

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND
INFLUENCE ELECTIONS



'Zis is a zexy Frenchman calling to see if you want to have ze affair.'

SET LOYALTY TESTS

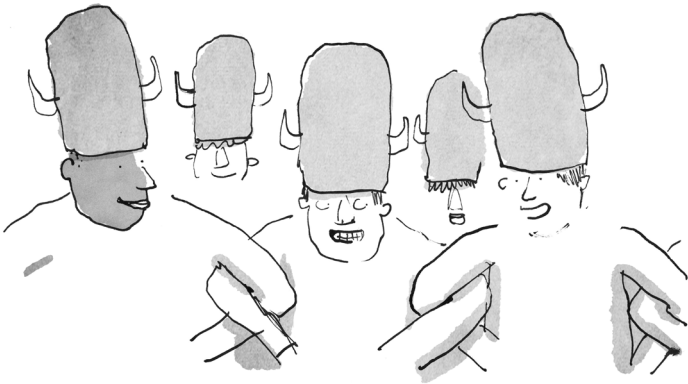
As a self-described ‘specialist in human relations’, Putin is always testing his inner circle. He even applied the tactic to his ex-wife Lyudmila.

‘Vladimir Vladimirovich has been testing me throughout our life together,’ she recalls. ‘I’ve always had the feeling that he’s watching me. It was like he was waiting to see if I would make the right decisions, whether I would pass the next test.’²

She even came to believe her then-boyfriend had tested her with a handsome, mustard-keen suitor who came out of nowhere pleading for her phone number and a date (something Putin with his KGB resources might easily have organised).

Be More Vlad

To test a work friend’s loyalty Putin-style, try inviting her to lunch on a day when you know full well she’s arranged to get a salad with the new starter. She should sack them off altogether or at the least invite you along. If not, you’ve got a traitor on your hands. Change her screensaver at the soonest opportunity so she arrives back at her desk to find the word JUDAS bouncing hauntingly around her screen.



'You're one of us now. There's a secret handshake and you get the grass verge outside your house trimmed every six weeks.'

FORM A NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP

The Ozero Cooperative, which sounds a bit like the secret organisation at the heart of a conspiracy thriller, was set up by a group of friends who own dachas on Lake Komsomolskoye, including one V. Putin. After he took power, Ozero members magically rose to assume top positions in the Russian government and economy.

Today these holiday-home owners also own banks, shipyards, gas companies, railways and nuclear fuel exporting businesses. You have to wonder if they are really suitable for their high-powered jobs, or just happened to share a waterfront with the right man at the right time.³

Be More Vlad

Starting a neighbourhood group as Putin did could be a great way to meet new friends and make sure local trees are properly maintained. It's also a good opportunity to meet the teenage son from number 63; you know, the one who does model UN, just in case he ever ascends to reign supreme over a large chunk of the world's population and mineral resources.



*'I enjoyed our after-work pint the other day so much I had this tattoo done.
It's you and me for ever now, bro.'*

START A BROMANCE/WOMANCE

The rapport between Putin and former Italian president Silvio Berlusconi could gladden the heart of the most jaded political observer.

To seal their friendship, Putin bought Berlusconi a four-poster bed, which became famous when Berlusconi allegedly used it to partake of the services of prostitute Patricia D'Addario. In exchange, Berlusconi had a bedspread made for Putin featuring a life-size photographic image of the two leaders palling around, arms around each other's shoulders.⁴

Be More Vlad

Get your friends lavish gifts and you can reasonably hope they'll repay you with all kinds of custom-printed curtains, pelmets, lamp shades, rugs and other soft furnishings, until your bedroom eventually becomes a cosy gallery of your same-sex friendships that none who enter will be able to forget.



'Well, my 12,000 new Bolivian Facebook friends don't think we should break up.'

HIRE A SOCKPUPPET ARMY

Putin's web brigades make him the world's leading online influencer – and you can be just like him.

It's alleged that ninety professional trolls,⁵ working from an anonymous-looking office block on Savushkina Street in St Petersburg, were paid by a shadowy organisation called the Internet Research Agency to mess with the 2016 US election. They worked day and night to influence opinion and make American politics seem even more divided than it really was, with each troll typing furiously to meet a quota of at least eighty comments and twenty shares per day across multiple fake social media accounts.⁶

Be More Vlad

Employing your own sockpuppet army on this scale could be expensive, so why not use actual sockpuppets instead? With one on each hand and foot, you can attend your local council's next public meeting in the guise of a crowd of angry constituents, or even as a family of wacky snakes. It's a great way to participate in local debate and advance your agenda just like Putin.



'Before I tell you the total cost, I want you to look deep into my baby blue eyes.'

LOOK THEM RIGHT IN THE EYE

Whatever charm tricks Putin learned at KGB school, they seemed to work on President George W. Bush when they first met at a summit in 2001.

‘I looked the man in the eye,’ Bush said afterwards. ‘I found him very straightforward and trustworthy – I was able to get a sense of his soul.’

Condi Rice later recalled in her book *No Greater Honour*⁷ that Bush’s reaction had been a mistake: ‘We were never able to escape the perception that the president had naïvely trusted Putin and then been betrayed.’ (It probably didn’t help that Bush started referring to his new friend as Pootie Poot.⁸)

Be More Vlad

Eye contact is an easily forgotten basic. If you find yourself dealing with a touchingly naïve individual who’s been elevated far above his ability level, earn his trust by first giving him the chance to check you have a set of anatomically sound irises. Propping your eyelids open with a couple of matchsticks can help him get a really good look and confirm that you’re not hiding anything suspicious under there.