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## ESL Podcast 400 – Working in a Dead End Job

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### GLOSSARY

**employment agency** – a business that helps people find jobs

\* DeShawn had been looking for a job for almost six months, so he decided to go to an employment agency to get some professional help.

**dead end job** – a job that does not have opportunities for the future; a job that does not lead to another job with greater responsibilities, importance, and pay

\* Working at a fast food restaurant is a dead end job for many people, so they usually don't stay there more than a few months.

**advancement** – promotion; moving up within an organization from an unimportant position to one with more responsibility and better pay

\* Cailee wants to find a job with a lot of opportunities for advancement so that she will always be challenged in her work.

**pay scale** – a system that sets a minimum and maximum payment amount to each kind of job in a business or organization

\* According to the company pay scale, a senior manager makes between \$75,000 and \$92,000 per year.

**pay raise** – an increase in one's salary; an increase in the amount of money that one is paid for working

\* Most employees get a pay raise at the end of their first year if they are good workers.

**employment history** – a record of where one has worked in the past and for how long

\* His employment history shows that he spent four years in the army before beginning to work in sales.

**mind-numbing** – boring; extremely uninteresting

\* That class is so mind-numbing that most of the students fall asleep in the first half-hour!

**menial** – boring and unimportant; uninteresting because something is too easy to do

\* During her first day at work, they gave her the menial task of writing addresses on envelopes. She was so bored!



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**to burn out** – to no longer be able to do something because one has done too much of it in the past and is too bored, tired, or sick to continue

\* Young lawyers who work 70 hours each week often burn out by the end of their third year.

**glass ceiling** – the idea that people, especially women, who work in an organization can see the top managers and presidents but can never become one of them

\* Many women think that there is a glass ceiling for them in this company because all of the directors, vice presidents, and presidents are men.

**to promote (someone)** – to give someone a better job that has more responsibility and better pay within the same organization where he or she was already working

\* Hank was promoted from Mechanic to Senior Mechanic last month and now he makes a lot more money.

**steppingstone** – something that helps a person get to another place or to another level, especially at work

\* Getting a college degree is a steppingstone to most good jobs.

**stumbling block** – something that makes it difficult or impossible to do something

\* When the runner hurt his knee, it was a major stumbling block in his athletic performance.

**reference** – an evaluation of a person as an employee, made by someone who knows one professionally, usually when one is applying for a job

\* Pauline used to work for me, so she asked me to write a letter of reference when she decided to apply for a new job.

**to be trapped** – to not have any options; to be forced to do something; to not be able to change something

\* Once they bought a house, they were trapped in their jobs, because if they quit working, they wouldn't be able to pay for their new home.

**personal satisfaction** – a feeling of happiness and contentment from what one is doing

\* Kayeesha worked as a lawyer for years, but she didn't find personal satisfaction until she quit her job and began singing professionally.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these would be part of a dead end job?
    - a) Advancement
    - b) Menial work
    - c) Personal satisfaction
  
  2. What does Kurt mean when he says that there was a glass ceiling in his job?
    - a) The building was made of glass.
    - b) He got cut a lot at work.
    - c) There were not opportunities for advancement.
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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **to burn out**

The phrase “to burn out,” in this podcast, means to no longer be able to do something because one has done too much of it in the past and is too bored, tired, or sick to continue: “After seven years of graduate school, Kelly was burnt out on studying and going to school.” The phrase “to burn up” means to have a very high fever or a very high body temperature: “This child is burning up! We need to take him to the doctor’s office right away.” Finally, the phrase “to burn down” means for a building to be destroyed by a fire so that there is nothing left: “When the candle fell over, the house made of wood quickly caught on fire and burned down.”

