

Left-hand/right-hand column case¹

Name: Tim Russell

1. The challenge or theme illustrated by this episode: disagreement with superiors about grant approval
2. Brief statement of context: I wrote a grant to fund the publishing of an Albanian glossary to accompany the English text used in the primary school system. The current text had a Macedonian Language glossary, but was used by Albanian students with only one year of Macedonian Language classes. I received an e-mail from Zhaklina, PC Training and Grant Manager, saying that I had followed the wrong process for submittal and that I should not have shared the grant with the committee that makes the decisions before she gave approval. The grant had been turned down. This was strange since I had followed the same procedure several times before. What was new here? Called to find out and she would not take my call and instead transferred me Zdenka, PC Program Manager. That conversation follows.
3. The conversation

<u>My Thoughts and Feelings</u>	<u>What We Said</u>
Why won't Zhaklina talk to me?	Me: Zdenka? I am trying to ask Zhaklina why the grant was refused. She wrote an e-mail about the process. Do you understand what she meant?
Was the process not a problem? What was that e-mail about?	Zdenka: This issue is too politically charged for Peace Corps to become involved.
	Me: Can we have a discussion about this? Things are not so politically charged... for example the Math textbooks used by Albanian students are in Albanian.
Maybe she didn't understand what the grant meant to accomplish...	Zdenka: It is not our place to make policy.
	Me: This isn't policy. This is something that is done for every other subject, just not English. We are following policy. The only reason that it was not done for Turkish and Albanian was financial. We can provide that money.

¹ Developed by Action Design, Inc. Go to ActionDesign.com for more details on productive conversations and reflective practice.

<p>Condescending tone. I live this everyday – she does not interact with Albanians in her Macedonian only world - always looking down on people.</p>	<p>Zdenka: You don't understand how politically controversial this is</p>
	<p>Me: The Embassy has expressed willingness to fund this work. If the US Embassy thinks it is OK, the Peace Corps should do it.</p>
<p>Racist staff not interested in helping volunteers serve Albanians.</p>	<p>Zdenka: You can take this up with the Country Director. The decision is final. This conversation is finished.</p>

4. Lingering concerns, puzzles, or questions:

Why was the office not willing to be open about the problem to begin with? Why were we never able to have an open conversation about this issue?