

Lesson 1

TALKING ABOUT A NEW PROJECT

Carl, Greg, and Anne work for WaterSonic Corporation. Recently, the company has come up with an idea for a new electric toothbrush.

Carl: I think we've **come up with a winner**.

Anne: I agree. The new Brush-o-matic toothbrush should be a **blockbuster!**

Carl: Our designers have already made up some *prototypes*.* The toothbrushes have a tooth-whitening attachment and many other **bells and whistles**.

Greg: We should **fast track this project**. Let's try to *launch* it in time for the holiday season.

Anne: This will be a great **stocking stuffer!**

Carl: We definitely need a **big win** for the holidays.

Anne: This is a great idea. We're going to **make a killing**.

Greg: Let's not talk about this project to anybody who doesn't need to know. We'll **keep it under wraps**.

Carl: I agree. **Mum's the word**. We don't want any of our competitors to **get wind of** the idea and **rip it off!**

Anne: Right. Let's meet again on Monday morning and discuss our **game plan for getting this project off the ground!**

* Words in italics in the dialogues are defined on pages 186-189.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS - LESSON 1

(to) come up with a winner

to think up a very good idea

EXAMPLE: Everybody likes Pepsi's new advertising campaign. Their advertising agency has **come up with a winner**.

blockbuster

a big success; a huge hit

EXAMPLE: Eli Lilly made a lot of money with the prescription drug, Prozac. It was a real **blockbuster**.

ORIGIN: This term comes from the blockbuster bombs used during World War Two by the British Royal Air Force. They were huge and created a large explosive force. Blockbuster ideas similarly create a big impact — and hopefully don't cause destruction like blockbuster bombs!

bells and whistles

extra product features, usually using the latest technologies; product features which are attractive, but not essential for the product to function

EXAMPLE: Our office just got a new copier with all the **bells and whistles**. I'll probably never learn how to use all of its features!

(to) fast track a project

to make a project a high priority; to speed up the time frame of a project

EXAMPLE: Let's **fast track this project**. We've heard rumors that our competitors are developing similar products.

stocking stuffer

a small gift given at Christmas time

EXAMPLE: These new mini travel pillows will make great **stocking stuffers**!

NOTE: This expression comes from the practice of kids hanging up stockings that Santa Claus fills (or "stuffs") with small gifts.

big win

a huge success; a successful product

EXAMPLE: The drug company spent millions on research and development, hoping that one of their new products would be a **big win**.

(to) make a killing

to make a lot of money

EXAMPLE: Suzanne **made a killing** on her Google stock and retired at 40.

SYNONYM: to make a fortune

(to) keep something under wraps

to keep something secret; to not let anybody know about a new project or plan

EXAMPLE: I'm sorry I can't tell you anything about the project I'm working on. My boss told me to **keep it under wraps**.

NOTE: "Wraps" are things that provide cover, so if something is "under wraps" it's covered up and hidden.

mum's the word

let's keep quiet about this; I agree not to tell anyone about this

EXAMPLE: Please don't tell anybody about our new project. Remember: **mum's the word!**

ORIGIN: The word "mum" comes from the murmur "mmmmm," the only sound you can make when your mouth is shut firmly. Try making other sounds besides "mmmmm" with your lips and mouth shut firmly, and you will see that it's impossible!

(to) get wind of

to find out about something, often sensitive information

EXAMPLE: When the restaurant owner **got wind of** the fact that one of his waiters was stealing money from the cash register, he was furious.

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(to) rip off

to copy an idea; to steal

EXAMPLE: Why doesn't the Donox Company ever think up any original ideas? All they ever do is **rip off** their competitors!

NOTE: "Rip off" is also a noun. Example: We were charged \$10,000 for a small advertisement in the newspaper. What a **rip off**!

game plan

an action plan; a plan for how a project will proceed

EXAMPLE: The software company's **game plan** is to expand its operations into China and India over the next year.

ORIGIN: In football, a "game plan" is a strategy for winning.

(to) get something off the ground

to get started on something, often a project

EXAMPLE: We've been sitting around talking about this project for months. It's time to take action and **get it off the ground**!



