



ESL Podcast 161 – A Bad Boss

GLOSSARY

to put up with – to deal with; to try to tolerate something for a long time

* I don't think that I can put up with your complaining for one more minute!

incompetent – unable to do something the way it is supposed to be done; being bad at doing something

* I have never had a more incompetent employee. He can't do anything right!

to have contact with – to be close to and to talk with; to be involved with or near someone

* I don't talk to my old boyfriend too often. Since he moved away, I don't have much contact with him much anymore.

sleeping on the job – being lazy while working; not doing one's job or duties correctly

* I called the office, but no one answered. Someone must be sleeping on the job today.

to keep an eye on – to watch carefully; to look at something closely

* Keep an eye on that fishing line. You don't want to lose another fish.

stranded – stuck in one place; not able to move from one place to another, often because one is without transportation

* When the flood came, Noah and his family were stranded on the boat since there was nothing but water all around them.

to fall down on the job – to be lazy; to stop doing one's job in the way one is expected to do it

* Stacy was surprised that, after 10 years of working at the office, the secretary was starting to fall down on the job, forgetting to send emails and faxes.

passing the buck – giving one's responsibilities to someone else; giving someone else the job one is supposed to do; blaming another person for one's own mistake

* Every time my brother got into trouble, he would pass the buck and I would get blamed for his bad actions.

factory – a place of work where objects and parts of machines are made or put together

* Our uncle works in a factory where he makes windows for cars and trucks.



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but – except for; leaving out

* When Lori was getting ready for her trip, she packed everything but her winter coats.

on (one's) way out – getting ready to leave; not going to be around very much longer

* The old manager barely works at the office at all anymore; he is on his way out.

“Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t” – a common saying that means it is better to know what type of problem you will have to deal with than to be surprised by an even bigger problem; it is better to know your enemy than to find a new enemy that could be even worse than the first

* Even though his boss was mean, Stefano chose to stay at his first job because of the old phrase: “Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.” He didn’t want to risk being stuck with an even meaner boss at a new job.

to take (one's) chances – to be willing to take a risk; to try something even if it could have a bad result

* I know that getting married at a young age will be difficult, but we will take our chances.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Tom says that Dennis is often “passing the buck.” What does he mean?
 - a) Dennis is generous with the employees.
 - b) Dennis blames others for failures.
 - c) Dennis won’t give anyone a raise.

2. What happened to the supervisors visiting from Salt Lake City?
 - a) They were left without a ride.
 - b) They went to a baseball game.
 - c) They fell asleep in Dennis’ office.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

To put up with

The phrase “to put up with,” in this podcast, means to deal with or to try to tolerate something for a period of time: “How long do we have to put up with the noise and inconvenience while the neighbors install a new bathroom?” “To put up” means to build or to construct: “The building developers want to put up a new shopping mall where those homes are currently.” “To put up” also means to install or to hang items on a wall: “Before I can put up these shelves, I’ll need to buy some more nails.” Finally, “to put up a good fight” means to try very hard to prevent something bad from happening: “They put up a good fight to keep their restaurant open, but in the end, they couldn’t pay their bills.”

on (one’s) way out

In this podcast, “on (one’s) way out” means for someone or something to get ready to leave or refers to someone or something that is not going to be around very much longer: “In fashion right now, skirts are on their way out, while wide pants are becoming more popular.” “No way out” describes a situation where there is no way to avoid something bad, such as failure or disaster: “Economists say that there is no way out of this poor economy unless the government does more to help.” The word “way-out” is a term most popular in the 1960’s and 1970’s used to describe something that is unusual or very new and interesting: “That song is way-out! I’ve never heard anything like that before in my life!”



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Culture Note

More Vacation Time?

If you work in the United States in a full-time job, you probably get paid vacation time. In the U.S., a full-time job is typically 40 hours of work a week, although that “varies” (is different) depending on the employer. Getting paid vacation time means that you continue to receive your “paycheck” (salary) even when you go on vacation.

How much vacation time an employee gets is different depending on their job and their “seniority” (how long they have worked for a company or organization), but most employees start out with two weeks each year. “Veteran” (long time) employees could receive several weeks of vacation time each year after many years with the same company or organization. This is, of course, in addition to major holidays when all employees get paid vacation time.

Surprisingly, a recent “survey” (questionnaire; research asking people the same set of questions) reported in the Los Angeles Times newspaper showed that nearly half of Americans didn’t use half of their vacation time in 2011. The survey asked 1,000 adults of different ages and experience their use of vacation time and many of them “passed on” (did not use; did not take advantage of) taking a vacation when they could. Their main reasons for not using vacation time were that they were too busy and that they didn’t want to “play catch-up” (try to once again be at the proper level, or the same level as other people, after falling behind) when they returned to work.

