



## ESL Podcast 576 – Using Unfair Influence

### GLOSSARY

**contract** – a legal agreement between two or more parties who agree to provide a product or service in exchange for money or something else

\* We have an appointment at 3:00 today to sign the new rental contract.

**to bid** – to offer to do something for a particular amount of money when many other people or companies are making similar offers, so that the buyer can decide which bid offers the best quality for the lowest price

\* Is your company going to bid on the new road construction project?

**to be of service** – to be useful or helpful in some way

\* If there's anything I can do to be of service during your stay in our hotel, please let me know.

**to secure** – to get; to obtain

\* How many new clients have we secured in the past two months?

**the less said the better** – a phrase used to mean that one doesn't want to share a lot of details about something, probably because those details would include something bad, wrong, or immoral that the other person doesn't really need or want to know about

\* I don't know how Marty got those great front-row concert tickets, and I don't want to know. The less said the better!

**friends in high places** – professional and/or personal relationships or connections with people who are very powerful and can make important decisions

\* Manny has lots of friends in high places and he even knows the President of the United States personally.

**Capitol Hill** – U.S. Congress; the name of the area where the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives meet, used to refer to powerful political decision-making in U.S. government

\* After college, James got a job on Capitol Hill, working in his senator's office for a few years.

**to line the right pockets** – to pay money to a powerful decision-maker so that he or she makes a particular decision or views something in a particular way

\* It can be really difficult to get permission to build in this area, but if we line the right pockets, it shouldn't be a problem.



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**to pull some strings** – to do something that is secretive, unusual, or immoral to influence a person or control a situation

\* I had to pull some strings, but the home sellers have finally agreed to the price we were asking for.

**bribery** – the illegal practice of giving money to politicians or other decision-makers to make them do what one wants

\* In some countries, people are expected to use bribery to pay off police officers if they don't want to get a traffic ticket.

**preferential treatment** – favoritism; the practice of giving more favorable results or decisions to a particular person or organization, often because one has received money or favors from that person or organization

\* The boss gives a lot of preferential treatment to her own daughter, letting her take long breaks and giving her the easiest projects.

**backroom deal** – a transaction or agreement that happens secretly without the awareness of all the people who will be affected by it, and is often illegal or immoral

\* The directors made a backroom deal to sell the company at a very low price, and in exchange, they were each secretly paid \$250,000.

**business as usual** – the way things are always done in a particular workplace or industry

\* Working 12-hours days is business as usual in many law firms.

**influence peddling** – the illegal practice of using one's authority or decision-making power as a way to get money or favors from other people

\* The senator made more than \$3 million through influence peddling before people found out what he was doing.

**corruption** – dishonest behavior by people who have a lot of power, especially in politics

\* There's so much corruption in the city that it's impossible to do anything without paying extra money to the officials.

**rampant** – prevalent; very common; not unusual or rare

\* The flu was rampant in our schools all winter.



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**unethical** – immoral; wrong

\* Do you think it is unethical for doctors to receive money and gifts for recommending certain drugs to their patients?

**dirty work** – tasks or activities that are unpleasant or wrong, but need to be done

\* You couldn't pay me enough to do that type of dirty work!

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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these is illegal?

- a) Bidding.
- b) Bribery.
- c) Signing contracts.

2. Why doesn't Josey want to hire Curt?

- a) Because Josey's company can do the dirty work itself.
- b) Because Curt doesn't understand business as usual.
- c) Because Josey's company has high ethical standards.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **to bid**

The verb "to bid," in this podcast, means to offer to do something for a particular amount of money when many other people or companies are making similar offers, so that the buyer can decide which bid offers the best quality for the lowest price: "Some companies bid low and then raise their prices after they have been selected for the project." At an auction, "to bid" means to say how much money one will pay for something: "Everyone was surprised when Mr. Hylton bid \$100,000 for the painting." Finally, the phrase "to bid against (someone)" means to be in competition with another person to see who will bid the largest amount of money to buy something: "You're bidding against one of the richest women in town. There's no way you'll win."

#### **to secure**

In this podcast, the verb "to secure" means to get or obtain: "Do you think those negotiators will be able to secure a peace agreement between the two countries?" The verb "to secure" also means to protect something, or to keep something safe: "They installed extra locks on all the doors to secure their home." Or, "We need to act now to secure the health of the planet for future



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generations.” The phrase “to secure a loan” means to borrow money from a bank or another financial institution by agreeing to give something up if one cannot pay back the money: “He used his new car to secure the business loan.” Finally, the phrase “to secure (something) to (something)” means to tie something to something else, usually with a piece of rope: “How did you secure your kayak to the top of the car?”

