GLOSSARY

gloom and doom – a feeling that nothing good can happen; a feeling that the future will be very bad
* Given the current recession, many people spend all of their time talking about gloom and doom.

outrageous – very difficult to believe; unfair; extremely surprising
* Who would tell such outrageous stories about you?

on the verge of going under – having a lot of financial problems and almost going out of business
* Our store is on the verge of going under, and if sales don't increase soon, we'll have to close the business.

misleading – leading people to incorrect conclusions; making people believe something that isn't true
* It's misleading to say that he finished fifth from last, because there were only six people in the race. It would be better to say that he won second place.

outright – completely; entirely; totally
* That man is an outright criminal who should spend the rest of his life in jail!

irate – very angry and upset
* Donors were irate when they found out that the organization was using their money to have big staff parties instead of to help poor people.

innuendo – an indirect statement that suggests something is true, but without actually stating it clearly
* Is that really true that James has been dating three women at once, or is it just innuendo?

to be nothing short of (something) – to be something, used when one wants to emphasize how extreme or inappropriate something is
* The kind of behavior you're describing is nothing short of sexual harassment. You should report it to the human resources department.

character assassination – an attack on another person that focuses on who he or she is, or what he or she believes, more than on what he or she has said or done
* This political campaign should have been about important social issues, but instead it focused on character assassination.

defamation of character – the practice of writing or saying things that are not true about another person, making other people dislike him or her
* If this defamation of character continues, she's probably going to lose all of her clients.

reputation – the way one is viewed or perceived by other people; the good or bad opinion that other people have of oneself
* I need to find a mechanic who has a good reputation for providing high-quality service at a low cost.

image – the way that a person or company is viewed or perceived by other people; the general impression that people have of a person or company
* The Department of Motor Vehicles is trying to improve its image by providing faster, friendlier service.

retraction – a written statement that appears in a newspaper or magazine to correct an error that was printed in a previous article
* Thousands of people read the incorrect information in the article, but unfortunately very few of them will ever read the retraction in which the newspaper corrected the mistake.

no-good – worthless; not having any value; of very poor quality
* I wish I'd never bought this no-good car. It's always breaking down.

mudslinger – a person who says bad things about another person to make other people dislike him or her
* Who is the mudslinger who's telling all these lies about us?

to neglect – to fail to do something; to not do something that one should have done
* They've neglected their yard for years, never mowing or weeding, and now it looks terrible.

slander – a spoken lie about another person; something negative and untrue that one says about another person, usually to make other people dislike that person
* How can their company's president say these things about our board of directors? Isn't that slander?

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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Alex mean when he asks, "What's with the gloom and doom?"
a) He wants to know why everyone is so happy.
b) He wants to know why Paige looks so depressed.
c) He wants to know why the lights haven't been turned on.

2. What would you expect a mudslinger to do?
a) Be on the verge of going under.
b) Share misleading information.
c) Print a retraction.

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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to go under
The phrase "to go under," in this podcast, means to go out of business because of financial problems: "What percentage of new restaurants goes under in their first three years?" The phrase "to go about" means to do something, usually on one's own initiative even if other people aren't interested in one's actions: "Stanley never earned much money, but he went about saving everything he could for years, and now he's almost a millionaire." The phrase "to go behind (someone's) back" means to do something without letting another person know, or without asking for his or her permission: "Cheryl's boss was really angry that she contacted the client behind his back." The phrase "to go above and beyond the call of duty" means to do much more than was expected: "The teacher received a special award for going above and beyond the call of duty to help his students academically."

retraction
In this podcast, the word "retraction" means a written statement that appears in a newspaper or magazine to correct an error that was printed in a previous article:

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"The newspaper printed a short retraction apologizing for its error and providing the correct information." The verb "to retract (something)" means to say that what one said earlier was not true, or that one did not really intend to say it: "We were all shocked when the man said he committed the crime, but even more shocked when he retracted his confession the next day!" Finally, the verb "to retract" can mean for part of something to go back inside something else: "Once the cat calms down, its claws will retract into its paws."

