

BUSINESS IDIOMS

Idioms exist in every language. They are words or phrases that are not meant to be taken literally, so you cannot simply translate each individual word to work out the meaning. If, for example, you say someone has “**cold feet**”, it does not mean their toes are cold. It actually means they are nervous about something.

The best way to learn idioms is to chat with local people, as they can tell you the true meaning. You will find that idioms may differ from region to region as traditions and cultures differ.

Common business idioms

What do you think these mean? If you don't know, use a dictionary or ask your trainer to help you understand the meaning.

1. Can you just give me a **ball park figure**?
2. We have to be careful at this stage in the negotiation, so please make sure you do everything **by the book**.
3. If we launch our product quickly, there is a chance we can **corner the market**.
4. I need to know exactly what your **game plan** is before I can move forward.
5. Erik is a great employee. He always **goes the extra mile**.
6. Valerie is new and she's still **learning the ropes**.
7. Giving our customers a discount is a **no-brainer**.
8. The thing is, I'm not sure we're both **on the same page**. Marcus seems to think this is going to be an easy project to manage, but he doesn't realise how tight the budget is.
9. Our competitors have really **raised the bar** with their latest low-cost product.
10. Taking a job in IT is always a **safe bet**. People always need help with their computer systems.
11. I really find working with Janis difficult. We just don't **see eye to eye**.
12. Well, that was an awkward meeting! No-one mentioned the **elephant in the room**.
13. Retaining staff is always **an uphill battle**.
14. We don't really spend money on marketing. All our work is by **word of mouth**.
15. We haven't had a chance to **touch base** since you got back from the U.S. Do you have time now?

Practice Exercises

1 > Idioms you may hear in a meeting

Match these idioms in bold with their meanings.

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|--|---|
| 1. We're going round and round in circles here. | a. To summarise an idea |
| 2. I think you're barking up the wrong tree with that idea. | b. To be too late, miss an opportunity |
| 3. Don't beat around the bush . Just say what you really mean. | c. To economise, do something the quickest or cheapest way |
| 4. Nothing is going right with this project. We need to go back to the drawing board and find a better way of doing things. | d. To start again from the beginning |
| 5. To put it in a nutshell , we are not going to meet our target this month. | e. To understand something |
| 6. With the economy being so unpredictable at the moment, I've got to bite the bullet and put this plan on hold . | f. To avoid speaking your mind |
| 7. We can't afford to cut any corners . Our customers expect high quality products. | g. To postpone something |
| 8. If we don't make a decision soon, we'll miss the boat completely. | h. To react too quickly |
| 9. I'm sorry but I just can't seem to get my head around what you're saying. | i. To talk about something or do something repeatedly without making progress |
| 10. Let's not jump the gun . Things may change in the next few weeks. | j. To force yourself to do something you don't want to |
| | k. To be wrong about the way something should be achieved |

2 > Idioms you can use in negotiations

Use these idioms to complete the dialogue below.

1. **be in two minds**
2. **strike a happy medium**
3. **the bottom line**
4. **to sleep on it**
5. **to make headway**
6. **give someone the hard sell**
7. **drive a hard bargain**
8. **offer a sweetener**
9. **knock down the price**
10. **seal the deal**

Dialogue between a sales representative and his client.

Client: I'm sorry, this new product you're offering me doesn't seem very different from the one I already have. _____ as to whether I really need it.

Sales rep: Look, I won't _____. I just want you to have the right product. But, if it helps, I can _____. There is a promotion coming up next month which would allow you to buy it at 30% less. If I have a word with my manager, I could probably let you have this discount early. What do you think?

Client: _____ that my budget has been cut substantially this year, so I don't know if I can afford it, even with a 30% discount. Would you be able to extend payment terms to 90 days on that?

Sales rep: You sure know how to _____! It's much easier for me to _____ (knock down the price) than it is to negotiate payment terms. Would 30% plus free delivery _____?

Client: Let's see if we can _____. I'm happy to pay delivery costs, if you could give me 60 days payment terms. What do you say?

Sales rep: I'm afraid I'll have to _____. Can I get back to you in the morning?

3 > Idioms to describe people's attitudes and behaviour

Match the idioms in column one with their correct definition in column two.

The first one has been done for you:

1	2
He's got a chip on his shoulder .	<i>She's receiving benefits from both of her current situations.</i>
You look terrible! Yes, I'm feeling under the weather .	<i>He can't forget something that happened in the past.</i>
She is very outspoken. She calls a spade a spade . At least you know how she feels.	<i>She lets things get out of control.</i>
They provide excellent customer service – they would bend over backwards to help you.	<i>He decided not to blame her for the mistake.</i>
He just doesn't want to listen. He keeps burying his head in the sand .	<i>He puts all his effort into doing something.</i>
Well, she's got the best of both worlds : a job she loves, in a city she loves.	<i>He refuses to face his problems.</i>
He decided to let her off the hook .	<i>She says exactly what she thinks.</i>
She let things get out of hand and then doesn't know what to do.	<i>They would do anything they could to help you.</i>
You can't fault Jon's dedication to his job. He flings himself into every new project .	<i>I'm not feeling well, I'm sick.</i>