

## BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN!

By; Stephen G. Wright  
For the Almaty Herald

In the last few articles I've thrown a few punches towards the expats. Now it is time to throw one in the other direction.

The issue – in the simplest form – is one of short-term gain verses long-term gain. If you expats have not noticed that you are being used and taken advantage of from time to time then you need to wake up and smell the java juice! This is pay back baby! You take everything from them (a perception) and they take as much as they can from you (a reality). For example, on a small scale - a shop owner charges a local resident 300 KZT for an item but will charge you 1000KZT. You do not know what the “real” price is, so who is the wiser? The shopkeeper has made 700KZT more than he had a moment ago and has taken advantage of your lack of local savvy. He is a little richer for the deed.

In human terms if you allow people to take you for a ride without fear of consequence then you will see the situation worsen, not improve. Do you really think that if you remain silent that the local population will, sooner or later, realize what nice people you are and NOT over charge you or refuse to accommodate simple requests?

Within the framework of the Soviet culture and also within the frame of reference of the Kazakh culture, they admire and respond to strength! Those that can take hold of, and project, power and authority are respected. Those that lack strength, as they perceive it, are weak and therefore should be taken advantage of. Inadvertently you guys have reinforced this through Western management principles that reinforce participative management, also economic shock therapy and free market reforms. Many seem to think that how this capitalist thing works is – “The person with the most money at the end of the game wins!” As indicated in the last article, someone forgot to adequately reinforce ethics training as an equal priority to economic training.

Allow me to let the observations of the great poet Abai Kunanbaev indicate an historical perspective on this issue, dating from 1886:

Oh, my luckless Kazakh...

Oh, my luckless Kazakh, my unfortunate kin,  
An unkempt moustache hides your mouth and chin.  
Blood on your right cheek, fat on your left –  
When will the dawn of your reason begin?  
Your looks are not bad and your numbers are vast,  
Yet why do you change your favors so fast?  
You will never listen to sound advice.  
Your tongue in its rashness is unsurpassed.  
Unable to manage your property,  
Day and night, care and worry are all you see,

Now naughty, now wearing a look of offence,  
Constant in nought but inconstancy.  
All sorts of scurvy, and petty scum  
Have crippled your soul for years to come.  
No hope of improvement have you until  
Master of your own fate you become.  
Kinsman for trifles each other hate.  
God bereft them of reason – such is their fate.  
No honour, no harmony, only dissent;  
No wonder cattle is scarcer of late.  
Over money and power hostilities rage.  
You look on while your lords in wrangles engage.  
If you fail to cast off those honourless knaves  
Fear and shame will your lot be through age after age.  
How can your heart be at ease, I ask,  
If you can't even face the easiest task?  
If you cannot master firmness and pluck,  
My folk, you will always be out of luck.  
Yet if anyone tells you the right thing to do  
You abuse and revile him, so stupid are you.

- Translated by Dorian Rottenberg -

Well people take all this for what it is worth. My suggestion is YOU start taking hold of your lives here. You have obligations, of course, but you have rights as well! We need to convince our “luckless” hosts of the great advantage of a long-term relationship with the foreigner and not just a “quick buck”, “Dodge City” mentality!

Remember what I said in article #1:

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

Responsible comments, issues for discussion, questions and observations are always welcome and may be sent to:

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