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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, people can "sue" (take to court and ask to be paid money) for defamation, "claiming" (saying that something is true) that the "defendant" (the person who is brought to court and accused of a crime) "knowingly" (with full awareness and knowledge) lied about a person or business in order to harm the reputation of that person or business. Proving that a statement was "false" (not true) is pretty "straightforward" (direct; simple; easy), but a false statement is defamation only if the person who made that statement did it while knowing that it was false.

Defendants can defend themselves against defamation by arguing that they had a "good-faith belief" in the statement, meaning that they honestly thought the thing they were saying was true. In these cases, the defendant will have to "prove" (show evidence of) what information was available to him or her at the time when the statement was made and show that it was "reasonable" (rational; logical) for him or her to have believed it was true.

Defendants can also defend themselves by arguing that the statement was merely their personal "opinion" (what one thinks). It is not illegal to share one's opinion – in fact, it is protected under "free speech" (freedom from being punished for what one believes or says). In these cases, the defendant must prove that what he or she said was "presented" (shared with others) as a personal opinion and not as a "statement of fact" (something that is 100% true).

There are other defenses against claims of defamation, but the two described above are the most common and best known.

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

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 604: Harming a Professional Reputation.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 604. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California. It is beautiful today especially; the sun is shining, another beautiful day in L.A. I hope the sun is shining where you are, unless, of course, you're listening to this at night.

Visit our website at eslpod.com, day or night, and download the Learning Guide for this episode. Don't know what a Learning Guide is? Well, go to our website and find out!

This episode is called "Harming a Professional Reputation." "To harm" means to damage. One's "reputation" is what other people think of you. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Alex: Good morning. What's with the gloom and doom?

Paige: Have you seen this morning's newspaper?

Alex: No, I haven't.

Paige: You'd better read this. It's an article about our company.

Alex: Let me see that. This is outrageous! How can anybody print such lies? We're not on the verge of going under. How did they get a hold of so much misleading and outright wrong information?

Paige: What I'm irate about is what it says about you, as the owner. The article is full of innuendos about your background. It's nothing short of character assassination. We'll sue the paper for defamation of character.

Alex: I'm not worried about my personal reputation. I'm more concerned about the company's image. I'm going down to that paper and making them print a retraction.

Paige: How're you going to do that?

Alex: After I call the reporter a no-good mudslinger, I'll give him the facts, the ones he neglected to include in this story.

Paige: Be careful what you say to him, especially in front of his coworkers. You don't want him suing you for slander!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Alex saying, "Good morning" to Paige. "What's with the gloom and doom?" "Gloom (gloom) and doom (doom)" is an expression that means that nothing good is going to happen. It's a feeling that the future will be bad, that bad things will happen soon. "Gloom" means sadness. We sometimes talk here in Los Angeles about the weather in June, we say it's "June gloom." That's because in the summertime there are often clouds that come in over the ocean and it is not sunny out, like it is today. "Doom" is bad things that will happen. So "gloom and doom" means that you think bad things will happen in the future.

Paige responds, "Have you seen this morning's newspaper?" Alex says, "No, I haven't." Paige replies, "You better read this (in other words, you should read this). It's an article about our company." Alex says, "Let me see that. This is outrageous!" he says. Something that is "outrageous" means it's very surprising, very difficult to believe. Often it's used to describe something that is very unfair, something that is wrong. Alex says, "How can anybody print such lies?" "Print" meaning publish, in this case, in a newspaper. "We're not on the verge of going under," he says. "To be on the verge of (something)" means to be almost ready to (something): "He is on the verge of asking her out on a date." All he needs is a little beer to give him courage!

