

Lesson 21: Leadership

Judy is struggling with her leadership role in a project, and Kevin gives her some suggestions. Listen to their conversation and mark these statements "True" or "False."

Listening Comprehension

True or false according to the dialogue?

1. Judy knew the project would be problematic from the beginning.
2. The project is to improve the children's facilities at a library.
3. Felix wants to modernize the selection of books.
4. Cecily wants to use fewer shelves.
5. The group agrees that the playground should be improved.
6. Heidi wants to add more areas for different activities.
7. Judy is the leader of the committee.
8. The group has tried voting before, but it didn't work.
9. Judy wants to get rid of all the extra plans.
10. Kevin thinks Judy's idea of delegating is a good one.
11. Judy has an upcoming meeting very soon.

Conversation Text

Judy: I thought this new project would be **a piece of cake**, but it's turning out to be **a real pain**.

Kevin: Sorry to hear that. What's making it such a **headache**?

Judy: The committee just can't seem to agree on anything. Everyone has different ideas about what we should do; they're all so **stubborn**, and **I'm at my wits' end!**

Kevin: OK, what's the goal of your project? **Fill me in on** the details, and maybe I can help you out.

Judy: We're trying to improve the Children's Center at the library. Just basic stuff like organizing and adding more shelves indoors, then **renovating** the playground outside.

Kevin: Seems pretty simple. So what's the issue?

Judy: Basically, Felix wants to **sort through** the old books before we start adding more shelves; he says the books are **outdated**. Then Cecily insists that we need to return the shelves we already bought and get new, safer ones instead. Everyone's **keen on** improving the playground, but half the people say they have back problems so they won't be able to help. And the ones that *can* work on the playground are **bickering** about which materials we should use.

Vocabulary

a piece of cake = very easy

a real pain / a headache = very annoying

stubborn = describes a person who is convinced they are right, and doesn't change their mind easily

I'm at my wits' end = at the limit of your mental resources, desperate and without additional options

fill me in on = give someone information they are lacking

renovating = repair and improve a building or structure

sort through = go through a collection and organize or classify the items

outdated = old-fashioned; not modern

keen on = excited about

bickering = arguing (often over insignificant things)

Kevin: I see....

Judy: Laura and Ned want to do a pizza **fundraiser** to get more money for the project. They want to expand the playground to include a skateboard area and a climbing wall. But Heidi thinks we should use the extra money to improve the **handicapped ramps** on the playground and maybe even add a wheelchair lift near the entrance.

Kevin: It sounds like your group is great at **brainstorming**, but if you can't come to a **consensus**, then you'll be doing nothing more than **spinning your wheels**.

Judy: **You nailed it.** At every meeting, we get so **bogged down** in discussion that nothing gets done. I'm supposed to be the leader, but if I **put my foot down** and make the decisions, some people are always going to be upset.

Kevin: Well, you can't please everyone. But the group does have to agree in advance that whatever decisions are made, everybody will **uphold** them. Do you have a voting process?

Judy: No... for some reason, we haven't thought about voting on things. It's just been a lot of talking and arguing for **hours on end**.

Kevin: Voting is great because everyone can **voice** their ideas, but then the majority decides on what the group does – and since

Vocabulary

fundraiser = an event for getting monetary donations for a project or cause

handicapped = refers to people with disabilities

ramps = inclined areas

brainstorming = creating many new ideas

consensus = agreement

spinning your wheels = wasting time staying in the same position, not advancing

You nailed it = you're exactly right

bogged down = stuck, slow, unable to progress

put my foot down = take a firm position

uphold = support

hours on end = many consecutive hours

voice = express

favoritism = giving some people unfair preference

everyone's vote is equal, nobody can accuse you of **favoritism**.

Judy: That's a good idea. Got any other tips for me?

Kevin: Another one is to make a clear distinction between what **NEEDS** to be done and what people **WANT** to do. This will help keep the group focused.

Judy: I like that. But what *should* we do about all the extra plans? There are some good ones in there, and I don't want people feeling like their ideas are always **shot down**.

Kevin: There are a couple different ways you could deal with it. You could always vote on the extras and have the group **pick** the best one. Another way is to divide the project into "Phase 1" – doing only what's essential to the goal – and then "Phase 2" – adding extra stuff later.

Judy: Hey, and I just thought of something else – the people who are suggesting the extra stuff, I could **empower** them to **head up** those projects. That way it wouldn't all be **on my shoulders**.

Kevin: Now **you're catching on**. Remember that leading a group of people is definitely a learning process. Let me know how your next meeting goes.

Judy: **Speaking of which**, I gotta get ready because it starts in an hour! Thanks, Kevin. You've given me a lot of **food for thought**.

Vocabulary

shot down = if an idea or proposal is "shot down," it means it criticized and rejected

pick = select

empower = give someone power or authority

head up = lead; be responsible for

on my shoulders = my responsibility

you're catching on = you're starting to understand

Speaking of which = we use this phrase when something the other person just mentioned reminds us of something we want to say about that topic

food for thought = things to think about and consider carefully

Vocabulary Quiz

Complete each sentence with a word from the box. Three words are not used.

a piece of cake	bogged down	keen on	speaking of which
a real pain	caught on	on your shoulders	spinning my wheels
at my wits' end	fill you in on	put your foot down	stubborn
bickering	heading up	shot down	

1. Before you take over the role, I'll _____ everything that needs to be done.
2. He's got a lot of musical talent. When I started teaching him how to play the piano, he _____ very quickly.
3. I left my boyfriend because I was sick and tired of the never-ending _____. We hardly had a moment of peace.
4. You can't let your boss mistreat you. It's time to _____ and say "enough!"
5. I'm working with the corporate sponsors for the event, and Jessica is _____ the team of volunteers.
6. No matter what I do, my teenage kids won't listen to me. I'm _____.
7. Signing up for this website is _____! It only takes a minute and the steps are pretty self-explanatory.
8. The country's economy is getting _____ by too many restrictive laws.
9. This job doesn't have any opportunities for advancement. I feel like I'm just _____.
10. We're not too _____ any of these designs. Do you have anything else?
11. You've got aging parents and four small children to care for; you've got a lot _____.
12. I tried to open a business, but it was _____. Tons of bureaucracy and it would have taken months.

Speaking Task

Talk about a time when you have had to be a leader (can be an official or unofficial leadership experience) – when you needed to be decisive and help a group of people do something. What were the challenges, how did you act in that situation, and what was the result? Record your answer at <http://www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish> or e-mail me the MP3 at homework@espressoenglish.net

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. False
2. True
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. False
7. True
8. False
9. False
10. True
11. True

Vocabulary Quiz

1. fill you in on
2. caught on
3. bickering
4. put your foot down
5. heading up
6. at my wits' end
7. a piece of cake
8. bogged down
9. spinning my wheels
10. keen on
11. on your shoulders
12. a real pain