

How Don't I Care? Let Me Count The Ways

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Maria Orlova / pexels

А НАМ ВСЁ РАВНО: As for us, we could care less

One evening over the holidays, some friends and I started to list all the ways to say “I don’t care” in Russian. It began as a joke and then got serious as the expressions piled up. In the end we came up with about 20 different ways to express indifference, from very polite phrases to words I can’t use in this public forum.

After a moment of puzzled silence, we came up with about 20 explanations for why there were so many ways to express indifference. In the end we decided that, paradoxically, indifference is a highly emotional topic and that’s why there are so many highly emotional ways to express it.

And then after another round of drinks, we decided: А нам всё равно почему (But really, we don't care why.)

Here is the fruit of our deep dive into indifference.

It all begins with всё равно. Всё равно means “it's all the same” or “nevertheless”: Фильм о человеческих мечтах и о том, что даже в дыре они всё равно сбываются (The film is about human dreams and about how, even in a hellhole, they still come true.)

But on its own, всё равно is the standard way of expressing indifference: Пусть посмотрят. Мне всё равно (Let them look. I don't care.) You can add various intensifiers to make your point: Мне абсолютно всё равно, что скажет муж. (I absolutely couldn't care less what my husband says). Мне совершенно всё равно, что жена думает (I couldn't care less — literally “completely don't care” — what my wife thinks). You get the idea.

You might be untroubled by others' opinions: Меня не волнует, что вы об этом думаете (I'm not the least bit concerned what you think about it). Or you might be uninterested: Меня не интересует, во что они верят (I'm not interested in what they believe). Or it doesn't rock your boat, from the verb колыхать (to rock, sway): Его моральный облик никого не колышет (No one gives a damn about his moral image).

And then there is this said in Russian about a German expression that has an English equivalent: У немцев есть отличная поговорка: “Чего я не знаю, то меня не колышет!” (Germans have a saying: “What I don't know can't hurt me!”)

Great national minds think alike, amirite?

Now then, when offered a choice, you might not care either way. However, most people are not indifferent to one topic: Не бывает таких людей, которым было бы совершенно безразлично, что о них говорят (There isn't anyone on earth who is completely indifferent to what is said about them).

Or you really don't care about something, so you're happy to go along with whatever someone else wants: как скажешь (whatever you say) or как хочешь (whatever you want) or сделайте, как хотите (do whatever you wish). ☒ Хорошо, хорошо, все сделаем, как скажешь ☒ говорит хозяйка дворнику (“All right, all right, we'll do whatever you say,” the owner said to the caretaker.) ☒ Может, мне переехать в Москву? ☒ говорила Анна. ☒ Ну, не знаю... Сделай, как хочешь... (“Maybe I should move to Moscow?” Anna said. “Well, I don't know. Do whatever you want...”)

Since you don't care what someone does, you tell them to suit themselves: Что ж, можешь поступать, как тебе угодно! (Well then, do as you please!)

When you couldn't give a hoot about something, it's very easy to be polite and gracious. Here someone doesn't care in two ways: Ну и пожалуйста, ну и не жалко (Of course go right ahead, I don't mind at all).

And since the Russian language loves using double negatives to make a positive, you can be not against something because you don't really care enough to object. Я не прочь! (I'm not averse!) Ничего не имею против! (I don't have anything against it). Я не возражаю (I don't

object). Я не откажусь (I won't say no).

In fact, I don't care one way or the other, so: Почему бы и нет? (Why the heck not?)

Once you've gone through those more or less polite ways of expressing your shoulder shrug of indifference, you can move on to slang. When you don't care about something, you spit on it in a variety of ways: the simple but elegant Плевать! (to spit); the more personal Мне наплевать! (I would spit); or the more precise Плевал я на это (I spit on that). Мне наплевать, кто эту квартиру купит. Да кто угодно. Были бы деньги (I don't give a hoot who buys the apartment. Let anyone buy it. As long as they have the money!)

If you prefer not to spit, you can also cough out your indifference and disdain: Мне чихать на ваше распоряжение! (I don't give a damn about your directive!)

Or you can use one of the phrases that are impossible to translate literally, like an expression involving a lightbulb: Мне до лампочки, чем ты торгуешь на своем рынке (I couldn't care less what you sell at your market). Or one involving a drum: Мне по барабану, кому из них эти земли принадлежат (I don't give a damn which of them owns that land). Or one involving mysterious grass called трын-трава that means nothing or nonsense. When it's all трын-трава to you, it means you don't care: Я работаю день и ночь, а ему всё трын-трава (I work day and night, and he couldn't care less).

Or you can sing a very silly song from a famous Soviet movie and everyone will understand: We just don't care.

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