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People behind success

Finland's oldest operating paint factory, Tikkurila Oyj, celebrates its 150th anniversary this autumn. What is the secret to its vitality?

The people, says Kirsti Manninen, the author of the recent corporate history of Tikkurila.

When the company's paint products were launched in the 1920s, the chemist Ragnar Holmström and office manager Albin Sandström spared nothing in their marketing efforts. It was possible to see this couple at handicraft auctions of master painters' wives, where they bought boxfuls of tablecloths and socks for the pleasure of the ladies, while simultaneously preparing the ground for future purchases by the painting firms.

One of those who found her place at Tikkurila was Tamara Alexejev, a refugee from two wars, having moved from Latvia to Vyborg in 1915 and ending up in the Helsinki area in 1944 with the Karelian evacuees. Without feeling sorry for herself, she initiated the Christmas collections for needy children and the elderly, which still continues within the company.

The fact that Tikkurila is one of the best-known brands in present-day Russia can be accredited to Pirkko Ikonen. When the company's eastern trade collapsed along with the Eastern bloc in the early 1990s, exports manager Ikonen was the first to recognise the potential of the consumer market and carried through an unprecedented campaign on Russian national television, buses and trolleys.

These and other stories in the book speak for the most important basis of a successful company, the workers—capable men and women, who do not hesitate to grasp the challenges and show what they are capable of doing.

Energetic workers are complemented by a responsible management. In the turmoil of negative news and personnel reductions there is every reason to highlight another Tikkurila employee, the former executive director Raimo Piironen. He led the company through the 1990's depression years without a single dismissal or lay-off, an achievement that will be long remembered.

As reasoned by Piironen at that time, the workers constitute a company's capital and the best means to attain better times. Such capital is not to be wasted.

Leena Laitinen
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