



Diverse Issues

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Diversity in People: Russians and Russian Immigrants

As of March 2000, 28.4 million or 10 percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born. Approximately 624,000 were from countries that were a part of the former Soviet Union (U.S. Census, 2001). Economic, political, and religious challenges have all factored into the decisions of Russians to leave their homeland.

Three Waves of Immigration

Russians have a long history of migration to the U.S. Many immigrants can be tied to three waves of migration (Shasha & Shron, 2002). The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the creation of the Soviet Union and the emigration of most of the Russian aristocracy. Joseph Stalin's harsh dictatorship (1926-1953) led to the escape of several hundred thousand people in the second wave after World War II. Finally, the partial opening of Russian emigration policy in the 1970's, along with the welcoming by the United States of Russians who suffered religious persecution, began the third wave of Russian immigrants. The numbers within the third wave of Russian immigrants increased significantly when President Mikhail Gorbachev announced in 1987 that victims of religious persecution in the U.S.S.R. were free to leave the country.

Economic and Religious Reasons

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, economic conditions deteriorated rapidly, bringing the economy to a virtual standstill in the early 1990's. Food shortages, waiting in long lines, and the use of food ration coupons issued by the government were a necessary part of the daily

struggle for basic needs. Purchasing other consumer goods, such as clothing and automobiles was even more difficult. Hardwick (1993), reports that it was not unusual to wait ten years for an apartment.

Although Russia has had a history of diversity in religious affiliations, the Russian Orthodox Christian church has been the single most important religious body in Russia and the USSR for over a thousand years. Support of any religion in Russia, however, was severely curtailed during the Soviet regime. The 1929 Law on Religious Associations officially supported atheism by the government. Church buildings were converted to social clubs, religious education became illegal, and many religious practitioners were denied admittance to universities, or exiled to forced labor camps (Hardwick, 1993). Today, however, freedom of religion has been restored to Russia. In 1990, the new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations was passed by the Soviet legislature.

(Continued on next page)

In This Issue

- **Diversity in People:** *Russians and Russian Immigrants*
- **Diversity in the Workplace:** *Discussing the Undiscussable*
- **Diversity Activity:** *Activities to Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)*
- **Diversity Calendar**
- **Diversity Around the State:** *Diversity Training for a Local School District*



Since the encouragement of religious freedom, the Russian Orthodox Church has become

even more popular and has gained increased political standing. It has also become more conservative and more rigid in its bureaucracy (Shasha & Shron, 2002). Although other religions are officially respected, there is a growing division between Russian Orthodoxy and other religious groups. The other “sects” are not seen as legitimate religions (Goehner, 2002). In frustration, many Russian Baptists, Pentecostals, Catholics, Jews, and other religious groups are immigrating to the United States. Today 72% of the population in Russia identifies as Russian Orthodox Christian. Nineteen percent of Russians claim no religion, while 5.5% are Muslim, 1.8% are Catholic, 0.7% are Protestant, 0.6% are Buddhists and 0.3% are Jewish (Issues and Controversies, 1998).

Russian Culture and Family Life

“The keyword to Russian family life is dependence” (RussianNation, 2002). It is common for two, three or more family generations to live together in one small flat. Children often continue to live at home after college and even after marriage. During Soviet time, flats were not for sell, but were “received” from the state. The state norms for giving the flats allowed for only 5-8 meters per person. Today, flats can be purchased, but are unaffordable for most people.

Relationships with family members tend to be close. A close-knit family lifestyle fosters willing adaptation to family rules, consideration for others, and ability to compromise.

Even outside of the family situation, Russians are more flexible. Both the cold climate and the political environment have contributed to

the Russian’s strength, and ability to endure extreme hardship. While Americans expect things to go well and become upset when they don’t, Russians have grown accustomed to unpredictable and unstable situations. They have learned to adapt to new rules and laws quickly (Goehner, 2002; RussianNation, 2002).

