also increasingly focusing

on impact investing by launching impact funds and adjusting their portfolios to reflect this growing shift and to be able to cater the demands of the next generation as their clients.

Will you be extending the initiative to other geographies, or will it be just in London?

London is a very unique city, therefore I don't think I need to go much further from it. London attracts the best European talent and the most ambitious and intelligent people. However, I would like to extend outside of the Russian speaking focus and become an international platform. Young people have global mentality, for them borders don't matter. I will of course need the support of like-minded people who will feel equally passionate about this project and help me grow it further. It is very demanding but very interesting and extremely rewarding emotionally.

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