



ESL Podcast 508 – Regretting Past Actions

GLOSSARY

to let (one's) temper get the best of (one) – to lose control of one's words and actions because one is very angry, saying and doing things that one normally wouldn't say or do

* After sitting in heavy traffic for hours, Bruce's temper got the best of him and he started yelling at the other drivers.

to freak out – to lose control of oneself; to panic, especially when one is very worried

* Chelsea freaked out when she lost her purse.

to rectify – to fix something that is broken; to correct something that is wrong; to solve; to repair

* He's hoping he can rectify his problems with his wife and they won't get divorced after all.

in retrospect – looking back on the past after something has already happened, especially when one wishes that one could change what happened

* It seemed like a good idea at the time, but in retrospect, I wish we had done things differently.

twerp – a stupid, annoying person whom one doesn't like

* Sacari thought her little brother was a twerp while they were growing up, but they're good friends now as adults.

hindsight is 20/20 – a phrase meaning that it is easy to understand a situation after it has happened, especially when one is unhappy about how something happened in the past and would like to change it

* Guido never should have married that woman, but hindsight is 20/20. There was no way for him to know what would happen.

dog and pony show – a meeting or event that is organized to impress other people, but isn't really important and doesn't really need to happen

* The mayor's office organizes a dog and pony show each time the mayor makes a public statement.

to sugarcoat – to make something seem nicer or better than it really is

* When Damian had to tell his employee that she was being fired, he tried to sugarcoat the news by saying, "You won't have to wake up so early anymore."



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objection – something that one says or does in opposition to something else, or because one doesn't want something else to happen

* Your proposal is a good idea, but my only objection is its cost.

to pull (one's) punches – to not use all of one's abilities, strengths, or resources; to not try to force something to happen

* Why would you pull your punches when you're negotiating? That's when you need to be as strong as possible.

to give an inch – to compromise; to change one's decision or change what one is asking for because another person wants one to do so

* They wanted to pay a lower price for the car, but the salesperson wouldn't give an inch.

nevertheless – regardless; even though something else is true

* Hideaki doesn't like baseball. Nevertheless, he agreed to take his cousin to the game.

repercussion – consequence; something bad that happens as a result of something else

* Scientists say there will be many repercussions if humans continue to pollute the air and water.

don't let the door hit you on the way out – a phrase used to mean that one wants a person to leave immediately, usually because he or she has said or done something that was inappropriate; a phrase used when one is happy that another person is leaving, usually after that person has done something to make one angry

* They had a horrible fight. He said, "I hate being around you when you're like this. I'm leaving!" And she said, "Well, don't let the door hit you on the way out!"



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why will the client think they're running a dog and pony show?
 - a) Because there were a lot of animals at the meeting.
 - b) Because the meeting didn't seem like serious business.
 - c) Because they're organizing a pet show.
2. What does Dennis think the boss will do?
 - a) Tell him to leave the company.
 - b) Tell him to be careful closing the door.
 - c) Tell him to find new clients as soon as possible.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to freak out

The phrase “to freak out,” in this podcast, means to lose control of oneself and panic, especially when one is very worried: “Gretel freaked out when she lost her son at the shopping center.” A “freak” is a person who is so interested in something that other people think is strange: “Jerry is a golf freak who plays golf at least five days a week, and watches golf on TV the other days.” A “control freak” is a person who likes to be in control and doesn't like to let other people help: “He's such a control freak that he didn't let anyone work on his project, even though it meant he had to work 90 hours each week.” Finally, a “freak of nature” is a natural event that is very unusual: “It would be a freak of nature if it snowed in Florida in July.”

to pull (one's) punches

In this podcast, the phrase “to pull (one's) punches” means to not use all of one's abilities, strengths, or resources, or to not try to force something to happen: “The professor didn't pull any punches, saying exactly what he didn't like about my essay.” The phrase “to beat (someone) to the punch” means to do something before another person can do it: “Kelvin wanted to be the first person in his town to buy a hybrid car, but Sasha beat him to the punch.” The phrase “as pleased as punch” means very happy: “She's as pleased as punch with her new job.” Finally, the phrase “to pack a punch” means to have a strong impact or effect: “That drink really packs a punch!”