Russian wives tend to do better at surviving immigration than do husbands. Ninety percent of Russian women are in the work force. In addition to working every day, the housework is also the women’s responsibility. While women spend most of their time at work or home, men are “allowed” more leisure time with friends in cafes, restaurants, and discos.

The communication style of many Russians is more straightforward than that of many Americans. “Russia is quite a rough country, and Russians usually do not hesitate to say what they think in a way that doesn’t leave room for misunderstandings” (RussianNation, 2002). Pushing and shoving in crowds bring no hard feelings. Additionally, Russians are less likely to flash smiles to strangers on the street. These behaviors should not be considered rude; they are just their way of doing things.

On the other hand, many Russians consider Americans to be a bit distant. Sergey Artushkov, a Russian immigrant, expresses this difference. “My communication with Americans, for the most part, is very formal. Formality guards against offense. America is a nation of immigrants and its culture is based on an individualistic mentality that values self-protection. The culture has created certain formalized ways of expressing emotions, guarded forms of communication. It doesn’t allow you to get inside another person, to know him in depth. Historically, I think, this has helped people who come from so many different cultures to coexist in one society and to live in peace.” (Shasha & Shron, 2002, p. 207).

Strong friendships are an important part of Russian culture. Sharing problems with friends at a deeper level made existence in a difficult place more bearable. In America, friendships may be more

casual. When Americans do not follow through with promises like, "Let's do lunch" or "I'll call you soon," Russians are often disappointed (Hardwick, 1993, p. 161).

In general, Russians tend to share a stronger communal spirit and sense of togetherness than many Americans. This sense of cooperation and group collective stems from the history of the agricultural village commune, even prior to the institution of communism. The land was held in common and decisions, reached by consensus for the good of the group, were binding on all households. A popular Russian "saying" is "Ya" – *poslednaya bookva v alfavite*. The English translation is "I" – *is the last letter in the alphabet*. The meaning is that one should not put themselves first before the good of the group.

Drinking alcohol, often heavily, is a Russian tradition; some might say it is a national vice. Russian vodka is a favorite for men and Soviet Champaign is a favorite for women. While drinking alone is looked down upon, drinking with others is highly respected. In social gatherings, drinking is often preceded by a toast.

When compared to other groups, the level of education of Russian immigrants is high. Education in Russia is free and having a university degree is common. Unfortunately, many people find it necessary to work in positions outside of their formal training and the pay for many highly professional jobs is low. Highly trained and skilled immigrants are often forced to accept low skilled jobs upon entering America.

The work ethic in American may take a bit of getting used to, however. Many Russians find that Americans work harder, are held to higher work standards, are much more competitive, and are preoccupied with work and economic success. In the former Soviet State, employment decisions were imposed by the state. "The concept of reward tied to performance was alien, as was individual initiative" (Goehner, 2002, p.4). Additionally, there was little incentive to get things done on time. During communism, workers could not be fired. Consequently, Russians are often not on time, but do not necessarily consider themselves late (Goehner, 2002).



Not only did the State control employment decisions, many other life decisions were controlled by the state - where one could live, what university one attended, what one could study, what brands were available for purchase in the store. Russian immigrants gained a new sense of independence in America that required a much greater sense of self-sufficiency. Today, Russians are faced with a new responsibility for making many more of their own life decisions, both here and in Russia.

A high value is placed on home ownership. In many Russian neighborhoods, boundaries are drawn around the home by fences with locked gates and high hedges that mark off one's own territory. In the former Soviet Union, ownership of property by any except the upper class was practically nonexistent. In America, "good people own homes, bad people rent" is the dominant attitude among Russian residents (Nostrand & Estaville, 2001). Close-knit Russian communities persist through several generations, sometimes becoming isolated residential enclaves. *(Continued on page 9)*

Diversity in the Workplace: Discussing the Undiscussable

Undiscussables are sensitive matters on the back of the minds of employees. They can often relate to issues of diversity. These undiscussables by their nature go undiscussed and therefore are not dealt with in a way that can benefit all employees and ultimately the organization (Davis, 2002).

