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**ESL Podcast 548 – Working for an Impossible Boss**

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**GLOSSARY**

**to mill around** – to hang around; to loiter, to be in an area without really doing anything productive or having a purpose

\* Stop milling around and do something useful! You can start by helping me move these boxes.

**in charge** – with responsibility for something; with power over a project or over other people, especially with the authority to tell other people what to do

\* Isaac has asked Renee to be in charge of the department while he's on vacation next month.

**incompetent** – incapable; unable to do something, often because one doesn't have enough intelligence or experience

\* Meghan is the most incompetent secretary we've ever had in this company. She doesn't even know how to type or answer the phone!

**verbal abuse** – a way of treating others very badly through what one says, usually by saying very negative, angry things in a loud voice

\* The last employee quit because of Uriah's verbal abuse, so he's trying to change the way he works with other people before he hires anyone else.

**management style** – the way that a person works with other people in an organization, especially with the people who report to him or her

\* All the team members are really pleased with the new boss's management style.

**can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen** – a phrase meaning that if one cannot handle the pressure and stress of a difficult situation, one should remove oneself from that situation, often by giving up

\* Wall Street is a high-pressure environment. If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen and go get an easier job that isn't related to finance.

**constructive criticism** – advice about how another person can improve something, presented in a way that helps the other person

\* The professor gave his student a lot of great constructive criticism before the interview, advising him on what he should and shouldn't say.



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**inappropriate** – not suitable; something that should not be done or said because it is rude or doesn't belong in a particular environment or situation

\* It's inappropriate to wear shorts and T-shirts at the office.

**to hold (one's) tongue** – to choose not to say something even though one wants to; to stay quiet even when one would like to say something

\* It's really difficult for Ward to hold his tongue when he hears his grandfather talking about politics, but he doesn't want to offend him by sharing his opinions.

**tipsy** – a little bit drunk; slightly under the influence of alcohol; acting a little bit silly or stupid because one has drunken alcohol

\* After one drink, Makiko was tipsy, laughing and dancing. After two drinks, she was drunk and almost couldn't walk.

**three-martini lunch** – a long lunch where business executives or managers spend time together, slowly eating and having more than one alcoholic drink, used to show that those people don't have other, more important things to do in their work

\* I hate the way our boss always goes out for three-martini lunches, leaving us here to do all the hard work.

**to go off on (someone)** – to lose one's temper and patience, criticizing and shouting at another person, especially if one is really angry about something else

\* Jake was in a really bad mood today, going off on his employees even though they hadn't done anything wrong.

**to undermine (one's) authority** – to decrease the amount of power that someone has; to weaken one's ability to be respected and tell other people what to do; to decrease another person's level of control over a group of people or a situation

\* I'm really mad at you for undermining my authority by telling all my employees that I'm on medication and can't be trusted to make good decisions. That was private information!

**with all due respect** – a polite phrase used when one disagrees with another person and wants to share one's own opinion without making the other person angry

\* I hear what you're saying, but with all due respect, I have to disagree.



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**how dare you** – a phrase used when one is very shocked and angered by what another person has done or said

\* How dare you spend all our money on a new boat? You knew we were saving that money for our daughter's college education.

**you don't know who you're dealing with** – a phrase used when one is very angry and wants to emphasize that one is too powerful and important to be treated in a particular way

\* You don't know who you're dealing with! With just one phone call, I can make your life miserable, so you better apologize for what you just said.

**ex** – former; used to describe the relationship that once existed between two people, so that, for example, an ex-husband is a man who used to be one's husband

\* Are you friends with any of your ex-girlfriends?