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### CULTURE NOTE

Rod Blagojevich was the Governor of Illinois from 2003 to 2009, but he was “arrested” (taken to jail for having broken the law) on corruption “charges” (accusations; claims of having done something illegal) on December 9, 2008. Specifically, he was arrested for “solicitation” (requesting or asking for something) of bribery in “pay-to-play schemes,” in which people are asked to give money to a politician secretly in order to receive a particular job or participate in a particular committee.

When Barack Obama became the President of the United States, his “Senate” (one-half of the law-making part of the U.S. government) “seat” (position) for the state of Illinois was left “vacant” (empty). In this situation, the governor has the power to “appoint” (decide who should have a particular government position or job) a “successor” (the next person to receive something – in this case, the Senate seat). This decision should be based on an individual’s qualifications, such as education and experience. However, Governor Blagojevich tried to “auction off” (sell) the seat to the “highest bidder” (the person willing to pay the most for something).

He won’t “be tried” (have a trial in a courtroom) until June 2010, but he has already been punished for his unethical actions. On January 8, 2009, the Illinois House of Representatives voted to “impeach” (take away a high-powered politician’s job) Governor Blagojevich. On January 29, 2009, the Illinois Senate made the same decision, so he was “removed from office” (he lost his job as governor) on that day. The Illinois Senate also voted to prevent him from ever “holding” (having) another “public office” (government job) in the State of Illinois.

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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 576: Using Unfair Influence.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 576. 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. You can support this podcast by becoming a member of ESL Podcast. When you becoming a member, you also receive the Learning Guides for each of our episodes, 8- to 10-page PDF guides that help you improve your English even faster. Don't forget about our ESL Podcast Store or our ESL Podcast Blog. Both of those you can find on our website.

This episode is called "Using Unfair Influence." Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Josey: Hello, I'm Josey Kim.

Curt: Hi, I'm Curt West. Thanks for agreeing to meet with me.

Josey: You mentioned on the phone that you can help us get that government contract we're bidding on, is that right?

Curt: Absolutely. I'm sure I can be of service to your company and secure that contract without too much difficulty.

Josey: I appreciate your confidence, but can you tell me more about how you plan to do that?

Curt: I think the less said the better. Let's just say that I have friends in high places.

Josey: I'm not sure I understand you.

Curt: Come on, you know how business is done on Capitol Hill. If you line the right pockets, it's not difficult to pull some strings to get what you want.



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Josey: Are you suggesting that our company use bribery to get preferential treatment on our bid?

Curt: I'm simply saying that backroom deals are business as usual in the government.

Josey: If you're suggesting that we hire you to do influence peddling, I can tell you now that we're not interested. Corruption may be rampant in government, but we're not willing to do anything unethical to get a contract.

Curt: Suit yourself, but without somebody like me doing your dirty work, there's no way you're going to win that contract.

Josey: That may be, Mr. West, but that's a chance we're willing to take.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Josey saying, "Hello, I'm Josey Kim." Curt says, "Hi, I'm Curt West. Thanks for agreeing to meet with me." Josey says, "You mentioned on the phone that you can help us get that government contract we're bidding on, is that right?" A "contract" is a legal agreement between two people or two groups, where one of the "parties," as they're called – one of the people or the groups agrees to give something, to do something for the other group or person, and that other party gives them money or something else of value.

Josey is talking about a government contract that her business is bidding on. "To bid" (bid) means to offer to do something, in this case for a particular amount of money. Often the government has work that it needs done, and it has businesses do that work. But the businesses have to bid; they have to say, "I'll do it for this much," "I'll do it for that much," and then the government picks the best bid, sometimes the cheapest or the one that will do the most for the money. "To bid" has other meanings in English as well; take a look at our Learning Guide for those.

Curt says, "Absolutely," meaning yes, we can help you get that government contract. He says, "I'm sure I can be of service to your company and secure that contract without too much difficulty." "To be of service to (someone)" means to be useful, to be helpful to that person. "To secure" here means to get, to obtain. "Secure" has other meanings in English; those – guess what – are in the Learning Guide.