“People need to learn to talk more openly together about issues that are on their minds but that are not frequently discussed. As all people become more proficient in having these discussions, all people stand to benefit from the corresponding learning that will result” (Davis, 2002, p. 1).

On work teams, people spend much of their time in small groups. The productivity and happiness of people depends, among other things, on the groups they are in and the way those groups operate. While in groups, members obey a complex set of rules. The rules are often unstated. In fact, often the group members are not aware of them. As if this were not enough, some of those rules forbid the mention of certain types of information. These are strong taboos. Other rules, as Chris Argyris (1985) has pointed out, forbid people from mentioning that there are taboos. Argyris calls it the cover-up of the cover-up.

No doubt the rules develop for good reason. Perfect frankness about everything is hardly possible, and of questionable benefit. Some of the taboos, however, prevent people from telling us what we need if we are to understand their actions. Rules which prevent open discussion hinder the giving of accurate feedback, resulting in misunderstandings.

The following is an activity which can be used by a group of people to identify some of the unstated rules which hinder useful openness, and help the group begin to develop a more constructive and open style of operation. The purpose is to help identify information which is relevant to group operation but is hard to discuss. Note: there is no requirement that anyone will actually

reveal the undiscussable information. Individuals may decide to do so, but that is not the primary aim of the activity.

It is important that individuals remain free to decide what they disclose, and how they disclose it. Each person is therefore urged to resist any pressures to disclose information until they themselves have decided that they are freely willing to do so. If participants identify the information and the results of its undiscussability, the activity will have served its purpose whether the actual information is disclosed or not.

The Process (Takes about 2 hours)

1. Select small groups (10 minutes)

This step is used if you are choosing small groups from within a larger group. Small



groups of 3 – 5 are most effective. If there are intact teams of people who know each other, the small groups can be formed on that basis. Otherwise, aim for as much diversity as possible.

2. Individually list undiscussables (15 minutes)

This step is done individually and without talking. Each person makes an individual list of information which you find difficult to discuss openly in group settings. Select a group to focus on. If the small group you are working in is a group where you know the members well, compile your list for this group. Otherwise, select a different group where you know all the members well.

(Continued on page 8)

Diversity Activity: Activities to Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15 - Oct. 15)

U. S. Geography

Many U.S. names are derived from the Spanish language.

1. Name four states whose names were derived from the Spanish language.
2. Name eight cities whose names were derived from the Spanish language.



Famous Hispanic Americans of the Past

On the line next to each name, write the letter of the statement that describes that person.

Person/People	Why Famous?
___ 1. Conquistadors	a. Author of <i>Don Quijote de la Mancha</i> , 1602
___ 2. Dennis Chaves	b. Spanish conquistador and explorer
___ 3. Cesar Chavez	c. Band leader and actor, was in <i>I Love Lucy</i>
___ 4. Desi Arnaz	d. The initiator of Cubism and probably the paramount influence on art of the 20th century
___ 5. Roberto Clemente	e. Civil War Naval hero, led battle to take New Orleans
___ 6. Vasco Nunez Balboa	f. In 1935, became first Hispanic U.S. senator
___ 7. Pablo Picasso	g. Spanish soldiers, invaded and took lands from Indians
___ 8. Miguel de Cervantes Saavdra	h. Led fight for a better life for migrant farm workers
___ 9. Francisco de Goya	i. Baseball player with the Pittsburgh Pirates, 1955-1972
___ 10. David Glasgow Farragut	j. Spanish painter and engraver of the 19 th century

Famous Hispanic Americans of Today

On the line next to each name, write the letter of the statement that describes that person.