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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Mr. Mann angry at Laura when he comes into the office?
    - a) Because the other employees aren't in the office.
    - b) Because the other employees are working in the mill.
    - c) Because the other employees aren't doing their work.
  2. What does Laura mean by saying, "I've held my tongue long enough"?
    - a) She has always openly shared her opinion.
    - b) She has never been comfortable speaking with him.
    - c) She has been quiet about her true feelings and opinions.
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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **in charge**

The phrase "in charge," in this podcast, means with responsibility and power over a project or over other people: "Each teacher is in charge of a classroom of 25 students." The phrase "to charge (someone) with (something)" means to give



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someone responsibility for a certain project or task: “The committee is charged with hiring a new sales manager by the end of the month.” The phrase “to be (all) charged up” means to be excited about something and ready to do it: “The players are all charged up, ready for tonight’s football game.” The phrase “to charge (someone) for (something)” means to ask someone for money because one has provided a product or service: “Can you believe they charge \$4.25 for a cup of coffee?” Finally, the phrase “to charge (someone or something)” means to attack someone or something: “Did you see how the bull charged that man?”

### **to go off on (someone)**

In this podcast, the phrase “to go off on (someone)” means to lose one’s temper and patience, criticizing and shouting at another person, especially if one is really angry about something else: “I know you had a bad day at work, but please don’t go off on the kids like that. It isn’t their fault.” The phrase “to go off” also means to leave a place: “What time did you go off to work this morning?” Sometimes the phrase “to go off” means to make a loud noise: “The alarm clock went off at 6:00 this morning, but I was so tired that I almost slept through it.” Finally, the phrase “to go off with (something)” means to leave a place while taking something that does not belong to oneself: “They were shocked to learn that the accountant had gone off with more than \$40,000 of their money.”

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## **CULTURE NOTE**

In the United States, most people can be “fired” (told that one no longer has a job) for any reason, even if it seems unfair. In general, employees are fired for incompetence, or for not doing their job. This is “legal” (allowed under the law).

However, if someone is fired “on the basis of” (because of) “race” (skin color), religion, “gender” (whether one is male or female), “national origin” (which country one was born in), age, or “disability” (when one’s body is not able to do certain things), it is an example of “unlawful” (against the law) “termination” (firing). Firing someone for being a “whistle-blower” (sharing information about the employer’s illegal activities) is another example of unlawful termination.

When people think that they have experienced unlawful termination, they may choose to “take action” (do something to officially fight against the unlawful termination). They might begin by “filing a complaint” (sending official, written



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documents) with the employer’s human resources department. If this doesn’t work, then they can “turn to” (go to) the government agency that deals with that particular “aspect” (type) of unlawful termination. For example, a woman who believes she has been fired because she is pregnant can file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Individuals can also hire a lawyer to help them “sue” (take to court and ask for money) their former employer. These people probably won’t get their job back, but they might “collect damages” (receive money to cover the amount of money that they lost from not having a job).

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – c



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 548: Working for an Impossible Boss.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 548. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com). Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode. You can also go to our website to take a look at our ESL Podcast Store for additional courses in English, and our ESL Podcast Blog, where you can pick up additional vocabulary, cultural information, and some hints on improving your English.

This episode is called "Working for an Impossible Boss." The word "impossible" (not possible) here means a boss who is very difficult to work for, somebody who is so difficult we may say that it is almost impossible to work for this person. It's a dialogue between Mr. Mann and Laura, and uses some vocabulary that you might find when you are having an argument with your boss. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Mr. Mann: Why are all these people milling around doing no work? Laura! You're in charge when I'm out of the office and you're incompetent!

Laura: Mr. Mann, we need to talk in private. Let's go into your office.

Mr. Mann: What is this about?

Laura: Mr. Mann, I've tried to do my job the best I can, but I won't tolerate your verbal abuse any longer.

Mr. Mann: Verbal abuse?! I'm just telling it like it is. It's my...it's my...management style. This is business. If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen.

Laura: If I thought this was about my performance, I would certainly take any constructive criticism, but this is really about your inappropriate behavior.



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Mr. Mann: What inappropriate behavior? You're questioning my behavior?

Laura: Yes, I've held my tongue long enough. Every day, you come back to the office tipsy from a three-martini lunch, and you go off on me in front of the other employees. That undermines my authority and puts me in an impossible position.