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CULTURE NOTE

My Name is Earl is a popular TV series about a man who regrets his past actions. The “protagonist” (main character) is a man named Earl who was a “petty crook” (a criminal who is involved in minor or small crimes) for most of his life. One day, he had a \$100,000 “lottery ticket” (a small piece of paper that one buys and, if the number on that paper matches another number, one wins money), but then he was hit by a car and the lottery ticket was lost.

While he is in the hospital, “recovering” (getting better) from the “accident” (when a car hits something), he thinks about “karma,” or the idea that if one does good things, good things will happen to oneself, and if one does bad things, bad things will happen to oneself. He decides that karma “makes sense” (seems true) and decides that he wants to “turn his life around” (change one’s life in a good way). He makes a list of all the bad things he has done and begins doing “good deeds” (actions that benefit or help other people, even if they don’t benefit oneself) to “make up” (compensate) for his bad deeds.

After doing his first good deed, he finds the \$100,000 lottery ticket. He sees this as an example of karma and it “motivates” (gives a reason for doing something) him to continue doing good deeds to make up for the bad deeds in his past. He uses his “lottery winnings” (the money won in a lottery) to do the good deeds. The show is about his efforts to do good deeds and how his actions are “perceived” (seen and interpreted) by other people.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 508: Regretting Past Actions.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 508. 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, an 8- to 10-page guide that will help you improve your English even faster. Better yet, become a Learning Guide member. Or, if you'd like to support us with a donation, you can do that on our website as well.

This episode is called "Regretting Past Actions." It's a dialogue between Dennis and Nora using vocabulary about being sorry for things that you did. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Dennis: Oh, why did I let my temper get the best of me? I never should have said those things to the new client!

Nora: Don't freak out. I'm sure you didn't do any damage that can't be rectified. It's true that, in retrospect, you probably shouldn't have called Nathan, the head of the project, a twerp.

Dennis: Don't remind me of what I said! Hindsight is 20/20. Now they're going to think we're running a dog and pony show.

Nora: No, they're not. Nathan was being unreasonable and you tried to sugarcoat your objections the best you could. Everybody could see that you were trying to pull your punches, but that guy just wouldn't give an inch.

Dennis: Nevertheless, this is going to have repercussions.

Nora: Oh, here comes the boss now. I think she wants to talk to you.

Dennis: I've no doubt about that.

Nora: What do you suppose she's going to say?



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Dennis: I know exactly what she's going to say: "Don't let the door hit you on the way out!"

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Dennis saying, "Oh, why did I let my temper get the best of me?" Your "temper" is your anger. To say "you let your temper get the best of you" means that you got very angry, you lost control, you started saying and doing things that you would not normally do. When something "gets the best of you," it defeats you somehow. In this case, it means that your anger has defeated you in some way and caused you some problems.

Dennis says, "I never should have said those things to the new client!" the new customer, obviously talking about something at his job. Nora says, "Don't freak out." The verb "to freak (freak) out" is an informal two-word verb meaning to lose control of yourself, to panic, to get very worried. "Freak" actually has a couple of different meanings in English; you can find more in this episode's Learning Guide.

Nora says, "I'm sure you didn't do any damage that can't be rectified." "To rectify (something)" is to fix something that is broken, to correct something that is wrong, to repair something. We often use this verb in talking about problems that we've caused: "I'm going to rectify the situation," I'm going to fix it; I'm going to make it better. Nora says, "It's true that, in retrospect, you probably shouldn't have called Nathan, the head of the project, a twerp." "In retrospect" is an expression meaning looking back on something that has already happened; looking at the past, especially when you wish that you would have done something differently. Normally, when someone says "in retrospect," they're usually expressing some sort of regret, something they wish they did not do or wish they hadn't done.

So, Nora is saying it was not a good idea for Dennis to call Nathan, who's the leader of this project at his work, a twerp. A "twerp" (twerp) is an informal insulting word meaning someone who's stupid, someone who you don't like because they're annoying or bothering you. It's a pretty strong insult; you certainly wouldn't want to call anyone a twerp at your work. Sometimes the word is used to imply that someone is too young to have sufficient experience.

