



ESL Podcast 572 – Blowing the Whistle at Work

GLOSSARY

ramification – implication; consequence; something additional that results from one's actions, especially when one cannot know exactly what it will be ahead of time

* The decision to quit your job could have serious ramifications for your future career.

to blow the whistle – to share information about something wrong or bad that an individual, corporation, or organization is doing, because one hopes to end it

* Who blew the whistle on Enron?

no two ways about it – very clear; without any uncertainty; able to happen in only one way

* There are no two ways about it: if you break up with Margot, she'll never speak to you again.

to step up – to come forward; to voluntarily do or participate in something without being forced to do it

* If you step up and tell the police what you've done, you'll probably get a less serious punishment than if you wait until you've been arrested.

on the line – at risk; in danger; with the possibility of being lost or damaged

* My job is on the line! If this presentation isn't perfect, I'll be fired for sure.

to get out – for information to become public; for information to become known by many people; for a secret to be broken

* Sequita would be so embarrassed if any of this information got out.

to live with – to put up with something; to be able to tolerate something; to be able to continue living one's normal life if something is true

* I don't think I could live with myself if I accidentally killed someone in a car accident because I was driving while drunk.

to protect (one's) interests – to meet one's own needs and fulfill one's own wishes; to take care of oneself

* The bankers seem very helpful, but they aren't really here to protect our interests, so we need to read all the documents very carefully before signing.



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anonymous – without one’s name being known; with an unknown name or identity

* This anonymous poem is beautiful. I wish I knew who wrote it.

to blow up – to become a major problem, usually affecting many people; to become an uncontrollable situation

* When a government scandal blows up, voters become angry and many politicians lose their jobs.

to be in knee-deep – to be heavily involved in something

* I’m knee-deep in paperwork, so I need to work late tonight.

to put (one’s) money where (one’s) mouth is – to finally do what one has been saying should be done; to stop just talking about something and begin acting on it

* If you think getting a college education is so important, why don’t you put your money where your mouth is and go back to school?

to go public – to share information with many people, especially with the media; to stop keeping something a secret

* What made you decide to go public with that story? Most people would have tried to keep it a secret.

to let the chips fall where they may – to do something or to let something happen, no matter what positive or negative things might result from it

* Even though they knew the housing market was falling, they decided to buy the home and let the chips fall where they may.

hasty – quick, fast, or rushed, especially when making a decision

* Whenever I make a hasty decision, I usually regret it the next day.

to sleep on it – to think about something overnight; to not make a final decision until the next morning, after one has had some time to think about it more carefully

* Don’t make a decision right now. Go home, sleep on it, and call me again tomorrow morning.

with (someone) – in agreement with another person; willing to support another person; willing to join another person in doing something

* We’re going to protest against the mayor’s decision. Are you with us or against us?



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Becky mean when she says, “we are putting our jobs on the line”?
 - a) They might lose their jobs.
 - b) They’re applying for new jobs.
 - c) They are doing something that isn’t part of their job.

2. What does Saeed mean when he says, “we’ll be in knee-deep”?
 - a) They’ll be heavily involved in whatever happens.
 - b) They’ll be able to change their minds later.
 - c) They’ll need to get down on their knees and pray.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to get out

The phrase “to get out,” in this podcast, means for secret information to become public and known by many people: “When the information got out, the company spent a lot of time trying to figure out who was sharing corporate secrets.” The phrase “to get out of (somewhere)” means to leave a place, usually quickly: “I don’t feel comfortable in this bar. Let’s get out of here!” The phrase “to get (someone) out” means to help a person leave or escape: “Don’t worry, we’ll get you out of here!” The phrase “to get out of doing (something)” means to find a way to avoid doing something one is supposed to do: “How did you get out of writing that report?” Finally, the phrase “to get out of (something)” can mean to stop doing a certain type of work: “In 1993, he got out of banking and became a musician.”

to blow up

In this podcast, the phrase “to blow up” means to become a major problem, usually affecting many people, or to become an uncontrollable situation: “Everyone was disappointed when the peace talks blew up and the war resumed.” The phrase “to blow up” also means to explode: “When the bomb blew up, many people were killed.” The phrase “to blow (something) up” means to fill something with air or a gas: “How many balloons do we need to blow up for the party?” Finally, the phrase “to blow up at (someone)” means to become very angry at someone and yell at him or her: “I’m sorry I blew up at you yesterday. I was just really upset about what had happened.”



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CULTURE NOTE

In 1989, the U.S. government “enacted” (made into law) the Whistleblower Protection Act. This “Act” (law) was created to protect government workers who report “misconduct” (bad, inappropriate behavior). “Official” (authority; leader) or “agency” (department) misconduct might include “gross” (serious; severe) mismanagement or “misuse” (inappropriate use) of government “funds” (money).

The law was created because some government workers had been complaining that they were being punished for having blown the whistle on their agency. For example, if they shared information about agency misconduct, they might be told that they had done a good thing, but then a few weeks or months later they might not receive a “promotion” (a move to a better job with more responsibility and better pay) or they might even be “fired” (lose their job). This was a strong “disincentive” (something that makes one not want to do something) against blowing the whistle on agency misconduct.