PRACTICE THE IDIOMS

Choose the best substitute for the phrase or sentence in bold:

- 1) Did the company think of this new product idea themselves?
No, they ripped it off from an inventor.
 - a) No, they paid an inventor for the idea.
 - b) No, they stole the idea from an inventor.
 - c) No, they discussed it with an inventor and he agreed to sell it to them.

- 2) Andrea is planning to quit her job at the end of September, but **mum's the word.**
 - a) don't tell anybody
 - b) don't tell her mother
 - c) she may change her mind

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- 3) Sony has **made a killing on** its popular PlayStation line.
 - a) lost money on
 - b) made a lot of money on
 - c) decided to stop producing

- 4) After receiving a large loan from the bank, the company was finally able to **get its project off the ground**.
 - a) get started on the project
 - b) cancel the project
 - c) borrow money

- 5) That new software company seems very disorganized. Do they have a **game plan**?
 - a) a plan for closing down their business
 - b) a plan for developing new games
 - c) a plan for how they will proceed to grow their business

- 6) Some experts recommend that when you're interviewing for a new job, you **keep your current salary under wraps**.
 - a) you should tell the interviewer what your current salary is
 - b) you should say you're making twice as much as you're really earning
 - c) you should not say how much you're currently earning

- 7) Don's new cell phone has a video camera and all sorts of other **bells and whistles**.
 - a) fancy features
 - b) things that make loud ringing noises and whistle tones
 - c) features typical in a low-priced product

- 8) When investors **got wind of** the fact that the pharmaceutical company's major drug increased the risk of heart attacks, the company's stock price fell.
 - a) hid
 - b) discovered
 - c) got fed up over



I did some back-of-the-envelope calculations.

Lesson 2

TALKING ABOUT FINANCIAL ISSUES

Juan and Diane work in the finance department of Delicious Delights, a company that makes snack foods. Here, they're discussing the financial projections for a new product line.

Juan: I'm really excited about the *launch* of our new line of fat-free Delicious Delight donuts.

Diane: Me too. But before we go any further, we'd better make sure this *product line* is going to be profitable.

Juan: I did some **back-of-the-envelope calculations**. Take a look.

Diane: I see you've estimated \$2 million for the new equipment. Where did you get that *figure*?

Juan: That's an **educated guess** based on some equipment I bought last year.

Diane: You're going to need to *double-check* that. Using old estimates can get us **in hot water**.

Juan: No problem. I'll get on the phone with the manufacturer in Dallas and get a *price quote*.

Diane: Do you have a sense for *market demand*? We should get the *forecasts* from the marketing department before we **crunch the numbers**.

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Juan: We don't have those yet. Mary from marketing said maybe we'd have them next week.

Diane: It just **blows my mind** when marketing people want us to **run numbers**, and they don't bring us the information we need!

Juan: If we end up **in the red** on this project, it's going to be their **heads on the chopping block**, not ours. They're the ones with P&L* responsibility!

Diane: Our CFO* won't **give this project the green light** until he sees all the numbers. If it doesn't look like we'll make money or at least **break even**, he'll **pull the plug** on the project.

*P&L – profit & loss. Those with P&L responsibility are in charge of making sure the business makes a profit. They manage the “P&L statement,” also called the “income statement.” This shows the financial results of operations over a certain time period, usually a month, a quarter, or a year.

* CFO – chief financial officer. The senior manager responsible for the financial activities of a company.

IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS - LESSON 2

back-of-the-envelope calculations

quick calculations; estimates using approximate numbers, instead of exact numbers

EXAMPLE: I don't need the exact numbers right now. Just give me some **back-of-the-envelope calculations**.

NOTE: This expression refers to the quick calculations one would do informally, as on the back of an envelope.

educated guess

a guess based on experience; a piece of information based on prior knowledge, not hard facts or data

EXAMPLE: I'd say there are about a million potential consumers for your new line of cosmetics, but that's just an **educated guess**.

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in hot water

in trouble

EXAMPLE: Ian was **in hot water** with the government after he was caught making illegal copies of software.

(to) crunch the numbers

to perform financial calculations

EXAMPLE: Reed Corporation is thinking about buying a small company. First, they'll need to **crunch the numbers** and see if their acquisition will be profitable.

