

The People

- Russia has had a long history of totalitarianism, which has resulted in a rather fatalistic approach to living. The desire to work individually under personal initiative was suppressed by the Czarist and Communist states.
- Many are finding it very difficult to adapt to the Western values of individualism and profit maximization.
- Older Russians are generally quite pessimistic and don't have much faith in a better life in the future.
- Younger urban Russians have adopted a more Western outlook on life.

The People

- Political changes, government reforms, a stable economy, vast natural resources and a large population have all led to Russia seeing enormous advances in their foreign trade links.
- However, Churchill's description of the country as a 'riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma' still very much holds true for outsiders looking in.

Meeting and Greeting

- Initial greetings may come across as cool. Do not expect friendly smiles.
- A handshake is always appropriate (but not obligatory) when greeting or leaving, regardless of the relationship. Remove your gloves before shaking hands. Don't shake hands over a threshold (Russian folk belief holds that this action will lead to an argument).
- On the whole Russians have three names. The first name is the given name while the last name is the father's family name. The middle name is a version of the father's first name, known as a patronymic; for a man, it ends with the suffixes "vich" or "ovich" meaning 'son of.' For a woman, the patronymic is also the father's first name but with suffixes "vna" or "ovna" added, which means 'daughter of.'

Body Language

- Russians are a very demonstrative people, and public physical contact is common. Hugs, backslapping, kisses on the cheeks and other expansive gestures are common among friends or acquaintances and between members of the same sex.
- Russians stand close when talking.
- Putting your thumb through your index and middle fingers or making the "OK" sign are considered very rude gestures in Russia.

Corporate Culture

- Always be punctual when doing business in Russia. However do not take offense if your Russian counterpart is not. It is not unknown for Russian business people to turn up hours late. A good indication of how serious a meeting is taken is how punctual they are.
- Under Communism there were no incentives for bureaucrats to perform well or to even be pleasant toward clients; this meant that the usual answer to any question was "No." This practice is still found in Russian society today, but "No" is usually not the final word on an issue. One has to bargain and be persistent to get what he or she wants.
- Business cards are handed out liberally in Russia and are always exchanged at business meetings. The ceremony of presenting and receiving business cards is important. Don't treat it lightly.
- Representatives of the Russian company or government body are usually seated on one side of a table at meetings with guests on the other side.

Corporate Culture

- Negotiations are an interesting affair for anyone doing business in Russia. They are tough and like to indulge in a fair amount of theatre if necessary. Their main aim is to gain concessions so there will be a lengthy process of grinding you down. Caving in too early is a sign of weakness so stand your ground. If you do feel the need to concede ask for the gesture to be reciprocated in some way. Generally speaking, Russians view compromise as a sign of weakness. Don't be surprised by loss of tempers, walkouts, threats to end the deal, and similar incidents. It's all part of the fun.
- Personal relationships play a crucial role in Russian business.
- No agreement is final until a contract has been signed.
- Russians find it difficult to admit mistakes, especially publicly. They also find it difficult to risk offending someone by making requests or assertions.
- Trying to do business in Russia over the telephone is generally ineffective.

Dining and entertainment

- Russians are great hosts and love entertaining guests in their homes. They will often put more food on the table than can be eaten to indicate there is an abundance of food (whether there is or not). Guests who leave food on their plates honor their host. It means they have eaten well.
- If you're invited for dinner, don't make other plans for later in the evening. You are expected to spend time socializing after the meal.
- An invitation to a Russian dacha (country home) is a great honor.
- Do not turn down offers of food or drink. Given Russian hospitality, this can be difficult, but to decline such offers is considered rude.

Dining and entertainment

- At formal functions, guests do not usually start eating until the host has begun. At such functions, no one should leave until the guest of honor has left. If you are the guest of honor, do not stay too late.
- Know your limits when drinking alcohol in Russia. Drinking is often an all-or-nothing affair -- moderation is not understood.
- Toasts, which are sometimes lengthy and occasionally humorous, are common. The host starts and the guests reply. Do not drink until the first toast has been offered.
- After a toast, most Russians like to clink their glasses together. Do not do so if you are drinking something non-alcoholic.

Dress

- A "serious" businessperson is expected to look formal and conservative. Wearing very light or bright colors might make you appear lazy or unreliable to a Russian.
- Men should wear suits and ties. Women should wear suits and dresses or pantsuits.

Gifts

- A small business gift is always appropriate, but its value should correspond to the rank of the Russian businessperson with whom you are meeting.
- As a general rule, do not give items that are now easily obtainable in Russia.
- Bring a gift for the hostess when visiting a Russian home. A small gift for a Russian child is always appropriate (and appreciated).

Helpful Hints

- Russians are very proud of their culture and enjoy opportunities to talk about their music, art, literature and dance. Knowledge about art, music and some Russian history is appreciated.
- Learn Russian! Learning the language is of incalculable value, and is the best way to win friends for yourself, your company and your country. If that simply isn't possible, try to learn at least a few phrases in Russian. It doesn't have to be perfect; Russians greatly appreciate any attempt by foreigners to speak their language.
- Never refer to a Russian as "Comrade."
- Do not expect to find smoke-free areas anywhere. A standard joke among foreign businesspeople in Russia is that Russian buildings have two sections: "smoking" and "chain-smoking."

Especially for Women

- Women are initially regarded with skepticism and may have to prove themselves. Before you visit, have a mutually respected colleague send a letter introducing you. Your business cards should clearly state your title and academic degree. If you establish your position and ability immediately, you will encounter far fewer problems.
- Be feminine. Allow men to open doors, light cigarettes, etc. Even if you think such customs are antiquated or silly, respect the cultural background of your Russian colleagues.

Especially for Women

- Foreign businesswomen can use their femininity to their advantage. For fear of not appearing a gentleman, many Russian businessmen may allow foreign businesswomen to get away with some things (requests for meetings, favors, etc.) that foreign businessmen aren't allowed.
- A woman can invite a Russian businessman to lunch and pay the bill, although it might be interpreted by some men as an invitation to flirt.