Person/People	Why Famous?
___ 1. Joan Baez	a. One of the world's best female golfers
___ 2. Antonia Coelho Novello	b. Secretary General of the UN, 1981-1991
___ 3. Henry Cisneros	c. Mexican-American mayor of San Antonio, Texas
___ 4. Katherine Davalos Ortego	d. Folk singer
___ 5. Gloria Estefan	e. Singer from Miami
___ 6. Nancy Lopez	f. Hispanic Treasurer of the United States
___ 7. Geraldo Rivera	g. Opera singer
___ 8. Jose Canseco	h. First Hispanic and first female U.S. Surgeon General
___ 9. Jose Carreras	i. Baseball player with the Oakland A's
___ 10. Javier Perez Cuellar	j. Talk show host

Answers:
States: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Montana.
Cities: El Paso, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Pueblo, CO; San Antonio, TX; San Diego, CA; San Francisco, CA; San Jose, CA; Santa Fe, NM.
Famous Hispanics of the Past: 1.g, 2.f, 3.h, 4.c, 5.i, 6.b, 7.d, 8.a, 9.j, 10.e.
Famous Hispanics of Today: 1.d, 2.h, 3.c, 4.f, 5.e, 6.a, 7.j, 8.i, 9.g, 10.b

Adapted from: Education World at <http://www.education-world.com>.

Diversity Calendar

September 2002 - Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15th – Oct. 15th)

- 2nd Labor Day** - U.S. Honors working people and the contribution of labor.
- 6th Rosh Hashanah** - (sundown) Marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year.
- 8th Grandparents Day** - U.S.
- 10th Ganesh Chaturthi** - Hindu. Day of offering to Lord Ganesh, god of wisdom, success, and remover of obstacles.
- 11th Attack on America** - U.S. Acknowledges the terrorist attack on America in 2001.
- 15th Hispanic Heritage Month begins** - U.S.
- Keiro no hi** - Japan. Respect for the Aged Day, a national holiday honoring the elderly.
- Yom Kippur** - (sundown). Jewish Day of Atonement. The most holy day of the Jewish year.
- 17th Citizenship Day** - U.S. Honors the people from other countries who become U.S citizens each year, and the anniversary of the 1787 signing of the U.S. Constitution.
- 20th Sukkot** - (sundown) Jewish. 8-day festival commemorating the divine protection given to Israelites during their 40 years of wandering through the desert.
- 21st Ch'usok** - Korea. Korea's Thanksgiving Day.
- Oktoberfest** - Germany. A 2-week harvest celebration.
- 22nd National Deaf Awareness Week** - U.S.
- 23rd Shubun no hi** - Japan. Celebrates autumn and family ancestry.
- 24th Our Lady of Mercedes Day** - Dominican Republic, Peru. Religious holiday.
- 28th Confucius's Birthday** - China and Taiwan. Celebrates the birth of the teacher Confucius in 551 B.C.E.
- Simchat Torah** - (sundown) Jewish. Celebrates completion of the reading of the Torah.

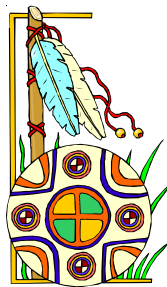
October 2002 - National Disability Employment Awareness Month

- 2nd Gahdhi Jayant** - Hindu. Marks the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- 5th Shab-E-Miraj** - Islamic. Commemorates Muhammad's ascension into heaven.
- 11th Cashmir Pulaski Day** - Poland, U.S. Honors the Polish patriot.
- National Coming Out Day** - U.S. A day of visibility for the gay and lesbian community.