Mr. Mann: I'm your boss and you have no right to question the way I run this house...I mean, department.

Laura: With all due respect, this is no way to run a department.

Mr. Mann: And how dare you suggest that I'm drunk? You don't know who you're dealing with.

Laura: Oh, yes I do. You're my ex-boss. I've had enough. I quit!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Mr. Mann asking Laura, "Why are all these people milling around doing no work?" "To mill (mill) around" is a phrasal verb meaning to be in an area without doing anything productive or without having a purpose; we would also say "to hang around." A more technical term would be "to loiter" (loiter). Sometimes you'll see signs outside of stores that say "No loitering," that means you can't just stand there and look around, you have to have some purpose while you're there. Usually it means you just can't stand there – you can't be there. In an office, if people are loitering – if people are milling around, well, they're not really doing anything; they should be working, in this case. So Mr. Mann says, "Laura! You're in charge when I'm out of the office and you're incompetent!" "To be in charge" means to have the responsibility for something, to have power over a project or other people. Usually, it's the power to tell them what to do – have the authority to tell them what to do. So when Mr. Mann is not in the office, Laura becomes the boss. By the way, the word "charge" has several different meanings in English; you can find those meanings in the Learning Guide for today on our website.

Mr. Mann says that Laura is incompetent. "To be competent" means to be capable, to be able to do something. "To be incompetent" means to be not competent, incapable, unable to do something often because you don't have



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enough experience or perhaps because you're not very smart, at least that's what Mr. Mann seems to think.

Laura says, "Mr. Mann, we need to talk in private (meaning with nobody else around). Let's go into your office." Mr. Mann says, "What is this about?" Laura then replies, "Mr. Mann, I've tried to do my job the best I can, but I won't tolerate your verbal abuse any longer." "Verbal" refers to something that is spoken, something that someone says. "Abuse" is when someone is hurting another person, either physically or psychologically. So, "verbal abuse" would be someone who is yelling at you, calling you names, perhaps swearing, saying bad things about you that are way more than what they should be saying to you. This is what is happening to Laura, so she says she won't "tolerate," she won't put up with, his verbal abuse.

Mr. Mann says, "Verbal abuse?!" He's surprised and shocked, maybe a little angry. "I'm just telling it like it is," meaning I am just describing the truth, the real situation here. "It's my...it's my...management style," he says. "Management" has to do with the way that you work with other people, usually as a boss. You manage them – you control them. "Style" is the way that you do something, so your "management style" is the way that you work with other people, especially when you're the boss. So Mr. Mann is a little angry here; he says, "This is business. If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen." This is an old expression: "If you can't take (meaning if you can't tolerate – if you can't put up with) the heat, you should get out of (you should leave) the kitchen." A "kitchen," of course, is where you prepare food, and it's often hot in a kitchen. So, if you can't put up with the heat – if you can't tolerate the heat, then you shouldn't be in the kitchen. The idea is that you should not be in a place or a situation unless you can handle the pressure and stress. If you are in a difficult situation and you cannot handle it, well then, you should leave it. It's often said to people who complain about their situation because it is stressful or it is difficult. The popular belief in the United States is that this expression was "coined," that is this expression was invented by a U.S. President, President Harry Truman, who was president after Franklin Roosevelt, up until January of 1953.

So, Mr. Mann is saying that Laura has to listen to him even if he yells at her. Laura says, "If I thought this was about my performance, I would certainly take any constructive criticism, but this is really about your inappropriate behavior." She's saying that this is not about her "performance," what she does. If it were about that, she would "take any constructive criticism," she would accept any advice about how she can improve. That's what constructive criticism is.





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“Criticism” is when you tell someone they’re doing something wrong; “constructive criticism” is when you are telling them things they are doing wrong in order that they can improve – so that they can get better. That’s the idea. But Laura thinks that Mr. Mann’s “behavior,” the way he is talking to her, is “inappropriate.” This is a common word now you hear; people say, “That’s inappropriate,” they mean it isn’t something that you should be doing or saying either because it’s rude or because it doesn’t belong in that particular situation or environment. So if you work at a business office, and you come in one day with your shorts on and a baseball cap (a baseball hat) and a T-shirt, and everyone else is wearing suits and ties and dresses, someone might say to you, “Your dress today is inappropriate.” It’s not right for this situation, and that’s what Laura is saying to Mr. Mann.

