

Comparative Reality

By: Stephen G. Wright

This is the premier of a weekly feature that will focus on the current state of affairs between the expatriates in Kazakhstan and the local residents. Recently a colleague told me that this topic is important, relevant, useful, cutting edge and no one wants to hear about it. A few weeks ago a resident approached me after a seminar I gave on relationship management and whispered, yes, whispered: “thanks for brining this up, most of us (referring to the local community) are afraid to talk about it”.

What is it that everyone secretly whispers about but will not put on the table for some hard discussion? It seems that you and those that where born here just don't get along well. Frankly, some residents tell me that they do not like you very much!

If you do not find the topic worthy of your time, just never read the column again. You will not break my heart. There are some people, such as the editors of this paper, that think there are problems here between us that in the event they fail to be resolved will result in tragic consequences for all concerned. Wait you say, Mr. Wright you are misinformed! I get along great with the local population you say; in fact we all have a fine time! Okay, please prove me wrong!! That's what this column is all about! Here is a chance to show everyone what the nature of the existing relationship is and for us to comment on it and learn from it.

This column is not simply a forum for expatriate complaints about how they have been used or cheated by residents. Yes, part of what is asked for are incidents of bad practices by locals or expats - of course, but there is more to this. This is a forum for both sides to discuss perceptions and resolve misunderstandings. Arrangements are being made for this column to appear simultaneously in a Kazakh or Russian language newspaper in order to maintain a fair opportunity to be heard for all concerned. As I am the person who taught ethics to a group of local journalists not so long ago I think it is required of me to make a running jump towards practicing what I preach!

Until your cards and letters start coming in (e-mail to be precise), I will be writing columns on specific problems brought to my attention already. As comments, problems, or issues from expats and residents come in the column will then focus on these submissions. I will take on the role of moderator and occasional commentator. Hey, it is my column after all and I get to talk now and then if I want to.

Lets start the ball rolling with this: Has there been any substantive discussion or advocacy, anywhere from anybody, for the formation of an independent Office of Expatriate Relations or a Kazakhstan Better Business Bureau? If such things exist they have been very, very quite! Sure as hell seems to me we could all do with a bit more oversight and social responsibility on the part of the guests and our “gracious” hosts. I have been thinking about this a great deal of late – are you interested in my thoughts? Most certainly the floor is now open for your thoughts.....

Those that speak affect history; those that are silent are affected by it.

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