The report points out a strange “contradiction” (for two things to be the opposite of each other) however: In the same survey, Americans said they would “give up” (not have) their next “promotion” (advancement to a higher-level job) or 5% of their salary to have five or more days of vacation each year.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 161, “A Bad Boss.”

You are listening to English as a Second Language Podcast Episode 161. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles in the state of California.

Today's podcast is called “A Bad Boss.” Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Tom: I wonder how much longer we'll have to put up with Dennis. He is the most incompetent boss I've ever worked for.

Katie: He's not that bad, is he? I don't have much contact with him.

Tom: Are you kidding? He's always sleeping on the job. The other day, he was supposed to keep an eye on the supervisors visiting from Salt Lake City. Instead, I heard that he went to a baseball game and the supervisors ended up stranded at the downtown office.

Katie: It's hard to believe that he'd fall down on the job like that.

Tom: It's not only that. He's always passing the buck. Every time something goes wrong at the factory, he blames everyone but himself.

Katie: If he's as bad as you say he is, he must be on his way out. But, you know what they say, “Better the devil you know, than the devil you don't.”

Tom: Yeah, I know, but I'm willing to take my chances.

[end of dialogue]

The title of today's podcast is “A Bad Boss.” Your boss, of course, is the person who you work for. It's a dialogue between Tom and Katie. Tom says, “I wonder how much longer we have to put up with Dennis?” How much longer means how much more time. “I wonder how much longer this television show will last. I wonder how much longer I will have to wait for my doctor. I wonder how much more time.” To “put up with” means to tolerate. When we say, for example, “I have to put up with the noise” - means I have to live with it, even though it is



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bothering me. And to “put up with” is always referring to something negative that is happening, that you have to live with. You can’t do anything about it, you have to tolerate it. I have to put up with screaming children out in the street. I have to put up with dogs that are barking next door to me - both of those things are true, by the way.

Well, in the dialogue Tom says, “I have to put up with Dennis” or Tom says, “We will have to put up with Dennis” - means we have to have him as our boss, even though we don’t like it. He says, he, Dennis, is the most “incompetent” boss I’ve ever worked for. “Incompetent” (incompetent) means that you are not competent. “In” (in) as a prefix here means “not” and to be competent means you’re able to do something, that you have the talent, you have the ability. So to be “incompetent” means that you do not have the talent, you do not have the ability or capacity to do something, and it’s of course a negative word. If you say to someone, “You’re incompetent,” that’s a very negative insult, a very negative way of expressing your opinion, even if it’s true. Well, Kim, Katie rather - says, “He’s not that bad is he? I don’t have much contact with him.” To have “contact” (contact) with someone means that you talk to them, or you see them, that you have some relationship with them that you have to communicate with them. So “contact with” - here means the same as much communication with him, I don’t have to talk to him or see him, and so forth.

Tom says, “Are you kidding?” - means “Are you joking? He’s always sleeping on the job.” Well, “to sleep” of course, is what we do at night and to “sleep on the job” means that you are sleeping or not doing what you are supposed to do. It doesn’t mean that he’s actually sleeping at his desk, for example. The expression “to be sleeping on the job” means you are not doing your job. You are not doing what you’re supposed to do. If you are supposed to be working on your computer, typing a report, and you are instead looking at different websites, or listening to ESL Podcast, you are sleeping on the job. You are not doing what you are supposed to be doing.

Tom says that the other day he was - Dennis, was supposed to keep an eye on the supervisors. To “keep an eye (eye) on” someone means that you are supposed to watch them, you are supposed to take care of them. This expression can be used in lots of different ways. For example, if you are sitting at a café, and you have your computer, your laptop computer, and you need to go to the bathroom, you need to go to the restroom, you may say to your friend, “Could you keep an eye on my computer?” - means “Could you make sure no one steals it?” in this case, make sure that nothing happens to it. So to keep an eye on is to watch, to supervise, to look after something.



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Well, Dennis was supposed to keep an eye on the supervisors and of course, “supervisors” are bosses. In this case, people who are in the top management of a company. Tom says, “Instead of doing what he was supposed to do, in place of that, Dennis went to a baseball game, and the supervisors ended up stranded at the downtown office.” “Ended up” (ended) - “up” (up) - two words - to “end up” means to result in after a series of things happen. The last thing that happens is how something ends up. For example, “I wanted to go to the movies last night, but it was raining. So I ended up watching television instead.” Usually, we use that expression when one thing is supposed to happen but it doesn’t. So you do something different.