Well here, we're talking about being on the verge of going under. "To go under" is a two-word phrasal verb that means to fail, to have a lot of financial problems, to go out of business, to lose your business. Alex says that their company is not on the verge of going under. He says, "How did they get a hold of (meaning how did they obtain, how did they get) so much misleading and outright wrong information?" "Misleading" means that you are telling people something that will make them come to the incorrect – the wrong conclusions. You're making people believe something that isn't true. That's misleading. The prefix "mis" (mis) usually is related to a negative idea. We could say something was "mishandled," meaning it wasn't dealt with – it wasn't handled correctly. Or, you

could say, "I mislaid my watch." "Laid" comes from the verb "to lay" (lay), meaning to put something down. Well, if you mislaid your watch (past tense), you put it somewhere and now you can't remember where it is. Sort of like my brain, my wife tells me! Alex says that the information in the newspaper is misleading and outright wrong. "Outright" (one word) means completely, totally, entirely, usually something that is completely wrong or totally wrong.

Paige says, "What I'm irate about is what it says about you, as the owner." "To be irate" (irate) means to be very angry, to be very upset. Paige says, "The article is full of innuendos about your background." An "innuendo" (innuendo) is an indirect statement that suggests something is true but without actually saying it's true. For example, you don't go to work one day because you say that you are sick. The next day you go to work and your boss says, "Well, you recovered very quickly from your illness." "To recover" means to get better. But, the boss is making a joke here; he's really making an innuendo. He's saying that you weren't really sick. "It's nothing short of character assassination," Paige says about what the newspaper says about Alex. The phrase "to be nothing short of" means to be something, used usually when we want to emphasize how extreme or inappropriate something is. So, it's kind of a strange expression. Although you have a negative word, "nothing," you're really saying the opposite; you're saying that this is true. "What he did is nothing short of theft (to steal something)." "Nothing short of" means it actually is theft; he actually did steal something. Here, the newspaper printed or published some innuendos about Alex that Paige thinks are nothing short of character assassination, meaning it is character assassination. "Character assassination" is when you attack another person because of who he or she is or what they may believe, even though it has nothing to do with their job or whatever it is that they are famous for or known for. Politics is full of character assassination, where the political candidates try to say bad things about the other person, often using innuendos. This is an excellent example.

Paige says, "We'll sue the paper for defamation of character." "To sue" means to take them to court and have them pay money because of what they did, because it was wrong, because it damaged you, it hurt you, it harmed you. "Defamation" comes from the verb "to defame," which means to say bad things about another person. "Character" describes who a person is: their honesty, their loyalty, and so forth. So, "defamation of character" is to harm someone's character, to say bad things – untrue things about them.

Alex says, "I'm not worried about my personal reputation (what other people think of me). I'm more concerned about the company's image." The "image" is similar

to reputation; it's how other people see you, or how other people see or view your company. He says, "I'm going down to that paper (I'm going to get in my car and go over to their building) and make them print a retraction." A "retraction" is when a newspaper or magazine admits that they made a mistake, that they committed an error, and they publish that in the newspaper. They put that in the next day or the next week's issue of the newspaper or magazine. "Retraction," as the expression "to go under," has different meanings; take a look at the Learning Guide for more of those.

Paige says, "How're you going to do that?" Alex replies, "After I call the reporter (the journalist, the person who wrote the story) a no-good mudslinger, I'll give him the facts." "No-good" means a very poor quality, not very good, worthless. A "mudslinger" is a person who says bad things about another person so that everyone will dislike that other person. "To sling" means to throw. "Mud" is, of course, the earth – ground, when you put water on it. So, we're saying that this person, just like someone who throws mud at someone else, is trying to do something harmful to them by saying false things about them. Alex says he's going to give the reporter the facts, the facts that he neglected to include in this story. "To neglect" means not to do something you should have done, to fail to do something.

Paige says, "Be careful what you say to him, especially in front of his coworkers (his colleagues, the people he works with at the newspaper). You don't want him suing you for slander!" "Slander" (slander) is when someone says something false about you. "Libel" (libel) is when someone writes something false and damaging about you.

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

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

I don't want to neglect to thank our wonderful scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

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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