The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Anna Chapman's Patriotism

By Victor Davidoff

January 16, 2011



People of all ages in all countries have always wanted to know the secret of success. There are thousands of recommendations, but they almost all boil down to the simple advice to "study well and work hard." But it turns out that this age-old maxim needs to be tweaked for certain times and places.

In the 1990s, Boris Nemtsov was a vivid illustration of success. At 32, he became the youngest governor in Russia when he was appointed in 1991 as head of the Nizhny Novgorod region. (He was later elected to the post by popular vote in 1995.) During the first Chechen war in the mid-1990s, Nemtsov famously swore that he wouldn't let a single conscript from his region serve in Chechnya.

In 1997, at age 38, he became first deputy prime minister. It didn't take him long to earn the ire of top bureaucrats when he demanded that they give up their luxurious foreign-made government cars for Russian ones. It seemed a sure thing that after leaving government service Nemtsov would enjoy cushy positions on the boards of major companies for the rest of his life.

But Nemtsov spent this New Year's Eve in a jail cell after being detained at a legally sanctioned demonstration in support of freedom of speech on Triumfalnaya Ploshchad. He was sentenced to 15 days in jail by a judge who refused to view a video of the arrest, perhaps because the video clearly showed that the accusations against Nemtsov were false.

"In the land of Gogol and Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Lermontov, the model of relations between the people and individuals on the one hand and the state and authorities on the other has not changed since the time of Nicholas I," the blogger Volnodum wrote. Former Central Bank Deputy Chairman Sergei Aleksashenko, aka Saleksashenko, saw Nemtsov's arrest as an alarming signal. "The authorities are once again showing that the judicial system in Russia is fully subordinated to them," he said. "There is absolutely no independent judiciary or supremacy of the law, despite the president's lovely words."

In contrast to Nemtsov's career path, take a look at Anna Chapman, nee Kushenko, whose career began when she had the good fortune to be born to a diplomatic family &mdash reportedly, the daughter of a KGB general. At age 25, she moved to Britain and then to the United States, where she failed in her attempts to organize a venture fund for high-tech startups in between time spent hanging out in singles bars. But Chapman's main occupation was working for a spy ring, although it appeared that most of her "work" consisted of living the high life in the United States. The exposure of the spy ring seemed to mark the end of Chapman's career, but it turned out to be the spark that let her career take off.

Since returning to Russia, Chapman has been showered with awards, high-paying jobs and fame. The blogger Devol wrote: "Putinland is rapidly turning into Chapmanland. [Prime Minister Vladimir] Putin's caricature of a great power has produced a new hero." Chapman got a job in a major bank and became a member of the advisory board of the pro-Kremlin movement Young Guard, which is responsible for the patriotic education of young people. Indeed, Chapman made an invaluable contribution to patriotic education by posing for a series of half-nude photographs for Maxim magazine.

The latest rung on Chapman's career ladder is her own talk show, now being rushed to air on Ren-TV. The Russian blogosphere reacted to this new success with a disgusted sigh of astonishment. As the blogger E-corse wrote: "There was one decent channel left that you could watch without throwing up. ... That was Ren-TV. And now they've gone and ruined it by having our very own failed Mata Hari as a talk show host."

Other spies have been making good careers, too. Natalya Pereverzeva, aka Patricia Mills, was recently named consultant to the president of Transneft. Andrei Bezrukov, who lived under the name of Donald Heathfield in the United States, got a cushy job with Rosneft.

But these success stories shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. After all, Putin predicted in July that all of the failed spies had bright futures ahead for themselves. This just goes to show you that in some countries, failure is a more certain path to success than hard work. Sure beats buying lottery tickets.

Victor Davidoff is a Moscow-based writer and journalist whose blog is chaadaev56.livejournal.com.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/01/16/anna-chapmans-patriotism-a4249