

To Buy or Not to Buy

- by Eric Schempp

The Olympics were taking place and I wanted to watch them. But I didn't have a TV. I could have had one I guess, but I had the American "shop around" mentality stuck in my head. I know I should have ditched my shopping mentality because it came in conflict with the Russian way of doing things, but somehow, I just had trouble doing so. I decided that I would just ask my tutor Vladimir to help me purchase a TV.

Day One:

Eric: Vladimir, I want to buy a TV. Where can I get one?

Vladimir: What kind of TV do you want?

E: A cheap one.

V: Color or Black and White?

E: Color.

V: You can get a cheap one at the repair shop. I'll call them for you.

E: Thanks.

Day Two:

E: Vladimir, what did you find out about TVs?

V: Well, I didn't call them.

E: Why not?

V: Because I didn't know how much you wanted to spend.

E: Well, I don't know how much they cost.

V: But you need to tell me how much you want to spend.

E: I don't have any idea. How much does a TV cost in Uglich?

V: I don't know.

E: I thought that was why you were calling.

V: I will when you tell me how much you want to spend.

E: You helped another person buy a cheap TV didn't you? How much did he pay?

V: 1500 Rubles.

E: Okay. That at least gives me an idea of the cost. Will you see if there is a repaired TV in the range of 1500 Rubles?

V: Okay, when do you want to go get it?

E: I don't have any money right now. I am waiting for Peace Corps to pay me. The electronic Transfer should be in the bank any day now.

V: Okay.

Day Three:

E: Vladimir, what did you find out about the TVs

V: I didn't call them.

E: Why not?

V: You told me you were waiting for Peace Corps to pay you.

E: I just want to know how much a stupid TV will cost at the repair shop.

V: I said about 1500 rubles.

E: Do you know that for sure?

V: No.

E: Please call and ask them.

V: But you have to get paid first.

E: I actually got paid today, okay? But, please just call and ask how much a TV will be.

V: I'll do it first thing tomorrow.

Day Four:

E: Vladimir, what did you find out about the TVs?

V: I spent all morning on the phone and they have a color one for 1500 rubles like I told you they would.

E: Great! What else do they have?

V: I don't know. You told me to get you a color TV for 1500 rubles and that is what I did.

E: Oh.

V: All we have to do is call them and tell them we want it.
E: Well, why don't we just go look at it?
V: They'll deliver it.
E: But what if I don't want to buy it. What if it is piece of junk? I just want to see it.
Can't I go see it?
V: They deliver and they are good people. I told you I got a TV for someone else from them before. You must hurry before someone else takes it.
E: I still want to see it first.
V: But, I don't know where the shop is.
E: Well, please call and find out.
V: Eric, you don't understand. In Russia, the phones are always busy, busy, busy. That is just the way it is.

Vladimir spends a half an hour confirming this.

E: I still want to shop around and compare prices.
V: Why did I spend all morning on the phone then?
E: I don't even know what a new TV costs. You were calling so that I could simply get an idea of the costs of a repaired TV.
V: Geez! But I spent all morning on the phone. Put your coat on. Let's go to the store with TVs.
E: Great! That's what I wanted to do three days ago. My very first question to you was, "Where can I get a TV?"

We go to the store tucked away in a random corner of Uglich and found out the cheapest is 4,000 rubles.

E: Well, I guess a color TV for 1,500 rubles is probably a pretty good deal.
V: Yes. I told you so.

E: I still want to look at it though to make sure that it won't break tomorrow. Will you call tomorrow morning and get the repair shop's address so that I can go look at it?

V: Yes.

E: I'll make the call if you want me to, just like I could have done four days ago.

V: Fine. It'll be good for your Russian,

E: I know.

Day Five:

I call and find out the address to the repair shop.

E: Vladimir, I found out the address of the repair shop. Where is Kamasheeskee Street?

V: Let's look at a map

E: Okay.

V: You are going to have to get on bus number 6 and go about four or five stops.

E: Can't you be more precise?

V: No. Ask the bus lady. Tell her where you want to go.

E: Fine.

I go to the bus stop. Not knowing what I am doing, I get on a bus and go the wrong direction. After two stops I realize that I am right next to the orphanage where I work. I decide to go in and talk to the director, Tatiana, and get some things done. After formalities and not so in depth conversation:

Tatiana: What are you doing right now?

Eric: Trying to buy a TV

T: Really?

E: Yes.

T: Where?
E: At the repair shop.
T: No! No! No! You don't want to do that.
E: Why not?
T: There is no guarantee.
E: Actually there would be a guarantee.
T: No, Eric! No! You don't want to do that.
E: I just want to look at it.
T: Oh. (What she thinks is: "You're American. I forgot.")

I make the mistake of asking where a particular street is.

T: Why?
E: So I can walk there.
T: We'll drive you.

"Uh-oh," I think, "I've been through this before. I have to somehow make my escape."

T: Where are you going?
E: I'll just walk.
T: Sit down.

I sit. I wait. And wait some more. After about a half hour I am in a car with three other people. But, the car is sitting still. It's not moving. Instead of asking questions, I insist that I will walk. But I am not allowed to get out of the car. After about ten minutes the driver decides to turn the car on. But we only move about twenty feet and it's backwards. They announce that before we go anywhere we must eat lunch. We get out of the car and eat. Twenty minutes later we are back in the car. First we go to some store. Then we go to the train station. Then we go to the Post Office. Finally we pull up to the TV repair store and I'm happy. From the car, they see that the door is locked and start to pull away.

Eric: Stop! I am getting out of the car.

Driver: Why?

Eric: I am going to wait.

Driver: You don't know when they will come back.

Eric: I don't care. I am going to wait.

Driver: Fine. But, we're leaving.

Eric: Okay.

Driver: Do you know where you are?

E: Yeah, I live close to here and will walk home (It's a lie).

The car leaves. I sit. Ten minutes later the owners of the shop show up and show me the TV. It's nice and I decide that I will probably take it. I have no way of getting it home. I have to walk. I am not quite sure where I am, and carrying a TV probably wouldn't make life that much easier. I leave. I wander aimlessly for a half hour, finally see somebody and ask directions and an hour later I am home.

Day Six:

Eric: I want the TV

Vladimir: Okay, I'll call them and get it for you.

He calls.

Vladimir: The TV is yours.

Eric: Great. When will they bring it?

V: Anytime between 10 A.M. and 2 P.M.

E: Okay, I guess I'll go home and wait for them.

V: Whatever.

E: Do they know where I live?

V: No, but I do.

E: So you told them.

V: I told them everything they needed to know.

Day Seven:

Eric: Vladimir, I don't have the TV

Vladimir: Why not?

Eric: They never brought it.

V: You were supposed to go get it.

E: You told me they deliver.

V: No, you were supposed to go and get it.

E: How am I going to carry it??

V: I don't know, maybe we should ask them to deliver it.

I never got a TV. But it didn't matter. The Olympics were nearly over anyway.