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Josey says, “I appreciate your confidence, but can you tell me more about how you plan to do that?” So Josey wants to know how Curt can help her company get this government contract, and Curt says, “I think the less said the better.” This expression, or phrase, “the less said the better,” is used to indicate that you don’t want to give a lot of information – a lot of details about something, perhaps because the details would be about something bad, unethical, immoral, or wrong in some way, and the other person doesn’t need to know that information. Sometimes the phrase is simply used to mean that I don’t want to talk about it or that’s not something we want to talk about because, perhaps, it’s embarrassing to someone: “The less said the better.”

Curt says, “Let’s just say that I have friends in high places.” “To have friends in high places” means that you have personal or professional relationships with people who have a lot of power. Perhaps you know the governor of your state. If I knew our current Governor Schwarzenegger I would say that I have friends in high places.

Josey says, “I’m not sure I understand you.” Curt says, “Come on (meaning be reasonable; don’t joke with me), you know how business is done on Capitol Hill.” Capitol Hill is in Washington, D.C.; it’s where the building – the Capitol Building is located, where you have the U.S. Representatives and the U.S. Senators. They meet in the Capitol Building, so when someone says Capitol Hill, they’re referring to the Senate and the House of Representatives, or simply the Congress, which is another word for those two groups.

Curt says, “If you line the right pockets, it’s not difficult to pull some strings to get what you want.” “To line (line) the right pockets” means to give money to powerful people so that they will make a particular decision or take a particular view on something. You’re basically influencing them illegally – unethically – by giving them money. This is a type of what we would call more generally “corruption,” where people in the government are taking money, or houses or vacations or whatever, in exchange for making certain decisions to help the people who gave him or her that money. That’s what it means to line someone’s pockets. He says, “it’s not difficult to pull some strings to get what you want.” The phrase “to pull some strings” means to do something in secret, something unusual, perhaps unethical to influence a person or a situation. It doesn’t always have to be something that is illegal. “To pull some strings” means simply to use your influence – your power to get something done. But with Curt, we kind of think it is unethical!





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Josey says, “Are you suggesting that our company use bribery to get preferential treatment on our bid?” “Bribery” (bribery) is the illegal practice of giving money to politicians or other decision-makers to make them do what you want to do, so it’s to line someone’s pockets, as we said earlier. That’s bribery, and the verb is “to bribe.” “Preferential treatment” means someone is going to be favorable toward you; they’re going to make decisions that help you or your organization. Again, if this is done because they received a bribe then that would be illegal and unethical.

Curt says, “I’m simply saying that backroom deals are business as usual in the government.” A “backroom (one word) deal” is an agreement that happens in secret, without people knowing about it, certainly without the general public – the average person knowing about it. “Business as usual” here means the way things have always been done in this particular kind of business or in this type of organization, in this case the government. Curt is saying that the government always has these secret agreements – these secret deals, that’s business as usual – as normal.

Josey says, “If you’re suggesting that we hire you to do influence peddling, I can tell you now we’re not interested.” “Influence peddling” (peddling) is, again, the illegal practice of using your authority or your power as a way to get money or favors from other people. Josey is saying that her company is not going to give Curt money so that he can go bribe government officials. She says, “Corruption may be rampant in government, but we’re not willing to do anything unethical to get a contract.” “Corruption” is, as we mentioned before, dishonest behavior by people who have a lot of power, especially governments. “Rampant” (rampant) means very common, not unusual; often a negative thing that’s very common. “Unethical” means wrong, immoral, often illegal. But unethical doesn’t necessarily mean it’s illegal, but it does mean that it’s wrong; it’s against the common understanding of right and wrong.

Curt says, “Suit yourself,” meaning you can do what you want to do; I don’t care. “Suit yourself, but without somebody like me doing your dirty work, there’s no way you’re going to win that contract.” “Dirty work” here means doing things that are not pleasant, perhaps are wrong, but that you are going to have to do. Curt says that if you don’t do this – if you don’t bribe the government officials – you won’t win the contract; the contract will not be given to you. Josey says, “That may be, Mr. West (that may be correct, she means), but that’s a chance we’re willing to take,” meaning that’s a risk that we are willing to take. Perhaps we won’t get the contract, but we won’t do anything illegal or unethical.





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

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[end of dialogue]



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I do, in fact, have friends in high places. I know the scriptwriter here at the Center for Educational Development, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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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