NOTE: You will also see the noun form of this expression, "number cruncher," used to describe somebody who makes a lot of financial calculations as part of his or her job.

(it or that) blows my mind

it bothers me; it really surprises me; it amazes me

EXAMPLE: **It blows my mind that** our company is trying to save money by taking away our free coffee service.

(to) run (the) numbers

to perform financial calculations

EXAMPLE: Should we lease or buy the equipment? We'll need to **run the numbers** to help us make the decision.

in the red

losing money; when expenses are greater than revenues

EXAMPLE: We need to do something to start making profits. If we're **in the red** for one more quarter, we're going to go out of business.

NOTE: This expression comes from the accounting practice of marking debits (subtractions to the account) in red and credits (additions to the account) in black. The opposite of "in the red" is "in the black," meaning profitable.

one's head is on the chopping block

in a position where one is likely to be fired or get in trouble

EXAMPLE: After Earthy Foods released a frozen dinner that made many consumers sick, their CEO's **head was on the chopping block**.

NOTE: A chopping block is a piece of wood on which food or wood is chopped. Having your head on the block would suggest that it is going to be cut off. Fortunately, the meaning here is not literal. If your head is on the chopping block, you might lose your job, but at least you'll still have your head!

(to) give somebody the green light

to give permission to move forward with a project

EXAMPLE: Super Software's Moscow office has developed its own regional advertising campaign. They hope that headquarters in California will **give them the green light** to proceed with the campaign.

(to) break even

to make neither a profit or a loss; the point at which revenues equal costs

EXAMPLE: You **broke even** during your first year in business? That's good since most companies lose money during their first year.

(to) pull the plug

to put a stop to a project or initiative, usually because it's not going well; to stop something from moving forward; to discontinue

EXAMPLE: After losing millions of dollars drilling for oil in Nebraska and finding nothing, the oil company finally **pulled the plug** on its exploration project.

ORIGIN: This expression refers to removing a plug to make something stop working — when you pull the plug out of the wall, your appliance doesn't work. In the 19th century, when this term originated, the plug was for a toilet. To flush the toilet, you had to pull out a plug.

 **PRACTICE THE IDIOMS**

Choose the most appropriate response to each sentence:

- 1) Did our CEO give the green light for the new project yet?
 - a) No, he told us he needed more information before making a decision.
 - b) Yes, he told us that the project was a bad idea and that we should stop working on it.
 - c) Yes, he's going to discuss the project with his wife and see what she thinks.

- 2) Last year, our company made a loss on our new line of video games, but this year we'll break even.
 - a) I'm sorry to hear you're broke.
 - b) That's great. At least you're making progress.
 - c) Too bad. Last year you did a lot better.

- 3) If you don't double-check those numbers and make sure they're correct, you might get in hot water with your boss.
 - a) You're right. My boss always appreciates it when I give him the wrong numbers.
 - b) That would be great. My boss enjoys soaking in hot water.
 - c) You're right. My boss always gets angry when he finds mistakes.

- 4) Our company is in the red again this quarter.
 - a) Congratulations! When's the celebration party?
 - b) In the red again? I hope you don't go out of business!
 - c) In the red? That's okay. It's better than being in the black.

- 5) We should pull the plug on our online advertising campaign.
 - a) I agree. It's not bringing us any new business.
 - b) I agree. Let's double our spending on it.
 - c) I disagree. I think we should stop spending money on online advertising.

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- 6) I know our company is looking for ways to cut costs. Do you think my head is on the chopping block?
- a) No, don't worry. They won't fire you.
 - b) No, I don't think so. But you might get fired.
 - c) No, I don't think they'll cut off your head.
- 7) Doesn't it blow your mind that they promoted Beth to General Manager after the mess she made in our department?
- a) Yes, she really deserved that promotion.
 - b) No, but it does surprise me.
 - c) Yes, it really surprises me!
- 8) Did you have a chance to crunch those numbers yet?
- a) Yes, I put them in a blender and crunched them up.
 - b) Yes, I just put the financial reports on your desk.
 - c) Yes, I'll take a look at them next week.

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