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## Editorial

Hiding your feelings can either build trust or destroy it. In some countries, such as Japan, expressing them too early in a professional relationship or too abruptly in any conversation would be considered immature. In Russia, you will discover that emotion is a necessary component of any communication. Véronique has numerous examples of business decisions taken when [the heart prevailed over the head](#).

Don't expect things to be easy. A foreign manager driving a Russian team or a joint-venture will often need strong leadership skills and full authority from head office. Similarly, a foreign negotiator will often have to hold tight to his/her position when he/she faces a strong "nyet" from the other side. But both of them will have a much harder time if a strong personal relationship has not been established. As Carolyn explains, let them understand the ["depth of your soul"](#) and make sure you express clearly that you see Russians as equal partners.

Russia is definitely a culture where [people orientation](#) is much stronger than meets the eye. The managers who know how to make "good use of time lost" often find it rewarding...in the end.



**Laurent Lepez**  
Associate Partner

## Les Russes entre rationnel & irrationnel

Par **Véronique Levasseur**, Consultante Senior basée à Paris

Winston Churchill disait : « La Russie est un rébus enveloppé de mystère au sein d'une énigme. »

Dans la vie courante comme dans la vie d'entreprise, les Russes sont souvent vus comme spontanés, dans l'émotion et ne cherchant pas à cacher leurs sentiments. Le cœur s'exprime avant la raison. Ils oscillent entre le rationnel occidental et l'irrationnel oriental. En effet, plus que dans d'autres cultures, les Russes observent et cherchent à connaître leur interlocuteur intimement afin de s'en bâtir une image éminemment subjective.

La relation personnelle est très importante, car il est essentiel pour eux de savoir s'ils peuvent ou non faire confiance à leurs collègues ou relations professionnelles. C'est pourquoi une affaire ne peut se conclure sans un investissement relationnel dans la durée.

Les négociations prennent beaucoup de temps et il est inutile, voire risqué, de se montrer impatient ou agressif pour tenter de les accélérer.

Notion et gestion du « temps russe » sont différentes de bien d'autres cultures. Leur notion du temps est cyclique et souple, comme l'illustre de nombreux proverbes : « C'est le temps qui nous apprend », « Qui trop se hâte reste en chemin », « Le lendemain est plus sage que la veille »,...

Mais le trait de caractère le plus difficile à gérer dans les relations d'affaires semble être un certain fatalisme. A mon sens, le mot « Nitchevo » résume à lui seul, tout le fatalisme russe. Les Russes ont emprunté au français l'expression « C'est la vie », en lui ajoutant l'adjectif russe « takova » qui peut se traduire par « La vie, c'est comme ça, il faut la prendre comme elle est... ». Dans les affaires et dans la vie d'entreprise, il convient d'apprendre à travailler avec cette dimension culturelle.

### Mini bio de Véronique Levasseur



Depuis plus de 30 ans, Véronique travaille avec la Russie. Sa carrière : CEGEDUR-PECHINEY, puis Responsable commerciale export pour ALCATEL (+ de 150 missions de longue durée dans l'Oural, ainsi qu'à Moscou et Kiev), puis Responsable de zone export pour BOSCH TELECOM où elle travaille principalement avec l'Ukraine et la Russie. Depuis 2004, elle élabore et anime des formations interculturelles sur cette zone. Elle intervient en français, anglais et russe.

## When “Nyet” doesn’t mean “No” Understanding the Russians

By **Carolyn Smith**, Senior Consultant based in California

Several years ago the head of Russia’s Ministry of Fuel and Energy was negotiating with the CEO of a major Western manufacturer and asked him for a special deal on the price. The CEO refused, saying it would violate his country’s tax regulations. The Russian Minister pressed him again and again to say yes. The CEO finally lost his temper and told the Minister there was no way he would violate the tax code. The Minister immediately backed down, saying jovially: “Why didn’t you say so in the first place?”

This story illustrates a potential pitfall for Westerners doing business in Russia: “no” doesn’t mean the same thing to Russians that it does to Europeans and Americans. “No” is a starting point to a Russian, not a final position. This is puzzling to Westerners who take at face value a Russian “nyet”, which could sometimes mean “I can’t give you an answer right now” or “Let me see what else you might offer.”

Probing for “wiggle room” in the opposite side’s position is a characteristic Russian negotiating tactic. The proper response is to repeat your position firmly and consistently, and eventually the Russian will back off. Of course, once you have established a solid working relationship with your Russian counterparts, they will come to know that your “no” actually means “no”, but the word “nyet” will still never have the same black-and-white connotation to them that it does to you.

A British businessman negotiating in Moscow recently said: “Before concluding a deal, Russians would ideally

like to know and understand the depths of your soul.” Russians tend to personalize their professional relationships to a greater extent than most Westerners. So, spending time getting to know them personally as well as in their professional capacity is essential. Hospitality is very important to Russians; be prepared to spend hours at table, eating, drinking and conversing. This is where you’re building your relationship.

It’s also important to realize that Russians have paradoxical feelings of superiority and inferiority about themselves. Their country was isolated from Europe for much of its history and lagged way behind other nations as they industrialized and modernized. Yet Russians see themselves as a special people with a great cultural and spiritual heritage, a nation with a unique role to play on the world stage. They feel underappreciated by the rest of the world. Therefore, make sure you show them you see them as equal partners in every part of your undertaking. If you do this, Russians will be much more likely to say “nyet” to you only when they really mean it.

### Mini bio of Carolyn Smith



Carolyn has lived in Russia, Thailand, Switzerland and Sudan and worked on projects in eastern Europe and Central Asia. Fluent in Russian, she has interpreted at summit meetings at the White House and Kremlin. For the last 12 years she has designed and delivered training programs helping people understand and overcome cultural differences.

## Cultural Tips

### Building solid relationships with Russian colleagues

1. Personalize your business relationship: get to know your colleague as a person. Share stories and photographs of your personal life: family, hobbies, how you spend your holidays.
2. Show Russians you respect them as equal partners.
3. Learn about Russian history and read Pushkin and Gogol to better understand the “Russian soul”.