



ESL Podcast 471 – Trying to Get Off the Phone

GLOSSARY

intention – a plan to do something

* They're planning a trip to New York City with the intention of seeing the Statue of Liberty and Times Square.

the nerve – one's ability or willingness to do something that is inappropriate or disrespectful

* Her parents couldn't believe she had the nerve to ask them for more money after everything they'd done for her.

to let (someone) go – to end a phone call or conversation, supposedly so that the other person can do the other things that he or she needs to do

* I should let you go now, so that you can get back to work.

bull – something that is not true; a lie

* Nemo said that he was sick in bed all day yesterday, but that's bull! We saw him at the mall yesterday afternoon.

veterinarian – a doctor who gives medical care to animals

* When their cow went into labor, they called the veterinarian.

a call on the other line – another call that one receives while one is already talking to someone on the phone, and that causes a quiet beeping sound to interrupt the conversation

* Can you wait just a minute? I have a call on the other line. Let me find out who it is.

as good as new – as if something were new, especially if something has been fixed after it was damaged or injured

* After the vase broke, we glued the pieces back together and now it looks as good as new.

no thanks to (someone) – an informal phrase used to emphasize that one did not help something to happen, or that one was not responsible for something that happened

* Ebony graduated from business school with honors, but it was no thanks to her roommates, who never studied and always wanted her to watch TV with them.



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to gun for (someone or something) – to try to speed up to hit someone or something with one's car; to aim for and hurt someone or something while driving a car

* Some drivers think it's fun to gun for small animals on the roads.

to count (oneself) lucky – to think that one is fortunate; to recognize one's good luck

* Scott counts himself lucky that he was born into a family with so many relatives.

to get off scot-free – to not be punished, disciplined, or criticized for what one has done, especially when one has done something wrong

* The criminal had a very good lawyer and got off scot-free, even though most people thought he had stolen the money.

to cut (something) short – to end something before it has finished, often because no time is left

* The people in the audience asked so many good questions at the beginning that we had to cut our presentation short.

to get going – to leave; to go away; to depart

* This has been a lot of fun, but unfortunately I have to get going if I want to catch the last bus home tonight.

nature calls – an informal phrase used to mean that one has to go to the bathroom

* He drank several sodas with lunch, and now nature calls.

shocker – something that is very surprising and unexpected

* Vic's parents didn't tell him that he was adopted until he was 16 years old. It was quite a shocker!



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What happened after Joey took Fifi to the veterinarian?
 - a) The cat got better.
 - b) The veterinarian said that Joey was very lucky.
 - c) Joey refused to pay for the treatment.

 2. What does Curran mean when he says, “Nature calls”?
 - a) He wants to leave the office and go outdoors.
 - b) He has another call from an environmental group.
 - c) He needs to use the restroom.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to let (someone) go

The phrase “to let (someone) go,” in this podcast, means to end a phone call or conversation, supposedly so that the other person can do the other things that he or she needs to do: “If you don’t let him go now, he won’t be able to get home before dark.” The phrase “to let go” means to stop holding something or to drop something: “You’re hurting my arm. Let go!” Or, “Don’t let go of the steering wheel while you’re driving.” The phrase “to let it go” means to forget about something or to stop worrying about something: “Yes, she said some mean things about you, but that was years ago. It’s time to let it go.” Finally, the phrase “to let (someone) go” means to fire someone, or to take away someone’s job: “The company is letting people go as a way to save money.”

bull

In this podcast, the word “bull” means a lie or something that isn’t true: “That’s bull! I can’t believe he said that. It isn’t true.” The phrase “like a bull in a china shop” is used to describe someone who is accidentally hitting things and knocking them over or dropping things so that they break: “Please keep your son away from the expensive dishes! He’s like a bull in a china shop!” The phrase “to take the bull by the horns” means to deal with a difficult situation or problem without any delay or excuses: “The project is a mess, but we need to take the bull by the horns and stop blaming each other.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Telephone service has gone through many changes in the past. Long before we had cell phones, all “land lines” (fixed telephones) were connected through a “telephone exchange,” or an electronic system that connects telephone calls.

A person known as an “operator” would sit in front of a large board called a “plug board” or “switchboard” with many “sockets” (things that something else can be pushed into to connect electronically). The operator would “manually” (using one’s hands) move “cables” (wires covered in plastic) from one socket to another to connect callers with the people they wanted to speak with.

