

Alexander Chikunov, from the Siberian Tundra to philanthropic investor

As a Venture Capitalist, I encounter various investors, founders gravitating to this privileged and yet very exciting ecosystem. In this story, Let's zoom on Don't Quit Venture's newest LP, Alexander Vasilievich Chukunov, straight out of Russia's harshest land: The Siberian Tundra.

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Alexander Chikunov's journey from the remote reaches of Siberia to a prominent investor and philanthropy is nothing short of remarkable. His path was unlikely, shaped by the dramatic changes that swept the USSR, and achieved by blending personal resilience with profound adaptability to the shifting global landscape. Chikunov's unique trajectory stands out as a powerful testament to how individuals can overcome geopolitical and cultural barriers to create lasting impact.

Early life and education

Born on March 9, 1963, in Siberia, Alexander Vasilievich Chikunov was raised amid the harsh realities of the Soviet Union's expansive tundra. At a time when the USSR held limited prospects for entrepreneurial pursuits, his early years did not suggest a future in global finance or high-impact philanthropy. Yet, he defied the odds, driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge. In 1985, he graduated with an economics degree from Novosibirsk State University, one of the USSR's leading educational institutions. Even in the constraints of Soviet academia, he developed a

forward-thinking mindset that would later fuel his pioneering work.

Career in Post-Soviet Russia

As the USSR collapsed in 1991, Russia underwent a period of radical reform, opening opportunities for private enterprise and ambitious individuals willing to navigate the challenges of privatisation. Chikunov was among this bold wave of pioneers. After working briefly as a researcher and lecturer at the Economic Institute in Novosibirsk, he transitioned into business, playing a significant role in privatising state-owned assets—a critical move that would reshape Russia's economic landscape.

In 1992, he founded "Research. Investments. Finance," a stock brokerage firm, and soon became instrumental in creating NAUFOR, the first Russian trading system equivalent to NASDAQ. He was also appointed to the board of directors of the Russian Trading System, solidifying his place at the centre of Russia's evolving market economy. In the chaotic yet transformative early days of Russian capitalism, Chikunov's entrepreneurial spirit and adaptability positioned him as a driving force in reshaping the post-Soviet financial system.

Leadership in Russia's energy sector

As Russia's economy stabilised, Chikunov shifted his focus to the country's energy sector, a move that would have a lasting impact on his career. In 2002, he joined RAO UES, Russia's major electric power holding company, where he was promoted to the executive board in 2004. As an executive director, Chikunov oversaw the management of 14 newly established generation companies, coordinated 14 secondary public offerings (SPOs), and spearheaded the construction of new power plants—a first since the 1960s. His leadership at RAO UES reflected his deepening commitment to systemic reform, bolstering Russia's energy

infrastructure and facilitating broader economic growth.

Transition to Life Sciences and Philanthropy

By 2008, having completed the energy sector reforms, Chikunov redirected his focus toward life sciences and philanthropy. From 2009 to 2013, he financed early-age research in life extension, founding Longevica Therapeutics, Inc., where he assumed the role of president. In 2011, he co-founded the Princeton Institute of Life Sciences, channeling resources into groundbreaking studies on aging and health. His contributions include:

- Funding a specialised mice vivarium at Moscow State University's Biology Department,
- Financing a genomic lab at the Vavilov Institute of General Genetics,
- Donating to the University of Massachusetts for Alzheimer's and schizophrenia research.

These initiatives positioned him as a visionary philanthropist committed to scientific advancement, particularly in areas that aligned with his belief in extending and enhancing human health.

Contributions to Global Sustainability

Chikunov's dedication to societal betterment expanded beyond life sciences to address global sustainability and civilisational risks.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of global issues, he joined the Balaton Group, a collective focused on environmental and social sustainability, and co-founded the Institute of World Ideas in 2011.

Through these platforms, he developed the 4Waves framework, a tool for assessing civilisational risks and promoting sustainable development. His research on the role of forests in climate regulation illustrates his commitment to blending scientific insight with actionable strategies for

environmental resilience.

Current endeavours

Today, Alexander Chikunov's work continues to influence both business and scientific circles. As president of Longevica Therapeutics, Inc., he promotes longevity research and collaborates with thought leaders on global risk mitigation strategies. He is also a member of the editorial board of **The Solutions Journal**, where he shares his perspectives on sustainability. Through webinars and educational programs, he champions the 4Waves framework, striving to address the grand challenges of our era.

Legacy of transformation

Alexander Chikunov's remarkable journey from the Siberian tundra to multi-millionaire status in the United States encapsulates an inspiring blend of resilience, foresight, and dedication. His diverse contributions, from helping shape Russia's early financial markets to advancing life sciences and sustainability, underscore a life of meaningful impact across multiple fields. Today, his ongoing commitment to science, environmental stewardship, and human health continues to shape his role as a global thought leader and a celebrated figure in both business and philanthropic communities.

Noa Khamallah is General Partner at *Don't Quit Ventures*.



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