

Nadiya Zherebyatyeva's Story: Living by Core Values

By Marshall Christensen

Nadiya was one of the “Lady Leaders” in the second International Servant Leadership Program (ISLP) class at the Kazakh-American Free University (KAFU). These young ladies were highly intelligent, fun loving, spirited and motivated to make a difference in the world. From the beginning of the program, their interest in the principles and practices of servant leadership were evident. They had fun together, but they were serious about life’s purpose and success.

Since her graduation from KAFU in 2008, life for Nadiya has not been easy. However, she has not wavered from the core values she discovered while participating in the ISLP program. She has experienced divorce, moved from Ust-Kamenogorsk to Almaty and back again to Ust, and, while her mother was recovering from cancer, she became the family “bread winner.”

During our interview Nadiya focused on the difficulty of practicing her core values in the corporate world of Kazakhstan. Over the years she has worked at two major corporations, done freelance translation work, and has taught English in small, privately owned schools.

Her biggest surprise and disappointments came as an employee of two major corporations. “I am not a patient person,” Nadiya notes about herself. “If I don’t like something, I change. My sense of what is right is objective. I often find myself at odds with people who are self-centered.”

In her first position after graduation, she progressed rather quickly to the position of HR manager, where she and her team were given the responsibility of developing running HR procedures and developing a training program and comprehensive schedule for 4,500 employees. Her dedication and hard work turned a spotlight upon her. She wanted to be a team player. However, “people viewed me as an ‘eagle queen,’” she told me. As she recalls, most people in that company did not see the big picture of the company mission. “I tried to help them. But most people were lazy, doing only what they had to do.” In 2012 she left the company.



Nadiya, in white, participates in the second ISLP group at KAFU in 2005.



Marshall Christensen meets recently with Nadiya at KAFU in Kazakhstan.



A recent photo of Nadiya.

At another major corporation, Nadiya served as the personal assistant to the chief operating officer for production. She was given virtually no orientation, but told to “watch your tongue.” The reason, she soon learned, was that the company was a “low trust” culture. “You never know who you might contradict. And you never know who is sleeping with the person you work with,” Nadiya was told.

In her key staff position, Nadiya observed that when cost cutting was necessary, the people fired by the company never included the administration. “Nepotism was evident in the administration. Lots of people do little work but have influence with the people they know,” Nadiya stated. When her boss quit, no one told her what to do. She could have stayed on, doing little work while collecting her salary, but that notion violated her core values. She quit.

Given what she has seen in the corporate world, Nadiya reflects upon her core values. As a result of experiencing servant leadership, she observes that “Americans value transparency and honesty.” Having witnessed nepotism and internal corporate fighting, she observed that the larger of the two major corporations she worked for was like a dysfunctional family. “Servant leadership works,” she told me. “It is based upon universal values. It reflects biblical truth. It is not an easy thing to practice. A person who practices servant leadership must be spiritually strong. A person must be fully aware of self.”

Nadiya tries to be objective about self, constantly asking: “Am I driven by my selfish side or by servant leadership.” Nadiya is determined to be true to her core values, no matter what the cost.