The caller would lift the “headset” (the piece of a phone that one puts next to one’s ear and mouth) and the operator would say, “Number, please?” Then the caller would state the number that he or she wanted to call. The operator would move the cable to the right socket to make that call. If it were a “long-distance” (not local) call, the operator might have to connect the cable to a socket that would connect to another operator, who would then have to do the same thing, creating a long “chain” (connection) before the long-distance call could be placed. This took much longer than just “dialing the number” (typing numbers on a phone) like we do today.

In the past, when more than two people wanted to speak over the phone, they had to use “party lines,” or shared “lines” (telephone connections) where more than two “parties” (people) could participate. These party lines didn’t allow the callers to have any privacy, and many people could “eavesdrop” (listen to something that one is not supposed to hear) on the conversations.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 471: Trying to Get Off the Phone.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 471. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This episode has a Learning Guide, you can find it on our website at eslpod.com. The Learning Guide will help you improve your English even faster by giving you some additional definitions, cultural notes, sample sentences, and a complete transcript of this episode.

This episode is a telephone conversation between Erin and Curran. It's all about trying to get off the phone – trying to end a telephone conversation. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Erin: So I told Joey that I had no intention of letting him use my car again. Can you believe the nerve of that guy, after what he did?

Curran: That's terrible, but I'm going to have to let you go. I have an appointment...

Erin: But I didn't tell you what else he said. He said that running over my cat was just an accident. That's bull. He said I should be thankful that he took Fifi to a veterinarian!

Curran: Yeah, I can see why you're mad. I think I have a call on the other line...

Erin: Well, I'm glad you agree with me. I said to him that Fifi may be as good as new now, but that is no thanks to him! He's never liked Fifi and I wouldn't be surprised if he was gunning for her when he ran her over. He should count himself lucky he's getting off scot-free for trying to kill my cat. I said...

Curran: Sorry to have to cut this short, but I really have to get going.

Erin: Oh, sure, but just let me tell you what I plan to do if he asks me again.

Curran: I really want to hear all about it, but...but...nature calls!



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Erin: Oh, okay, call me back. I haven't even told you what Sam told me about Ben yesterday. It's a real shocker!

Curran: Uh...right. I can't wait to hear all about it.

[end of dialogue]

We're in the middle of a conversation between Erin and Curran; Erin says, "So I told Joey that I had no intention of letting him use my car again." "Intention" is a plan to do something, what you plan on doing. Erin said she had "no intention," meaning she wasn't going to let Joey use her car again. She says, "Can you believe the nerve of that guy, after what he did?" The expression "the nerve," especially "can you believe the nerve" or "that guy has a lot of nerve," means your willingness or ability to do something that is inappropriate, disrespectful, something that will make someone else angry, something that is not right. "That guy has a lot of nerve," meaning he is doing something wrong and he knows it, and it is bothering me. Erin says, "Can you believe the nerve of that guy (of Joey)?" meaning he's doing something that he shouldn't be doing by asking her to use her car again.

Curran says, "That's terrible, but I'm going to have to let you go." "To let someone go" means, in this case, to end a phone call or a personal conversation. The idea is that you are going to let the other person continue with what they were doing or what they need to do, although the real intention – the real reason is so that you can go back and do what you want to do. So when someone says, "I'll let you go," often they mean "I need to go," but it's a polite way of saying I don't want to take up any more of your time. There's a couple of different meanings of this expression, so take a look at the Learning Guide for some more explanations.

Curran says, "I have an appointment." Erin, however, doesn't want to stop talking. She says, "But I didn't tell you what else he said. He (Joey) said that running over my cat was just an accident." "To run over" means that your car goes over something; if you run over a cat, you're probably going to kill it – unless it's a very strong cat! Erin says, "That's bull," speaking of what Joey said. "Bull," here, means something that is not true, something that is a lie. It's actually a short form for another expression, which is vulgar – a bad expression that begins with the letter "S" and ends with the letter "T". Well, this is an informal expression; you wouldn't want to use this in your work environment. When you say "that's bull" or "bull," that's an informal way to express that you know that this is wrong. Erin says, "Joey said I should be thankful that he took Fifi to a



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veterinarian!” Fifi is Erin’s cat. A “veterinarian” is a doctor who takes care of animals such as dogs and cats.

