

OWAD BUSINESS ENGLISH TRAINER

Wichtige Redewendungen im Geschäftsleben

When communicating in a foreign language, the understanding and use of idioms is one of the hardest skills to master. As advanced as one's vocabulary may be, the meaning of most idioms used in the workplace can still remain unclear. Their meanings – rather than being clearly deducible from the words used – are often based on past events, cultural traditions and even past scandalous behaviour. Without this cultural background, there is in most cases little hope of understanding what has been said. Your only recourse is to familiarise yourself with a few of the more commonly used idioms.

We've collected some of the idioms business people use on a nearly daily basis here. Not only do they make for entertaining reading, they're worth memorising and working into your conversation and writing.

Idioms concerning people and things

across the board

Meaning: Including everyone or everything

Example: Each year we perform an across-the-board review of employee productivity.

boys in the back room

Meaning: The faceless group of powerful people making decisions behind the scenes (the group could contain both men and women). The idiom usually implies the opinion that the group's decisions are driven by personal interests.

Example: We're facing yet another plant closing this year. I think the boys in the back room have something big in mind.

to come on strong

Meaning: To overwhelm someone with very strong language or behaviour

Example: Our competitors have one weakness: consumers consistently complain that their sales people come on too strong. We should take advantage of this in our marketing messages.



Idioms concerning money

bang for the buck

Meaning: High value for the money spent

Example: We've been getting the biggest bang for our buck with Internet advertising.

bottom line

Meaning: The final figure on a financial report representing the total result. Usually used to refer to the final result, evaluation, outcome or meaning of something.

Example: You've presented quite a bit of information about the challenges we're currently facing in our quality process. What exactly is the bottom line?

budget crunch

Meaning: The condition of not having enough money available to pay for what needs to be purchased

Example: As a result of our current budget crunch, we've put a moratorium on hiring outside contractors.

to break even

Meaning: To have expenses equal to income

Example: Our new business unit has been breaking even right from the very start.

to cut corners

Meaning: To reduce costs by eliminating necessary items that have a small cost, Or: To complete a project or task faster by skipping over small details, often implying that quality may have been sacrificed to meet the deadline.

Example: As a result of our current budget crunch, we've had to cut corners. We delivered the solution on time, but we had to cut a few corners to do it.

to tighten the belt

Meaning: To reduce costs by eliminating the purchase of products and services that are not directly necessary to the functioning of business

Example: The smaller-than-expected number of Hollywood films this year has resulted in a temporary decrease in demand for our popcorn machines. Sales are significantly down. I'm afraid we'll have to tighten our belt for the rest of the year.

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Idioms concerning concepts

at a loss

Meaning: The condition of having lost money, Or: the condition of not having an answer or reply

Example: We just purchased the company last year, and now we've had to sell it at a loss. I'm afraid I'm at a loss for an explanation.

a long shot

Meaning: Associated with very low odds

Example: It's a long shot to expect that we'll be able to find a new QA manager this year.

to carry the day

Meaning: To win, or to win complete support for something

Example: The competitive customer presentation yesterday was really tough, but we managed to carry the day.

at face value

Meaning: The value something has based on its appearance alone

Example: I think we should take his comments at face value.

to have one's finger in the pie

Meaning: To have an interest in something, Or: to be inappropriately involved in something

Example: Mary Samuelson has her finger in every pie. It really slows our projects down.

to throw cold water on something

Meaning: To go against, discourage, forbid or put an end to something, or to take the excitement out of it by confronting people with reality. Creates a visual image of a quick and sobering action.

Example: The CEO threw cold water on our expansion plans after he was informed of the sales projections for the year.

a bitter pill to swallow

Meaning: Bad news that's difficult to accept

Example: Mathew Brody has been our interim CEO for the last two years, and he worked hard to secure a permanent appointment to the position. The surprise selection of Andrea Matin as the new CEO instead must have been a bitter pill for him to swallow.

my gut tells me

Meaning: I have a strong feeling that...

Example: My gut (*Bauchgefühl*) tells me that we should proceed with our plans on schedule.

Idioms concerning work

banker's hours

Meaning: Short working hours similar to the opening hours of a bank

Example: Her decision to quit was no surprise. After her last performance review, she started working banker's hours. Quitting was the obvious next step.

to deliver the goods

Meaning: To succeed in delivering assigned work with high quality

Example: Our new salesman, Jonathan Baines, isn't very popular with the rest of the team but he certainly knows how to deliver the goods.

in the works

Meaning: To be in the process of being planned or developed

Example: A totally new form of television that allows advertisers to look into every home is in the works, but very few people know about it.

brownie points

Meaning: Credit for having done a good deed, for having done a good job without having been asked or for giving someone a compliment. The meaning is sarcastic.

Example: Samantha really scored brownie points with the boss when she offered to attend that sales training course at her own cost.

to face the music

Meaning: To have to deal with the consequences of an action

Example: Some of our sales people have been openly bad-mouthing our competitors during customer visits, and now we're having to face the music.

to keep something under wraps

Meaning: To keep a plan or effort secret

Example: We managed to keep development of our new, highly advanced light-bulb oven under wraps for two years before the competition learned about what we were doing and brought a competing product to market before we could even finish.

to pass the buck

Meaning: To shift the blame to someone else

Example: Every time we try to confront him with constructive feedback, he tries to pass the buck.

to pull one's weight

Meaning: To do one's share of the work

Example: One reason for our continuing success is that everyone on the team is committed to pulling his own weight year after year.

down to the wire

Meaning: Until the last minute

Example: We worked down to the wire to deliver that financial report.

in the loop

Meaning: To be aware of what is going on

Example: While I was sick, my manager kept me in the loop via e-mail so I'd be able to step right back into the job without any difficulty. Also: As soon as I started working earlier and leaving at 3, I found myself out of the loop.

to lay something on the table

Meaning: To present for discussion, usually implying that the matter is something people don't want to discuss

Example: We thought we had done a good job with the presentation until the CEO laid his concerns on the table.



► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• deducible	ableitbar
• recourse	Regress; hier: einzige mögliche Vorgehensweise
• to overwhelm	überhäufen; hier: überwältigen
• to put a moratorium on	auf Eis legen
• to discourage	abraten, entmutigen
• interim	zwischenzeitlich
• to bad-mouth	schlecht über jemanden reden

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