

a) mundane	f) sense	l) niceties
b) reexamine	g) reconfigure	m) abundance
c) ulterior	h) apology	n) superficially
d) rubs	i) funny	o) outspokenness
e) blunt	j) self – development	p) repercussion
	k) deception	

TEXT 1.3: Look up the meaning of the words and insert them in the text.

In 2011, I travelled to Saint Petersburg, Russia. The food sucked. The weather sucked. My apartment sucked. Nothing worked. Everything was overpriced. The people were rude and smelled **1**____. Nobody smiled and everyone drank too much. Yet, I loved it. It was one of my favorite trips.

There's a bluntness to Russian culture that generally **2**____ Westerners the wrong way. Gone are the fake **3**____ and verbal webs of politeness. You don't smile at strangers or pretend to like anything you don't. In Russia, if something is stupid, you say it's stupid. If someone is being an asshole, you tell him he's being an asshole. If you really like someone and are having a great time, you tell her that you like her and are having a great time. It doesn't matter if this person is your friend, a stranger, or someone you met five minutes ago on the street.

The first week I found all of this really uncomfortable. I went on a coffee date with a Russian girl, and within three minutes of sitting down she looked at me funny and told me that what I'd just said was stupid. I nearly choked on my drink. There was nothing combative about the way she said it; it was spoken as if it were some **4**____ fact — like the quality of the weather that day, or her shoe size — but I was still shocked. After all, in the West such **5**____ is seen as highly offensive, especially from someone you just met. But it went on like this with everyone. Everyone came across as rude all the time, and as a result, my Western-coddled mind felt attacked on all sides. Nagging insecurities began to surface in situations where they hadn't existed in years.

But as the weeks wore on, I got used to the Russian frankness, much as I did the midnight sunsets and the vodka that went down like ice water. And then I started appreciating it for what it really was: unadulterated expression. Honesty in the truest **6**____ of the word. Communication with no conditions, no strings attached, no **7**____ motive, no sales job, no desperate attempt to be liked.

Somehow, after years of travel, it was in perhaps the most un-American of places where I first experienced a particular flavor of freedom: the ability to say whatever I thought or felt, without fear of **8**____. It was a strange form of liberation *through* accepting rejection. And as someone who had been starved of this kind of **9**____ expression most of his life — first by an emotionally

repressed family life, then later by a meticulously constructed false display of confidence — I got drunk on it like, well, like it was the finest damn vodka I'd ever had. The month I spent in Saint Petersburg went by in a blur, and by the end I didn't want to leave.

Travel is a fantastic **10** _____ tool, because it extricates you from the values of your culture and shows you that another society can live with entirely different values and still function and not hate themselves. This exposure to different cultural values and metrics then forces you to **11** _____ what seems obvious in your own life and to consider that perhaps it's not necessarily the best way to live. In this case, Russia had me reexamining the fake-nice communication that is so common in Anglo culture, and asking myself if this wasn't somehow making us more insecure around each other and worse at intimacy.

I remember discussing this dynamic with my Russian teacher one day, and he had an interesting theory. Having lived under communism for so many generations, with little to no economic opportunity and caged by a culture of fear, Russian society found the most valuable currency to be trust. And to build trust you have to be honest. That means when things suck, you say so openly and without **12** _____. People's displays of unpleasant honesty were rewarded for the simple fact that they were necessary for survival — you had to know whom you could rely on and whom you couldn't, and you needed to know quickly.

But, in the “free” West, my Russian teacher continued, there existed an **13** _____ of economic opportunity — so much economic opportunity that it became far more valuable to present yourself in a certain way, even if it was false, than to actually be that way. Trust lost its value. Appearances and salesmanship became more advantageous forms of expression. Knowing a lot of people **14** _____ was more beneficial than knowing a few people closely.

This is why it became the norm in Western cultures to smile and say polite things even when you don't feel like it, to tell little white lies and agree with someone whom you don't actually agree with. This is why people learn to pretend to be friends with people they don't actually like, to buy things they don't actually want. The economic system promotes such **15** _____.

The downside of this is that you never know, in the West, if you can completely trust the person you're talking to. Sometimes this is the case even among good friends or family members. There is such pressure in the West to be likeable that people often **16** _____ their entire personality depending on the person they're dealing with.

Extract by Mark Manson