

# **CITIZEN DIPLOMATS**

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## **Personal Perestroika**

IN PAST YEARS, the psychological interplay between the US and the USSR led to growing tension within the world and the emergence of a new kind of citizen—a citizen who, at a time when the leaders were not speaking, decided that the people must speak; a citizen who had the courage to cross the borders of his/her personal, political, and ideological beliefs to embrace the oneness of humanity. This citizen is known as a Citizen Diplomat. Citizen Diplomats over the years have become a bridge between the grassroots and the bureaucracy. They span the gaps of separation between people and nations through their ability to listen, to understand and accept a perspective so different from their own.

Citizen Diplomacy is the art of holding two points of view simultaneously without overemphasizing cultural similarities or denying cultural differences. A Citizen Diplomat appreciates individual as well as societal differences without comparing those differences. It is one who is discriminating without being judgmental. When we discriminate, we see the differences. When we judge, we compare or criticize those differences.

To empathize with the perspective of another requires a certain amount of individual security, a well-developed sense of personal identity and high self-esteem. When these qualities are present, we are not threatened by the perspective of another, no matter how foreign to our own. We are secure in the knowledge of our own beliefs without fear of being swayed, conditioned or absorbed by the belief systems of others. This security gives us a source of inner strength and an intuitive sense of

knowing when to yield and when to be firm, when to be silent and when to speak out.

There will always be times when perspectives of individuals and countries do not and cannot join. As nations grow more mutually interdependent, "Nuclear Age Diplomacy" increasingly requires holding two (or more) points of view simultaneously.

Successful Citizen Diplomacy begins with personal *Perestroika*. It begins with the inner transformation of our own being. An acceptance and love of others begins with acceptance and love of ourselves. Trust of others comes from trusting ourselves. In applying these qualities with our own life, we can more easily accept the differences of the people of other nations and other political systems. In turn, what we experience through our international interactions can be applied to the people and leaders with our own nation, our own community and, equally important, to those within our own home.

### **The Bi-Polar Global Mind**

As Citizen Diplomacy can be said to be the alignment of polarities, then the most extreme planetary polarities of past decades has been that of the Soviet Union and the United States. They represent the seeming diversities of East/West, Communism/Capitalism, The Collective and The Individual. Our aim as Citizen Diplomats is to bring about a balance. A balance of unity, not uniformity! It is to align the polarities within our own thinking and interactions for harmonious alignment upon the planet.

In applying Citizen Diplomacy to the Soviet Union, it is important to understand the two major differences in our societies. American anthropologist Edward Hall divides cul-

tures into 1) High Context Oriented, and 2) Low Context, or Content Oriented. The Soviet Union is considered to be a High Context culture. This means that the setting in which the communication occurs is considered to be far more important than the content, or the words that are being conveyed. The United States is considered to be a Low Context, or Content Oriented society. This means that the communication, or message that is being conveyed is seen as being more important than the context in which it is taking place.

When confronted with a complex problem, Americans tend to break it down into its component parts, wanting immediate solutions and initiatives. The Soviets demonstrate patience. When confronted with a complex problem, instead of breaking it down sequentially, they expand their thinking to the broader perspective, contextually surveying the origin of the problem rather than looking for immediate solutions.

Hypothetically, we can speculate that the polarities of Context and Content oriented societies can be compared to the right and left hemispheres of the human brain. The right hemisphere is equated with the function of spatial or intuitive awareness where knowledge is grasped as a whole without dividing it into components. The left hemisphere functions in an intellectual, sequential way, logically breaking down complex concepts into their component parts.

Theoretically, we could relate the hemispheres of the human brain to the East/West hemispheres of the planet. The Soviet Union (East) would be seen as contextually right brain oriented, while the United States (West) relates to the content orientation of left brain activity. Citizen Diplomats, ironically enough, can be compared to the Corpus Collosum which forms a synoptic bridge between these diametric opposites.

If the psycho-physiological ideal of the body is to maintain a healthy balance between the two hemispheres of the human brain, the corresponding societal ideal would be to create healthy alignment between the two hemispheres of the global brain, thus bringing the entire planetary nervous system into co-creative alignment.

## **Communicating**

Developing a partnership with the Soviets is rather like entering into an intimate relationship or marriage. After the initial enthusiasm of our finding one another in the rubble of past stereotypes, we enter into a honeymoon phase. This can be followed by a period of disillusionment and loss of momentum when communications are not answered. It is a time when feelings of doubt and rejection threaten to reinforce our original stereotypes. Faults and imperfections may surface with renewed vigor.

However, if at this point we can persist in our communication attempts, letting go of expectations and judgments to forgive and accept one another, we breakthrough to a new level of intimacy. Instead of ending the relationship, we establish a "New Relationship," a relationship of Soviets and Americans working together for the common good of humankind where cooperation replaces competition and confrontation.

And now, a few words of advice for the Citizen Diplomat. For successful negotiations and follow through in the development of joint projects, you must develop a solid relationship with your Soviet counterparts. Relationship is the foundation for verbal commitment and written agreements. Soviets are more loyal to people than to papers. As you develop a close bond with your Soviet counterpart, your loyalty to one another is the best security to prevent cracked promises and broken dreams.

There are three phases in negotiations with the Soviets: 1) euphoria, 2) disappointment and 3) hard work. Euphoria when your proposal is accepted and there seems to be a good meeting of the mind and heart; disappointment when communications are not answered and you confront your own frustration with bureaucracies; and hard work when you overcome the psychological and technical barriers to communication and continue to work with a stronger commitment than ever before.

### **Barriers to Communication**

Under the New Reforms, the Soviet Union is one of the most rapidly changing countries today. But even though laws and communication links are changing, it takes time for the habits and customs of the individuals who are accustomed to the old system to change.

When we come up against communication barriers either psychologically or technologically, we must refrain from putting our own cultural overlays on the Soviet bureaucratic system. If we become angry and defensive, our Soviet counterpart will mirror our reaction, leading to even further barriers in communication and negotiating. Regardless of your frustration with "bureaucratic tape," open your mind and heart, letting go of expectation and the attachment to a particular result.

If your Soviet partner does not answer your communications, it does not mean that they do not want to work with you or are not following through with your original agreement. The technology of communicating to and from the Soviet Union, although vastly improved still remains a source of challenge to both Soviets and Americans.

Telexes to date have been the most effective and officially accepted means of communication. However, very

few organizations have telex capabilities. Even when they do, the greatest complaint of most Americans is that their telexes are not always answered. It is important to know that successful telex communication is built upon establishing a close personal relationship with your Soviet partner.

Mail has vastly improved within the last year. At one time it took forty days for mail to reach the Soviet Union, if it arrived at all. Now it takes approximately ten days and is much more reliable. Courier service from the US to the USSR, which takes three days, is excellent but expensive. There are a growing number of courier services now delivering to the Soviet Union, including the US Post Office.

Facsimile Machines are growing in popularity with several organizations in the Soviet Union. However, according to the telephone company, only half of the FAX messages currently get through.

Telephone links between the US and USSR have vastly improved over the last year. At one time it took several hours to book a call. If the party did not answer, the call would have to be rebooked, which might take several more hours and sometimes days to successfully complete. Even then, it was difficult to get a clear connection each time, making it necessary to call back.

Today calls can be placed directly through the international operator who can connect the parties immediately. That is, of course, if the circuits are not busy, which they increasingly are. Organizations and businesses in the Soviet Union do not have central switchboards. Phone lines ring directly into the offices and will usually not be answered by a Soviet sitting at another desk. This makes it difficult to reach many Soviets by phone at their office, so it is important to obtain their home phone numbers.