Well, Mr. Mann...he’s, uh, not very interested in hearing Laura’s opinion. He says, “What inappropriate behavior? You’re questioning my behavior?” meaning you’re asking questions; you’re doubting the way I do things; you’re criticizing me. Laura says, “Yes, I’ve held my tongue long enough.” “To hold your tongue” means to not say something even though you want to, to stay quiet even when you really want to say something. Laura says that she has held her tongue long enough, “Every day, you come back to the office tipsy from a three-martini lunch.” “To be tipsy” (tipsy) means to be a little bit drunk, to have had an alcoholic drink. It makes you a little silly or a little stupid. It’s not completely drunk, but it is a little bit drunk, if you will. “Martini” is a type of drink. There’s an old expression: “the three-martini lunch,” meaning instead of going to lunch and eating food, especially if you’re a business executive or manager, you spend your time drinking instead. “The three-martini lunch” represents someone wasting their time; doing things, because they are the boss, that they shouldn’t be doing. “The three-martini lunch” expression is not as common anymore. In part, that’s because it used to be many years ago that businesses could include the cost of business lunches as a business expense. However, in the recent years the government has changed the regulations so that now you can only count half of that lunch as being a business expense, so the three-martini lunch is not as popular.

Laura says to Mr. Mann, “you go off on me in front of the other employees.” “To go off on (someone)” means to lose your temper and patience, to criticize someone else, to shout or yell at them, especially if you are really angry about something. Notice the expression is “to go off on (someone).” You can say, “he went off” or “don’t go off” without the “on” if you mean don’t get angry, don’t start yelling. If you want to talk about who someone is yelling at, who someone is



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angry with, then you would say, “He’s going off on Laura,” or whomever. Laura says that when Mr. Mann goes off on her in front of other employees that that undermines her authority. “To undermine (someone’s) authority” means to decrease the amount of power that someone has, to weaken their ability to be respected by other people. So you’d undermine someone’s authority by doing things that would make other people not respect them, not listen to them.

Mr. Mann says, “I’m your boss and you have no right to question (to criticize) the way I run this house.” “Run,” here, means to manage. “...I mean,” Mr. Mann says, “department.” Of course, Mr. Mann suddenly thinks that he’s at home, perhaps arguing with one of his children. Laura says, “With all due respect, this is no way to run a department.” “With all due respect” is a polite phrase that you use when you disagree with someone and you want to give your opinion without making them angry. So Laura says, “With all due respect, this is no way to run a department.”

Mr. Mann is still angry; he says, “And how dare you suggest that I’m drunk?” “How dare you?” is a phrase used when you are very angry and shocked by what someone has said, usually because they have criticized you: “How dare you come into my house and yell at me? Get out of my house! How dare you?” Mr. Mann then says, “You don’t know who you’re dealing with.” This expression, “you don’t know who you’re dealing with,” is used when you’re very angry and you want to emphasize to the other person that you are very powerful, very important, too powerful and important to be treated the way you are being treated.

Laura says, “Oh, yes I do. You’re my ex-boss.” “Ex,” here, means former, used to. I can say, “Angelina Jolie is my ex-girlfriend” or “Halle Berry is my ex-girlfriend.” I could say that – it’s not true, but I could say that! That would be an example of “ex,” former, used to, not anymore. Laura is really saying here that she’s quitting. She says, “I’ve had enough (meaning I cannot stand or tolerate your behavior anymore). I quit!” And she leaves the office and she goes back to school to study biology or she gets another job – you can invent the end of the story!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]



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[end of dialogue]

Dr. Lucy Tse is in charge of writing the scripts here at ESL Podcast, including this one.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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