- 12th Durga Puja** - Hindu. 10-day festival celebrating the goddess Durga, destroyer of demons and triumph of good over evil.
- Nossa Senhora de Aparcida** - Brazil. Celebrates Brazil's patron saint, the Virgin Mary Aparcida.
- 13th National Diversity Week** - U.S.
- 14th Chong Yang** - China. Family remembrance. Families visit the graves of ancestors.
- Columbus Day** - U.S. Commemorates the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas.
- 16th Bosses Day** - U.S.
- 19th Birthday of the Bab** - (sundown) Baha'i.
- 24th United Nations Day** - U.N. Commemorates the birth of the United Nations organization.
- 26th Karva Chauth** - Hindu. Fast honoring the Hindu god Shiva and goddess Parvati.
- 27th Reformation Day** - Protestant Christian.
- 31st Halloween** - U.S.



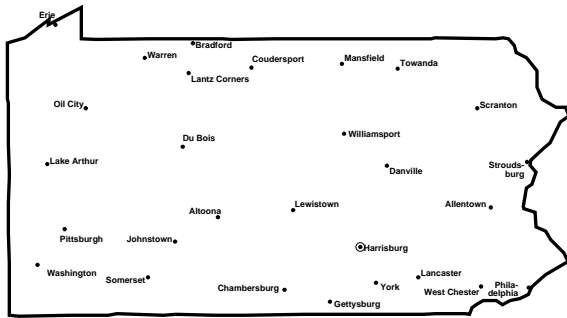
November 2002 - National American Indian Heritage Month



- 1st All Saints Day** - Christian.
- Dia de los Muertos** (Day of the Dead)-Mexico and Latin America.
- 2nd All Soul's Day** - Catholic Christians. Celebrates the dead.
- 4th Diwali** - Hindu. Marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year - an important Hindu festival.
- 5th Ramadan** (sundown) Islamic. Begins the holiest month of the Islamic year. Fasting occurs throughout the month.
- 11th Veterans Day** - U.S.
- Remembrance Day** - Canada
- Birthday of Baha'I'llah** - (sundown) Baha'i.
- 15th Haile Selassie's Coronation Day** - Rastafarian.
- 19th Guru Nanak's Birthday** - Founder of the Sikh religion.
- 23rd Labor Thanksgiving Day** - Japan
- 25th Day of the Covenant begins** - Baha'i.
- 28th Thanksgiving Day** - U.S.
- Hmong New Year** - Hmong, U.S.
- 29th Hanukkah** - (sundown) Jewish. 8-day celebration begins.
- 30th St Andrew's Day** - Patron saint of Scotland

Source: Honoring Differences. Professional Development Group, Inc. 2001.

Diversity Around the State: Diversity Training for a Local School District



Submitted by Mary Miller, 4-H/Youth Development Agent

Mary Miller, Montgomery County 4-H/Youth Development agent, recently had the opportunity to provide diversity and sensitivity training for a local school district as partial fulfillment of their required ACT 48 hours.

Two 5.5 hour day-long workshops were offered in the summer to elementary and high school teachers and counselors in separate sessions. Teachers and counselors learned strategies in cultural sensitivity through topics in cultural, ethnic, and racial differences in family parenting patterns; discipline and child-rearing preferences in diverse families were addressed. Participants studied class differences and poverty, grandparents raising grandchildren, blended families and its effect on the diverse learner.

Part of the day was devoted to sharing all the many educational resources available to teachers through the 4-H and Family and Consumer Sciences disciplines. As issues of grandparents raising grandchildren was discussed, 4-H summer assistants employed by Montgomery County this summer demonstrated components of the 4-H Generation Celebration project, using a lending box of 12 stations that address sensitivity to the elderly.

A poverty simulation game was used to highlight poverty and class issues.

Mary Miller was also able to introduce the African American curriculum and regional lending box of curriculum materials made available through Dr. Patreese Ingram's efforts.

A panel of community members discussed strategies and techniques to ease the transition of culturally diverse families who struggle to understand the school process. They included an African American female director from a local Family Center, a Hispanic caseworker from a family counseling agency, a caseworker from ACLAMO, an agency serving Hispanic families in the county, and a director of a counseling agency who is the wife of an Arab American.