#### **reference**

In this podcast, the word “reference” means an evaluation of a person as an employee, made by someone who knows one professionally, usually when one is applying for a job: “People have to send a list of three references when they apply for that job.” The phrase “with reference to (something)” means regarding or about: “Hello, I’m calling with reference to your ad to sell your car.” When writing an academic paper, a “reference” is a book or article that one used to find information: “Don’t forget to list your references at the end of your essay.” Finally, as a verb, “to make a reference to” means to refer or to mention a book, article, or other source of information that one used while writing a paper: “Did you make a reference to any books from other countries, or did you read books only by American authors?”



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### CULTURE NOTE

American companies “recruit” (look for new employees) in many different ways. One of the simplest and most inexpensive ways is to place an “ad” (advertisement or announcement) in the local newspaper. Sometimes they place ads in “journals” (academic magazines) for professionals in a “field” (an area or type of work).

Many companies also use the power of the Internet for recruitment. Companies often post “job descriptions” (a summary of what the job is and what the company is looking for in a new employee) on their website. Other companies use employment websites specifically for job announcements to “post” (upload something to the Internet for others to read) their job announcements. “Jobseekers” (people who are looking for a new job) can read job announcements on those websites and then “apply” (send in the required papers to be considered for a job) for those jobs.

Companies that have a lot of money and need to hire for “top” (very important) positions often use “executive search firms,” which are also known informally as “headhunters.” These companies call people who are working in similar jobs at other companies and try to get them interested in coming to the company that is “hiring” (looking for a new employee). They often do this by offering to pay more money than what the other company is currently paying.

Finally, many American companies recruit on college “campuses” (areas with many college buildings). They send a representative to a college campus to speak with interested students before they have completed their education. Some of these students are offered jobs to work after they finish college even before their graduation from the university.

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



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 400: Working in a Dead End Job.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 400. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Working in a Dead End Job." It's a conversation between Kurt and a woman who works at an "employment agency," a company that helps you find a job. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Agency employee: Tell me why you'd like to sign up with our employment agency.

Kurt: Well, right now I'm working in a dead end job. There are no opportunities for advancement. I'm already at the top of the pay scale, so there's no chance of another pay raise.

Agency employee: Okay, I'd like to find out a little more about your employment history. Tell me about your last job.

Kurt: Oh, that was a mind-numbing position. I did menial work all day and I burned out in six months.

Agency employee: What about the job you had before that?

Kurt: The problem with that job was that there was a glass ceiling. They would never promote a person like me.

Agency employee: And what about the job you had before that?

Kurt: I only took that job as a steppingstone to the next one, but it turned out to be a stumbling block instead. My boss didn't like me and wouldn't give me a good reference.



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Agency employee: Okay, so you were not happy with any of the jobs you've had.

Kurt: No, they weren't right for me. I don't want to be trapped in a dead end job. I want something that will give me personal satisfaction.

Agency employee: I see. Well, we'll do the best we can. Have you considered working at an employment agency? I'm looking for a new job myself.

[end of dialogue]

The conversation begins with the woman who works for the employment agency asking Kurt, "Tell me why you'd like to sign up with our employment agency" – tell me why you want to use our agency – our company – to help you find a job. Kurt says, "Well, right now I'm working in a dead end job." A "dead end job" is a job that doesn't have a lot of opportunities; it doesn't have a very good future. A "dead end" is when you have a street that stops, that you can't go any farther on. Here, it's used to refer to a job that doesn't have any great importance, pay, or responsibilities in the future; it's not going to lead you to anything else.

Kurt says, "There are no opportunities for advancement." "Advancement," here, means moving up in the company; it's the same as a "promotion," to get a better job in the same company. Kurt says, "I'm already at the top of the pay scale, so there's no chance of another pay raise." The "pay scale" is a system that a business or organization uses to determine how much each job is going to be worth, how much they're going to pay their employees. If an employee is there for two years, they may get this salary; if they're in the company for five years, they get a different salary. So that's what a pay scale is; it's a set of, we would call them, "steps" that you go through as you are in the company longer, as you have more experience, or perhaps as you increase your education while at the job. A "pay raise" is an increase in the amount of money you receive for working, an increase in your salary.

