



Lake Vyoksa, Russia

One Man in a Baidarka or Kayaking and Connecting (What I did for Summer Vacation)

by Tim Pearson

Neva River, St. Petersburg, Russia, Sept. 3 – Hello! Want to bring the kayaks together for a mug-up? The water's calm enough. I've got some sausage, bread, and Pivo with me if you'd like. Pivo? Oh, it's a warm Russian beer whose primary advantage is that it doesn't take much not to be thirsty anymore.

What's the route been? Anchorage, Frankfurt, Stockholm, and St. Petersburg. I flew to Stockholm to lead a workshop on "Listening in the Workplace" for the International Listening Association Conference (www.listen.org) with fellow coach and kayaker, Lora Vahue. While there I met Peter deLisser (www.delisser.com), a former Williams College football coach and now NYC executive coach. His book, Be Your Own Executive Coach, has a great chapter on responsible listening. (Ever wonder why people don't listen? Only 5% ever receive any training in listening. We teach speech, not listening.)

I also met Dr. Rick Bommelje (www.listeningleader.net) from Rollins College in Florida. His book, The Listening Leader, comes out in the fall and he writes a popular listening e-newsletter. I did pick up Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps by British authors Alan and Barbara Pease. Lots of laughs and serious material.

Oh, I highly recommend kayaking the Tyreso Nature Reserve. And don't miss the Swedish national memorial to the importance of listening -- the museum of the warship Vasa. The most powerful warship of its time, it sank on its maiden voyage in 1628 and was salvaged nearly intact 333 years later in 1961. The technical reason for sinking? It was top heavy. The human reason? King Gustavus Adolfus didn't listen to his shipbuilders and added too many gundecks. Total cost of the loss in today's terms? 5% of Sweden's GDP.

If Sweden was about kayaking and listening, St. Petersburg has been about rowing and networking. I met Andrew, a Russian friend, five years ago while standing in line to exchange dollars for rubles. This year we took off on a rowing trip out of Priezorsk on Lake Vyoksa, 100 km north of St. Petersburg. Lots of islands and inlets. I had fun telling him about Alaska's best-known rower, Jill Fredston, author of the prize-winning Rowing to Latitude. One of Alaska's master networkers, Allan Johnston, had just emailed me that Jill's parents, Arthur and Ellie Fredston, would be visiting St. Petersburg in a week. I've seen Jill's slideshow, so I was excited.

We connected. You have to understand that Arthur Fredston is a master rainmaker and attorney with Pillsbury Winthrop, LLP in New York specializing in international trade and public offerings. Ellie's a master networker who loves the fine arts. Since I had a networking workshop coming up for Russian graduate students returning home after two years in the U.S. as Muskie Fellows, I asked the Fredstons' for their top three tips for aspiring rainmakers. They're gold:

1. Do your homework to find common interests.
2. Look for common and genuine connections. (Genuine is key.)
3. Listen, listen, listen. (That's how you discover common ground, new connections, and previously unseen opportunities.)

Bonus: Don't forget to visit the museums, the theater and the ballet. (It will make you a richer human being.) And be patient. One international client showed up 20 years after their first meeting and said, "I want you to be my attorney."

Why does networking matter? First, for job hunting. Only 11% of available jobs are listed in the newspapers. The rest are networked. Second, for productivity on the job. Star employees at Bell Labs were five times more productive than the average employee according to Robert Kelley, author of How to Be a Star at Work. Stars solve problems in a fraction of the time of others, thanks to their networks. Third, the best of the best networkers are rainmakers. Rainmakers create business opportunities out of thin air because they can see connections that others don't.

In our workshop, the Muskie Fellows raised an interesting point about the Russian and American distinctions between friends and acquaintances. Some people say that Americans have lots of acquaintances, but no friends, while Russians have a handful of friends, but few acquaintances. Understand that a Russian friend is someone you can call at 2 am and discuss the meaning of life. If you do that to an American, he'll unplug the phone. The consensus: the average Russian could use more acquaintances in their networks. The average American could reflect on the old Russian proverb: "It's better to have 100 friends than 100 rubles." (That from the era when a ruble was really worth a ruble.)

Well, time to unhook kayaks, leave the Russian grandparents, and depart for Alaska. You know, the Russian word for kayak is baidarka. Not a surprise to Alaskans. What type of kayak is this? It's a "Ladoga-1" made by Triton in St. Petersburg. Only \$410 and 32 lbs. Not bad for a folding kayak.

By the way, 2003 commemorates the 200th anniversary of Admiral Adam Johann von Krusenstern's 1803-1806 voyage to resupply Alaska. His statue here on the Neva marks the first Russian circumnavigation of the globe. So tell me, when's your next voyage of discovery?



Photo by Lora Vahue

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