Cross-Cultural Communication

Is It a Bribe, or Not? Challenges in Communicating with Russian Officials

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This column deals with cross-cultural issues. Topics covered include teaching culture through language, cross-cultural communication in both business and academic settings as well as current trends in research. Any suggestions are welcome; please contact Elena Denisova-Schmidt (elena.denisova-schmidt@unisg.ch).

On 4 March 2013, the Russian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs published a set of recommendations for Russian officials. The recommendations are about corruption, or more specifically, what might be interpreted as a bribe, and what one should do to avoid doubtful situations.

Definition of bribery:
In addition to money, commercial papers and property, some services might be interpreted as a bribe. These include paid vacations, renovating a home, or building a dacha.

Limits of bribery:
If any persons associated with an official (such as family members or friends) accept gifts or receive benefits with the official's knowledge, and the gift-giver receives preferential treatment in a certain manner that might be interpreted as a bribe.

Signs of corruption:
Russian officials must learn to behave without any hints of possible bribery, i.e., without acting coercive.

Certain phrases:
Russian officials must try to avoid the following phrases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ПО-РУССКИ</th>
<th>ПО-АНГЛИЙСКИ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Вопрос решить трудно, но можно</td>
<td>The question is difficult, but it is possible to solve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Спасибо на хлеб не намажешь</td>
<td>‘Thank you’ cannot be spread on bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Договоримся</td>
<td>We will agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Нужны более веские аргументы</td>
<td>One needs more compelling arguments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Нужно обсудить параметры</td>
<td>One should discuss all parameters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ну, что делать будем?</td>
<td>Well, what shall we do?</td>
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</table>

Certain topics of conversation:
- Conversations with a decision maker about a family member’s job search.
- The official's desire to obtain certain goods or services.
- The official's dream of spending a holiday at a particular location or to place his or her own children in a particular educational institution.
- Requests to support a particular sport club or a specific charitable organization.

One should not regularly accept any gifts or vouchers with a value of 3000 RUB (~ 90 USD). Gifts over 3000 RUB are considered a bribe in Russia.

http://www.rosmintrud.ru/docs/mintrud/employment/15

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