Each day included stereotyping activities, discussion of tolerance and prejudice, and specific issues confronting teachers today in the classroom.

As a result of this training, teachers brainstormed and shared how they will try to create a more multicultural classroom and a welcoming environment for families. Suggestions were made to provide more child-care when Hispanic and African American families come to parent conferences or Back to School Night. Teachers and counselors wanted to provide more opportunities for parents to bring their children to the school for pre-school start sessions and orientation.

Specific curriculum, appropriate children's books and videos for their classrooms and their school libraries were listed as resources they would like to purchase. We were also fortunate to have some administrators as part of this training. Plans are being discussed to have this training repeated for all staff on an in-service day to include support staff and school nurses.

(Continued from page 4)

Think about the activities the chosen group typically does. Think about those things that might annoy you, distract or disturb you, or hinder the groups' activities, but which you would be unlikely to talk about.

3. Categorize undiscussables (10 minutes)

Continue to work individually and without talking. Categorize this information into three lists which we will call A, B and C lists:

- A. *Discussable*. These are items which you would be willing to discuss in this group, now, if there were sufficient reason.
- B. *Potentially discussable*. These are items which you would be most reluctant to discuss in this group now, but you could imagine them becoming discussable if certain conditions were fulfilled.
- C. *Undiscussable*. These are items which you would find very difficult to discuss in this group even under the most favorable circumstances.

All three lists are of items that are relevant to group and individual satisfaction or performance, and which are to some extent not usually discussed.



4. Discuss nature of undiscussables (15 minutes)

Hold a group discussion of the nature of the items on the various lists. There is no requirement that the items themselves are discussed. This will help you add to the items on your A, B, and C lists. (If the whole group is large, this may be done in small groups.)

5. Consider moving items between lists (5 minutes)

Working individually, you decide if there are any borderline B items you might consider moving to the A list, or any C items you might consider moving to the B list. It is not necessary that you actually move any items, only that you consider doing so.

6. Individually identify conditions which aid movement (5 minutes)

Working individually, identify the conditions that would make it easier to move B items to the A list and perhaps C items to the B list. (What is it about a group that helps to make an item discussable?)

7. Discuss conditions (30 minutes)

The group or subgroup discusses the conditions that would be the most helpful to change some B items to A items (and perhaps C to B). List the conditions on butcher paper, each person in turn contributing the most important item from his/her list that is not already listed.

In the large group, use a voting process to agree on group priorities for the conditions. (Perhaps give each person three dots or checks to assign to their choice of conditions.)

Hold an informal discussion on the possibility of agreeing to these conditions. Each person who wishes can identify the conditions he or she is willing to try to observe. No one is required to participate unless they choose to do so.

8. Again consider moving items between lists (5 minutes)

Working individually, you decide if there are any B items you would now choose to move to the A list, and perhaps C items to the B list. In light of the conditions agreed to by the group, are there items you are now willing to move? Note: you are not required to move any items unless you choose to do so. Resist pressures from others.

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Due to decades of oppression, mistrust of government authorities is not uncommon among new immigrants. While in America, laws are assumed to protect the individual, in Soviet Russia the law served to protect the state (Goehner, 2002). Russian immigrants may approach paperwork for government agencies, such as the welfare office, with suspicion. And the sight of police or others in uniform may be cause for stress. Extra effort by agency workers to reduce concern on the part of the immigrant may be helpful.

Russians are a proud people. While they come to the United States in search of religious freedom and economic well-being, most maintain a positive attachment to the homeland.

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9. Final discussion (25 minutes)



In small groups, discuss the nature of the items on the different lists, the conditions the group agreed to try to observe, and the result this had on the categorization of items.

In the large group, hold a brief discussion of the activity and its results.

Teamwork, creativity, management, leadership, following, trust and consequently productivity may be improved by effectively renegotiating the rules of operation for groups, and by developing the skill to discuss the undiscussable.

Adapted from:

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