Dennis says, "Don't remind me of what I said! Hindsight is 20/20." "Hind" is "behind," so "hindsight" means looking back. When we say your vision – your sight (how well you can see) is "20/20," that means that it's perfect. "Hindsight is 20/20" is an old expression meaning it's always easy to see what you did wrong



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or did right when you are looking at the past; it's much more difficult to know what to do in the future. Dennis says, "Now they're going to think we're running a dog and pony show." The expression "a dog and pony show" refers to a meeting or an event that is organized to impress other people but isn't really very important, doesn't have a lot of depth. "A dog and pony show" is often a somewhat negative way of describing someone going in and giving a presentation, for example, at another company. A "pony" is a small type of horse that you might see, for example, in the circus. It's a small type of horse that a child might ride, for example.

So Nora says, "No, they're not (they're not going to think we are running a dog and pony show). Nathan was being unreasonable and you tried to sugarcoat your objections as best you could." Remember, Nathan is the guy that Dennis called a twerp. "Nathan was being unreasonable and you (Dennis) tried to sugarcoat your objections." "To sugarcoat (something)" means to make something seem nicer than it really is, especially something that's, perhaps, critical or negative. "Sugar" is, of course, something that is sweet. If you put sugar on top of something it may make it taste better – unless, of course, that something is, say, a steak or your eggs. You shouldn't put sugar on those – usually! Dennis was trying to sugarcoat his objections. Your "objections" are your differences of opinion, things that you have against what someone else is saying. "To sugarcoat your objections," then, means to try to give your disagreements but do it in a nice way.

"Everybody could see," Nora goes on, "that you were trying to pull your punches, but that guy just wouldn't give an inch." "To pull your punches" means not to use all of your abilities, not to do everything that you possibly could. The word "punch" has several different meanings: one meaning comes from boxing, where you take your fist (your hand – your closed hand) and you try to hit the other person. That's called a "punch." "To pull your punches" means not to hit the person as hard as you could. In general, however, it means not to use all of your strength and ability. For more meanings of the word "punch," take a look at today's Learning Guide. Nora says that Nathan, however, just wouldn't give an inch. The expression "to give an inch" is to compromise; to change your idea, even a little bit. You say one thing; I say something different. When one of us changes our opinion so that we can agree, we would give an inch – an inch, of course, being a very small amount. But this guy wouldn't give an inch; he wouldn't compromise.

Dennis says, "Nevertheless, this is going to have repercussions." Nevertheless (regardless; even though what you say what is true), this action (what he did by calling him a twerp) will have repercussions. "Repercussions" is just another



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word for consequences, usually negative consequences, something bad that happens because of something else.

Nora says, “Oh, here comes the boss now (meaning the boss is walking towards them). I think she wants to talk to you.” Dennis says, “I’ve no doubt about that,” meaning I’m sure that’s true, she will want to talk to me. Nora says, “What do you suppose she’s going to say?” meaning what do you guess, what do you think she’s going to say. “What do you suppose she’s going to say?” Dennis says, “I know exactly what she’s going to say: ‘Don’t let the door hit you on the way out!’” This is an old expression; don’t let the door hit you on the way out while you’re leaving, in other words. It’s a phrase used to mean that you want someone to leave immediately, usually because they have said something or done something wrong. It could mean because they’re fired – they’re losing their job, or that they just want that person to leave. “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out!” That’s what all my old girlfriends used to say to me!

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

[start of dialogue]

Dennis: Oh, why did I let my temper get the best of me? I never should have said those things to the new client!

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Dennis: Don’t remind me of what I said! Hindsight is 20/20. Now they’re going to think we’re running a dog and pony show.

Nora: No, they’re not. Nathan was being unreasonable and you tried to sugarcoat your objections the best you could. Everybody could see that you were trying to pull your punches, but that guy just wouldn’t give an inch.

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Dennis: I know exactly what she's going to say: "Don't let the door hit you on the way out!"

[end of dialogue]

This script was written by Dr. Lucy Tse, who never pulls her punches; she gives it everything she has!

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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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