

Turgay Teymurov: EY company creates equal opportunities for all employees

This year EY (formerly known as Ernst & Young) celebrates its 20th anniversary in Azerbaijan. As is well known, EY was the first of the Big Four to open an office in our country and today it is the leading brand in the market, widely recognized for the high quality of its services. Today we talk with Turgay Teymurov, Assurance and People Partner in Azerbaijan, to understand what contributes to the success of the company, learn about EY's role in the development of our country's economy and discuss success factors for young professionals.

Everyone understands the role of Assurance Partner, but how does your work intersect with HR strategy?

- Our people are the foundation of our success, so EY CIS established the People Board, which includes partners from large offices. Together we define and supervise implementation of many interesting ideas and initiatives for the motivation and professional growth of our people. Here are just a few examples.

From the first day, each employee is assigned to a more experienced colleague, who is her/his Counselor and helps her/him identify and achieve development targets. This process continues throughout the employee's whole career and combines both formal meetings and informal communication. Twice a year we hold Round Tables, where each Counselor talks about the success of her/his counsees and makes recommendations for the next period, and where a performance rating is determined in comparison with the counselee's peers.

Another example – every month our employees recommend candidates for the "Employee of the Month." Review of nominations is done by a special Committee, which includes partners, heads of administration, the Employee of the Year and the Employee of the previous month. The Committee selects a winner, who is awarded a prize at the monthly meeting of the entire office. We gladly share this news on our Facebook page.

Furthermore, every year we conduct an anonymous survey to collect feedback from all employees on the improvement of the performance of the company and their line supervisors. These recommendations are carefully analyzed and an action plan is developed.

I can talk about this for a long time, but I'm afraid you would get bored.

Recently, EY was named the second most attractive employer, next only to Google, according to Universum's annual World's Most Attractive Employer (WMAE) ranking. How did you achieve this despite the famously long hours in the Big Four?

Thanks for a good question. Indeed, Universum surveyed about 200,000 students around the world and it is very pleasant to know that we not only topped the list of professional services employers, but also left behind investment banks and IT companies that have traditionally been the leaders in the ranking. I think the reason is that the young generation is well informed that each employee of our company can achieve his potential and become an outstanding leader, and this is very important for us.

Once one of my colleagues said that when he came to EY he felt himself a very successful man – he had the best grades in school and college and in general had always stood out among his peers. But at EY he realized that he had to prove himself from scratch, because "stars" like him were everywhere. And he is absolutely right, because many have the potential to be successful, but only those who work hard for self-development achieve that potential.

In addition, we try to be flexible and innovative: we introduced the working from home concept and casual Fridays and pay great attention to sports. We are also very active in social networks.

Furthermore, we actively involve our people in the management of the company and give them the opportunity to engage in areas of their interest, besides professional activities. We have established internal forums where employees at different levels discuss current issues, created Charity and Social Responsibility Committees. We have been teaching in universities for many years and sharing our knowledge and experience with various ministries and departments.

I think all these things make EY a place where people are happy to come to work in the morning.

And what does EY mean for you personally?

Something very near and dear. We often say that we are one big family, and for me it really is. I came to EY having little idea of what accounting and audit is, but eager to learn and become a good specialist. I was supported and EY created great opportunities for me, helping me to realize myself. In addition, I met here several great friends, people with whom I've been family friends for many years. Some of them have left the country, but we still communicate closely, since today there is every opportunity to do so.

Recently, our company has announced a new vision, "Building a better working world." We believe that our services help to improve the business environment and build public confidence in capital markets and economies around the world. So for me EY is of course an opportunity to contribute to making our country even better.

It is known that one of the problems in the Big Four is high turnover of personnel. How do you deal with this?

I am an optimist and try to live according to the principle of "Everything happens for the best." Indeed, the business model of our company is that we make large investments in our people, but at certain stages of their career, some of them decide to try something new.

I must note that the experts from the Baku office are highly valued at EY and many of my friends and colleagues who started at EY Azerbaijan today are very successful in our offices in Houston, Chicago, Calgary, London, Rotterdam, Dubai, Moscow and other cities. I will not be modest: the demand for Azerbaijani specialists in EY is quite high, because we have really great professionals, and I'm proud of this.

Of course, this is a two-way street. Recently we have seen an increase in the number of requests from EY employees in other countries who wish to gain experience in the Baku office. This trend is largely attributable to the success our country has achieved, particularly in the oil and gas sector. There is much to learn in Azerbaijan - a unique system of production sharing agreements, large oil and gas fields, transport infrastructure, and the world oil industry leaders that are present here.

And, of course, the beauty of Baku is of no little significance.

Obviously, a large number of our alumni remain in Azerbaijan and today many of them hold leadership positions in local and foreign companies and are our friends and clients. So, as I said, a positive side can be found in everything.

Actually, I think that our alumni are among our company's most valuable contributions to the development of the country.

It is believed that there is a lot of routine work in your profession. Is this true?

Of course, we must comply with many rules and requirements, so I cannot say that there is no routine at all. However, as a career develops, the routine lessens and personal qualities and organizational and leadership skills come to the fore. Today, most of my time is spent on communication with colleagues, clients and business partners and it gets more difficult to find time for paper work, even though it remains necessary.

However, the routine is very important. For example, you should always find time to improve and keep abreast of new developments both in our industry and in the business of our clients. And this should become a part of your routine. You should always read, learn and be open to everything new. Otherwise, suddenly, one day, you'll find everything you knew is out of date and you belong to yesterday, as Arthur Hailey wrote in my favorite book, "The Final Diagnosis."

And finally, we congratulate you on EY's twentieth anniversary in Azerbaijan this year. What is the company's most important achievement in your opinion?

Thank you for the congratulations; this is really an important date for us. Perhaps the most important thing is that we have created equal opportunities for everyone. I am proud of the fact that the first Azerbaijani CPA qualified professional, the first Azerbaijani ACCA qualified professional, the first Azerbaijani partner, the first female partner in the consulting industry, the first female assurance partner— all are from EY. Warren Buffett recently said that women are

undervalued and are the key to America's success. Today, half of the top management of our company in Baku is female, so I'm sure everything will be great!