

About Line Managers, Employee Support, Women in Men's Positions, and Team Strength — Key Points from Tetiana Petruk's Speech at HR DAYS

Tetiana Petruk, Metinvest Group's Chief Sustainability Officer, talked about managing personnel during the war, including line managers, employee support, women in men's positions and team strength at the HR DAYS forum held in Kyiv on 25-26 July. Below are the key points from her speech.



Over the course of two days, 50 expert HR practitioners spoke to 500 forum participants. The programme covered all key aspects of team management: leadership in the face of challenges, HR transformation, support and staff development.

The forum began with a discussion panel titled “Experience of war: A team's ‘superpower’? How to transform it into a competitive advantage for business”. The HR directors of Ukraine's largest companies in the manufacturing, telecommunications, energy and construction industries shared their responses to the security, personnel and mental health challenges facing their teams. These included Metinvest Group, Voila Data Group, NPC Ukrenergo, and CRH Ukraine.

Tetiana Petruk said that Metinvest employed about 111,000 people before the war. The Group's first asset losses began in 2014. In 2022, Metinvest lost two steel plants in Mariupol; and, in 2023, a plant in Avdiivka. Today, the Group employs 60,000 people. From this number, almost 10,000 have served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Currently, more than 8,000 employees are serving in the army and almost a 1,000 have returned from the war and gone to work for the Group.

The importance of line managers

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Metinvest decided to delegate as much authority as possible to its enterprises in Pokrovsk, Kryvyi Rih, Zaporizhzhia and Kamianske, all of which are located 20-30 kilometres from the front line. Line managers were the ones who made decisions on the ground. According to Petruk, this approach has proved its effectiveness and efficiency: it helped to save lives and prevent an environmental disaster.

Petruk said that Metinvest pays particular attention to the development of line managers.

She noted: “We train line managers in practical and theoretical skills to provide them with a foundation and a growth outlook. We focus on line managers when creating a general development programme. These are the people who know what the business needs today and how to get things done in the here and now. For this reason, we have started the programme for integrating veterans with line managers, because people return to them and they cooperate with them.”

Petruk recalled that Metinvest's programme for veterans is based on four principles, the first of which is that it is

the responsibility of everyone, from the CEO to the foreman in the shop.

She said: “We have heroes who, every day, 20 kilometres from the front line, go to their workplaces and perform their duties. It is a conscious choice to take on such a responsibility. They understand that the company, the state, and their colleagues need it. It means that they are a pillar for each other. And, in fact, the development of line managers — those who do business, support the economy, and earn money — is the development of your foundation.”

Employee support

Every sixth Metinvest employee is defending the country in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The personnel shortage in the Group stands at almost 4,000 people, and staff turnover is up to 20% per month. The return of veterans is an opportunity to provide enterprises with workers.

Petruk said: “It is very important for us that veterans return to their workplaces. Why should they return? Because they know that the Group cares about their families. They know that we offer retraining programmes. And then women started to take up men’s positions, we have introduced part-time work, and people have switched from one quarry to another. We use all the levers available to the Group. Primarily, it is a caring attitude towards our personnel. That is why they decide to stay despite everything.”

According to her, 367 Group employees have tragically been killed while serving in the Ukrainian armed forces and 265 employees and members of their families have been killed in the regions where they were working. In addition, the Group has more than 1,500 employees who have been injured.

She said: “We assist everyone with medical treatment, restoring housing and we support the families of the deceased. Together with the Wellbeing company, we have been continuing the Metinvest Together psychological support service for three years now.

Petruk added that the Group supports not only the families of mobilised employees but also all those in need: the children, wives and parents of the Group’s employees.

Women in men’s professions

Metinvest is facing a shortage of specialists in occupations traditionally held by men and is retraining women. For example, the Group has a team of women working as underground machine operators at the Pokrovsk mine.

However, there are also issues. Petruk said: “Firstly, women are not queuing up to work in men’s roles. Secondly, it takes time to retrain women. In addition, there are professions that women are physically unable to do.”

Currently, the share of women in recruitment is nearly 30%. The Chief Sustainability Officer added: “Before the war, this was not the case, there were mostly men. Now there are more women.”

According to her, cities need to have infrastructure and schools with bomb shelters for the safety of children to be able to hire more women.

Petruk said: “This is a real issue for Ukraine’s post-war recovery. The state must restore the infrastructure. People will return if they know that they have a place to go back to.”

She also added that the Ministry of Education should think about programmes that will guarantee a flexible transition from the education children obtain while abroad to the Ukrainian curriculum.

The strength of the team

Metinvest’s Chief Sustainability Officer said that the Group does not create separate business processes for integrating veterans or mobilising employees, rather it adapts all existing business processes to the new realities.

Metinvest has introduced coordinator positions to develop an approach and to provide support to make the return of female and male veterans to their teams more comfortable.

According to Petruk, Metinvest’s team is united by the same values. First, everyone is responsible for their actions and the overall result. Secondly, it is mutual assistance and mutual support.

She concluded: “And also there is the understanding that we work in a single team to achieve a shared result — to support the country. Being aware that the Group, a pillar of Ukraine, provides employees with the strength to stay and work. And third, of course, is faith in our defenders. Because we have the opportunity to work and continue to live for what they have already done for us, are doing and will do in the future.”