Curran says, “Yeah, I can see why you’re mad (I understand why you are angry). I think I have a call on the other line.” “To have a call on the other line” means you have another call – another phone call that you receive while you are talking to someone else. You may have two phones or you may have phones with the service that allows another person to call and to let you know by a small beep that you hear when you’re talking to someone else. Curran, of course, is looking for an excuse to end the conversation, that’s why he says “I think I have a call on the other line.” Of course, we know that’s probably bull!

Erin says, “Well, I’m glad you agree with me,” and of course, she continues talking. She says, “I said to Joey that Fifi may be as good as new now, but that is no thanks to him!” The expression “to be as good as new” means that something has been damaged or injured but now it is just like it were new, just as if nothing had happened to it. So Fifi, apparently, is alive. I thought for sure she would die when the car ran over her, but she’s a strong cat! Erin says, though, that Fifi is okay, no thanks to Joey. “No thanks to (someone)” is an informal expression used to emphasize that that person didn’t do anything to help, that it is not because of what the other person did, that person was not responsible for what happened.

Erin says, “He’s never liked Fifi and I wouldn’t be surprised if he was gunning for her when he ran her over.” “To gun for (someone or something),” especially if you’re in a car, means to go faster, to increase your speed so that you can hit someone. This, of course, is very dangerous; you don’t want to do this with a human being, you could hurt them or even kill them. Joey, however, I guess doesn’t like Fifi – I can understand why – and he is gunning for her, tries to kill her with the car. Or at least, that’s what Erin thinks. She says, “He should count himself lucky he’s getting off scot-free for trying to kill my cat.” The expression “to count yourself lucky” means to realize or recognize that you have had very good luck, that you are fortunate. This often is used when something almost bad happens to someone, or someone does something wrong and they’re not being punished for it – they should count themselves lucky. Joey should count himself lucky that he’s getting off scot-free. This expression, “to get off scot-free,” means not to be punished for something that you have done wrong, not to be criticized for something that you have done wrong. We usually use this expression when it is clear or obvious that the person is guilty but, for whatever reason, does not get punished, for example does not go to jail if they commit a crime (do something against the law).



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Curran does not want to continue talking to Erin, so finally he says, “Sorry to have to cut this short, but I really have to get going.” Curran is trying to be very polite at the beginning, but as time passes he is more and more direct with Erin. He’s still being polite, but he’s trying to be more insistent – more forceful. He says, “Sorry to have to cut this short.” “To cut (something) short” means to end something before it has finished, usually because you don’t have any more time. Curran is saying he has to cut this telephone conversation short, he has to end it, he really has to get going. When you say, “I have to get going,” you mean I have to leave, I have to go away, I have to depart.

Erin says, “Oh, sure, but just let me tell you what I plan to do if he asks me again.” Erin will still not stop talking. Curran then uses another excuse; he says, “I really want to hear all about it, but nature calls!” The expression “nature calls” is an informal one used to mean that you have to go to the bathroom, so that you cannot stay any longer – you cannot talk any longer, “nature calls.” Erin says, “Oh, okay, call me back. I haven’t even told you what Sam told me about Ben yesterday. It’s a real shocker!” A “shocker” is something that is very surprising, very unexpected. Curran says, “Uh...right. I can’t wait to hear all about it.” Of course, he doesn’t want to hear all about it, but he’s being polite.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Erin: So I told Joey that I had no intention of letting him use my car again. Can you believe the nerve of that guy, after what he did?

Curran: That’s terrible, but I’m going to have to let you go. I have an appointment...

Erin: But I didn’t tell you what else he said. He said that running over my cat was just an accident. That’s bull. He said I should be thankful that he took Fifi to a veterinarian!

Curran: Yeah, I can see why you’re mad. I think I have a call on the other line...

Erin: Well, I’m glad you agree with me. I said to him that Fifi may be as good as new now, but that is no thanks to him! He’s never liked Fifi and I wouldn’t be surprised if he was gunning for her when he ran her over. He should count himself lucky he’s getting off scot-free for trying to kill my cat. I said...

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Erin: Oh, sure, but just let me tell you what I plan to do if he asks me again.

Curran: I really want to hear all about it, but...but...nature calls!

Erin: Oh, okay, call me back. I haven't even told you what Sam told me about Ben yesterday. It's a real shocker!

Curran: Uh...right. I can't wait to hear all about it.

[end of dialogue]

We count ourselves lucky to have Lucy Tse as our scriptwriter for this episode.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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