

# Dutch Truck Driver Makes All the Right Moves

By Yelena Andreyeva

SPECIAL TO THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Norbert Gooren, general manager at AAA MOVERS RUSSIA, has always been interested in transport and the business of moving. Having started working by combining the roles of a truck driver and warehouse worker over ten years ago, he soon jumped up the career ladder, gaining international work experience in management and eventually starting his own business in St. Petersburg this year.

Gooren was born in 1972 in Oeffelt, a small town in southeast Holland. On finishing high school he made the move towards logistics.

"I studied European Logistics as a major at college, mainly focusing on the road transport sector. The courses gave me a basic but essential knowledge of the industry," he said.

Gooren followed his course with an internship at an international transport company where he was made responsible for all warehouse activities and transport documentation for import and export.

"The company was mainly focused on Eastern Europe and that is when I got interested in this area. After the training I decided to stay on," he said.

Starting off in the warehouse, Gooren later combined this with work as a truck driver — it gave him "a good chance to look around and to gain knowledge of all aspects of transport."

It was at this time that Gooren came across a removal company advertising jobs in Eastern Europe. In June 2000, he joined the company as an operational manager and moved to the Hague.

"After a six-month training period I was ready to take up a position in Russia. Actually, at that time I didn't mind which country I went to," he said.

In January 2001, Gooren started working at Voerman International in Moscow. After three and a half years of

work in Russia, he decided to move back to Holland in order "to recharge the batteries" in his motherland.

"It was an interesting but very intense period for me. I was exhausted from working in Moscow. I did not know if I wanted to stay in Russia or go to another country," Gooren said.

"The point is that in Russia work requires a great deal of energy. You face a lot of issues that we are not used to in Western Europe. After a certain amount of time the batteries run low and it gets harder to solve problems that tend to arise on a daily basis. That is why it is sometimes better to go out of the country and look at the situation from afar. It is hard to judge difficulties when you are in the middle of them."

After a five-month break, however, Gooren decided to return to Moscow. "Coming back to Russia was a difficult decision, but it is a country with lots of opportunities and I didn't want to pass up the chance of doing business here," he said.

Gooren first thought of starting his own company in 2003, and even devised a business plan, though at the time he could not push it through. "Three years later, the opportunity came along and my plan became viable," he said. A policy change at Voerman International gave him the opportunity to take over its St. Petersburg's office, and Gooren started his own company AAA MOVERS RUSSIA, as a representative of Voerman International in St. Petersburg. "Now we are partners and it's a good way of working together," he said.

Gooren said that he is now eager to apply all his experience in the development of his new business.

"Now I am doing what I've always wanted to do. My company provides every possible removal service in St. Petersburg and Russia. On top of that we have a worldwide network. We also run



ALEXANDER SELIKOV / SP1

Norbert Gooren found the opportunity to return to Russia too good to miss out on.

successful projects for office moves on the local market," he said. "We are focused on presenting a variety of services to our clients, offering personalized solutions."

As a foreign manager in Russia, Gooren said that he often faces issues resulting from a difference in working standards in Russia and Europe. "Foreign clients usually expect a certain high standard and local staff should be aware about it. In Holland, everything is traditionally very, very well organized, while, in Russia, it is a transitional period, a time of big changes. And, although it can cause some problems for doing business here,

that is what makes it especially interesting and challenging for me," he said.

In Gooren's opinion, there is no point applying a fully-fledged western management style to Russian business. "Every country has its own culture and you have to respect it," he said. "Among the main problems of foreign managers coming to Russia are their high expectations. Having not succeeded in using their western experience and knowledge in a new country, they soon get frustrated and disappointed and might go back home," he said. Therefore, Russian managers who have trained abroad but are aware of

Russia's cultural distinctions can be very efficient here," Gooren said.

According to Gooren, Russian people, unlike their Dutch counterparts, require "a more direct management style. Here people are motivated maybe in a different way than in Holland, which has a well organized social security system," he said.

As a manager, Gooren always tries to encourage the professional development of his staff motivating them with various types of training and getting them to improve their English skills. Those of his employees who are successful are usually rewarded with days out or presents.

"It is very important to appreciate your workers' achievements. It is the most rewarding thing when you help people to grow professionally. And am always happy to discuss with them any new ideas they want to realize at work," he said.

Management, in general, comes down to common sense. "You should just treat your staff, how you yourself would want to be treated. However, it is important to remember that you can't change everything at once. "Many small steps can also bring about a big change," he said.

A good negotiator, Gooren thinks that communication is the most vital part of business. "In order to succeed, you need to be open and honest and in the long term it will work out" he said.

"My objective for the next three to five years is to let AAA MOVERS RUSSIA grow steadily, become known as a solid and reliable company that finds the best solutions for its clients, and provides possibilities for growth and social security for its employees," he said.

"And it's not only about making money, the point is to set a goal that keeps you motivated, focuses on professional development and self-fulfillment and makes you enjoy life."