Well here, Dennis was supposed to keep an eye on the supervisors, but he didn’t do that, he did something else and the result was that the supervisors ended up stranded at the downtown office. “To be stranded” (stranded) - to be stranded means to be left somewhere with no transportation. If you are driving your car down the street, and you run out of gas, you have no more gasoline, you are stranded on the street. You are stranded at that place means you don’t have any transportation. Well, in this case, the supervisors were stranded at the downtown office. They were visiting from Salt Lake City. Salt Lake City is a city in Utah - the state of Utah, and they ended up stranded. They had no transportation, they couldn’t go anywhere and they were left at the downtown office. Usually, we are stranded at some location. You could be stranded at the airport - means your flight was cancelled or the airplane had a problem and you couldn’t go to where you wanted to go; you were stranded at that place.

Katie says that, “It’s hard to believe that Dennis would fall down on the job like that.” To “fall (fall) - down” (down) - two words - “to fall down on the job,” that expression means similar to be sleeping on the job, not to do your job. Usually, it means when you do something wrong. So not only are you not doing it, but you are often doing it wrong. But in general, “to fall down on the job” means to not be doing the work you are supposed to be doing, like some of you right now, listening to this podcast.

Tom says, “It’s not only that” - means that is not the only reason - it’s not only that. He says, “Dennis is always passing the buck.” To “pass (pass) the buck” (buck) - means to give the responsibility for something that went wrong to someone else. So, for example, your boss tells you to email one of your clients - one of your customers, and you forget to email them, and your boss talks to you and says, “Why didn’t you email this person?” and you say, “Oh, I thought John was going to e-mail him.” You are passing the buck, you are putting the blame or the responsibility for something that went wrong onto someone else. There’s a famous expression for an American president, Harry S. Truman, who was president of the United States in the 1940s and early 1950s, he had a sign - the



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president had a sign on his desk that said, “The buck stops here,” meaning that he was ultimately responsible. If something went wrong, he was the one to blame, because of course, he’s the president, he’s at the top of the government. So, “to pass the buck” means to give the responsibility for something that went wrong, to someone else, to blame someone else.

Tom says that “Every time something goes wrong at the factory, Dennis blames everyone but himself.” A “factory” (factory) is a place where you make something. So you could have a computer factory, where they make computers, or a toy factory where they make toys. In this case, he says that “Dennis blames everyone but himself” - means he blames everyone except himself. He doesn’t take the responsibility himself.

Katie says, “If he’s as bad as you say he is, he must be on his way out.” “To be on your way out” means that you are going to be leaving this job or this position soon. Usually, it means that you are probably going to be fired, that you are going to lose your job. You have not lost it yet, but you are going to. If you say, “Oh, he’s on his way out” - means he’s going to be leaving his job, and perhaps being fired from his job soon. Well, Katie says that if Dennis is as bad as Tom says Dennis is, he must be on his way out. He’ll probably be leaving.

Katie then says, “But you know what they say, better the devil you know, than the devil you don’t.” “You know what they say” - that expression we use before a proverb, and a proverb (proverb) is a famous saying or expression. The famous saying or expression that Katie uses here is “Better the devil you know, than the devil you don’t.” A “devil” (devil) is of course an evil person. In the Christian religion, the devil is the person that tries to make you do something wrong - do evil. Well, the devil here when we say, “Better the devil you know” means it’s better to have someone bad that you are familiar with than to bring someone else in new, who maybe even worse than the person you have now. So better when we say, “Better the devil” - that’s short for “it is better that we have the devil - the bad person, the bad boss in this story, that we are familiar with, than do lose him and maybe we’ll get an even worse boss. “Better the devil you know, than the devil you don’t.”

Tom says, “Yeah I know, but I’m willing to take my chances.” “To take your chances” means I’m willing to risk something worse. It means I’m open to the possibility that something may go wrong. We usually use this expression when someone warns us, or tells us that something bad could happen. If we do what we plan on doing and you say, “Oh, I’ll take my chances.” So, for example, you want to go to the beach in the summertime and your friend says, “Well it’s going to be very crowded, lots of people there. It may be difficult to find a place to



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park,” and you say, “I’ll take my chances” - means I’m going to try it anyway. It’s something usually that you say when you are rejecting someone’s advice. When you are saying, “I’m not going to follow what you tell me to do.”

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

[start of dialogue]

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Tom: Yeah, I know, but I’m willing to take my chances.

[end of dialogue]

The script for today’s podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. Remember to visit our website at www.eslpod.com for a script of this podcast, as well as for more information about our podcast.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan, thanks for listening. We will see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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