The agency employee says, "Okay, I'd like to find out a little more about your employment history." Your "employment history" is a list or a description of the jobs that you have had in the past. If you look at my employment history, it began working at a car wash, cleaning cars when I was 15 years old. When I was 16, I worked at a nursing home, cleaning dishes in the kitchen for three or four months. Then, I worked in a store, selling things for almost seven years, and so on and so forth. Eventually, I ended up being a podcaster – it's a long story!



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Kurt says, in describing his last job, it “was a mind-numbing position.” “Mind-numbing,” here, means boring, very uninteresting. Not interesting at all – it was mind-numbing. To “numb” (numb) something means that you lose your feeling. For example, if you sit on your legs the wrong way your foot could go, we would say, to sleep. It would go numb; you couldn’t feel anything in your foot.

So, this is a mind-numbing – a brain-numbing, if you will – position. He says, “I did menial work all day and I burned out in six months.” “Menial” (menial) is similar to mind-numbing; it’s boring, it’s not important, it’s uninteresting. Usually, “menial” is a very simple physical task, such as washing the windows, or washing cars, or washing dishes – these are menial jobs. To “burn out” means that you can no longer work at that job; you are exhausted, mentally and perhaps physically. When you do a job for a long time, you may get sick of it; it becomes boring to you. “Burn” has several different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

The agency employee then asks Kurt, “What about the job you had before that?” – what was the previous job you had? Kurt says, “The problem with that job was that there was a glass ceiling.” A “glass ceiling” (ceiling) is the idea that people, especially women, who work in an organization can never become the managers, the vice presidents, or the presidents. They’re looking up as if through a ceiling made of glass at all of those men in the higher positions. The “ceiling” is, as you probably know, the top of a room; the bottom is called the “floor.”

So, “glass ceiling” is usually used to talk about women who are unable to advance or get promotions in an organization, but Kurt says that he was a victim of a glass ceiling. He says, “They would never promote a person like me.” To “promote” someone means to give them a better job, something with more pay and more responsibility.

Then, the employment agency employee asks Kurt, “Well, what about the job before that one?” Kurt says, “I only took that job as a steppingstone to the next one, but it turned out to be a stumbling block instead.” Couple of expressions here: first “steppingstone,” in this case, is something that helps you get to another level – to a higher level, especially at work. So, you start washing dishes, and you say, “Well, that’s a steppingstone for cleaning the tables in the dining room; that’s what I really want to do.” A “steppingstone” is the first, or one of the first jobs that you have that you hope will lead you to get a promotion. A “stumbling block” is something that makes it difficult or impossible to do something. To “stumble” means to fall; “stumbling block,” then, would be something in your path – in your way that would make you fall. Here, Kurt is



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talking about how the job he had was a stumbling block; it prevented him from advancing.

He says, “My boss didn’t like me and wouldn’t give me a good reference.” A “reference,” when we talk about a job, is an evaluation, usually a letter that someone will write about an employee, often for an employee that’s looking for another job outside of the company – a different job. “Reference” has a couple of different meanings in English however, so take a look at the Learning Guide so you know how to use it correctly.

The agency employee says, “Okay, so you were not happy with any of the jobs you’ve had.” Kurt says, “No, they weren’t right for me (they weren’t good for me). I don’t want to be trapped in a dead end job.” To be “trapped” means not to have any choices, not to have any options, to be forced to do something. Kurt doesn’t want to be trapped in a dead end job. He says, “I want something that will give me personal satisfaction.” “Personal satisfaction” is a feeling of happiness, feeling good about what you are doing.

The employee says, “I see” – I understand. Then she asks Kurt, “Have you considered working at an employment agency? I’m looking for a new job myself.” So the woman says that maybe Kurt wants to work at the employment agency, because she wants a new job.

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

[start of dialogue]

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Agency employee: I see. Well, we'll do the best we can. Have you considered working at an employment agency? I'm looking for a new job myself.

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by someone who definitely needs a pay raise, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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