

# LANGUAGE MATTERS

## 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 the idioms in bold with their meanings.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. We're going <b>round and round in circles here</b> .  | a. To summarise an idea   |
| 2. I think you're <b>barking up the wrong tree</b> with that idea.   | b. To be too late, miss an opportunity  |
| 3. Don't <b>beat around the bush</b> . 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 <b>go back to the drawing board</b> and find a better way of doing things. | d. To start again from the beginning  |
| 5. <b>To put it in a nutshell</b> , 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 <b>bite the bullet</b> and <b>put this plan on hold</b> .    | f. To avoid speaking your mind  |
| 7. We can't afford to <b>cut any corners</b> . Our customers expect high quality product.  | g. To postpone something  |
| 8. If we don't make a decision soon, we'll <b>miss the boat</b> completely.  | h. To react too quickly   |
| 9. I'm sorry but I just can't seem to <b>get my head around</b> what you're saying.  | i. To talk about something or do something repeatedly without making progress |
| 10. Let's not <b>jump the gun</b> . 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. **the bottom line**
3. **to sleep on it**
4. **to make headway**
5. **give someone the hard sell**
6. **drive a hard bargain**
7. **offer a sweetener**
8. **knock down the price**
9. **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: \_\_\_\_\_ is 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 top of that?

Sales Rep: You sure know how to \_\_\_\_\_! It's much easier for me to \_\_\_\_\_ 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 the first column with their correct definition in column two.

The first one has been done for you:

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