“Theoretically” (in theory, but not necessarily in reality), government workers should now feel more comfortable blowing the whistle on official misconduct or agency misconduct, because according to the Whistleblower Protection Act they won’t have to “suffer” (feel pain from) negative consequences. However, it can be hard to “enforce” (make sure a law is followed) the Act. Agency officials might argue that their “personnel” (related to human resources) decisions are unrelated to the whistleblower’s actions. For example, they might say that a whistleblower was fired because he or she wasn’t doing the job very well, even though he or she was really fired in “retaliation” (revenge). It can be very difficult or impossible to prove the reason why someone has been fired.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 572: Blowing the Whistle at Work.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 572. 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. Support this podcast by either donating to our site or by becoming an ESL Podcast member. If you become a member, you are able to download all of the Learning Guides for our episodes. These are 8- to 10-page special guides we provide for all of our current episodes that will help you improve your English even faster.

This dialogue is between Becky and Saeed; it's about blowing the whistle. "To blow the whistle" is to tell someone about something that is wrong in your company or organization. If someone is doing something illegal like stealing, to blow the whistle would be to tell your boss or to tell the police. Let's get started

[start of dialogue]

Becky: What are we going to do?

Saeed: I don't know. I need time to think about the ramifications of blowing the whistle.

Becky: There are no two ways about it. If we step up and do the right thing, we are putting our jobs on the line.

Saeed: But we can't keep quiet about this. If it gets out, and we knew about it all along, we'll get into even more trouble. And plus, think of how many people would be hurt if we kept our mouths shut. Could we live with that?

Becky: Maybe there is a way for us to protect our interests and still do the right thing. Maybe we could be anonymous whistleblowers.

Saeed: Don't count on being able to remain anonymous. When this thing blows up, we'll be in knee-deep. There's only one thing to do.

Becky: What?



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Saeed: I have to put my money where my mouth is and go public with what we know. I'll just have to let the chips fall where they may.

Becky: Don't be too hasty. Let's sleep on it and talk about it tomorrow.

Saeed: You can do that if you want to, but I've made up my mind. The question is: Are you with me?

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Becky saying to Saeed, "What are we going to do?" Saeed says, "I don't know. I need time to think about the ramifications of blowing the whistle." "Ramifications" are consequences, implications, something that will happen because you do something, especially when you're not exactly sure what will happen if you do something: the consequences of your actions. To blow the whistle means to share information about something wrong or bad that someone is doing because you want to stop it; you're either telling someone in your company – the president or your boss – about something that people are doing wrong, or you're perhaps telling the government that your company or organization is doing something wrong or illegal.

Becky says, "There are no two ways about it." This is an idiom that means there is no doubt, it's very clear; this can happen in only one way, there are no different options for us. There's only one thing we can do, that's the meaning of there are no two ways about it. She says, "If we step up and do the right thing, we are putting our jobs on the line." She says that this is what will happen, there is no other choice for us. "If we step up," that is, if we volunteer to do or to participate in this action – if we come forward, which is another phrasal verb that means the same thing – if we go to the boss or to the government, "we are putting our jobs on the line." Something that is "on the line" is something that is at risk, in danger, there's a possibility that you could lose it. To say your job is on the line means depending on what I do I could lose my job very soon.

Saeed says, "But we can't keep quiet about this (we can't not tell anyone). If it gets out, and we knew about it all along, we'll get into even more trouble." Notice the very popular word "get" in English; there are all sorts of phrasal verbs – two-word verbs that use the verb "get." This one is "get out." "To get out" means for information – secret or private information to become public, to become known by many people. There are other meanings of this expression also, and those are in the Learning Guide.



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Saeed says, “If it gets out (if this news about this bad thing is publicized – if people find out about it), we’ll get into even more trouble.” Notice “into,” the preposition, connected with “get.” “To get into trouble” means to be in trouble, to go from not being in trouble to being in trouble. Saeed says, “And plus (meaning in addition), think of how many people would be hurt if we kept our mouths shut.” “To keep your mouth shut” means not to tell anyone, not to say anything to anyone else, to be quiet. This is something I have a great deal of difficulty doing: keeping my mouth shut. My wife tells me this almost every day! Saeed is worried that people will get hurt if they don’t tell someone; he says, “Could we live with that?” “To live with” means to be able to tolerate something. It’s a phrasal verb meaning to put up with something, to be able to continue living your life.

Becky says, “Maybe there is a way for us to protect our interests and still do the right thing.” “To protect your interests” means you are taking care of yourself, you are making sure you don’t get hurt. She wants to protect herself, but she also wants to do the right thing. She says then, “Maybe we could be anonymous whistleblowers.” “To be anonymous” means that no one knows your name, that no one knows who you are. So, you write a note to a girl you like but you don’t put your name on the note; the note is anonymous. I’m not sure why you would do that; it seems kind of stupid to me. You, of course, would want the girl to know your name. But, I suppose maybe you want to provide some mystery about your identity – it’s possible!

Back to the story, Saeed says, “Don’t count on being able to remain anonymous.” “Don’t count on” means don’t rely upon, don’t depend upon, it’s not for certain. Saeed says, “When this thing blows up, we’ll be in knee-deep.” “To blow up” here means to become a major problem, to be a situation that will affect many different people in a bad way. “To blow up” has other meanings in English as a phrasal verb; those are in that Learning Guide we talked about earlier. So, Saeed is saying, “When this thing blows up (when people find out about it and it becomes a big problem), we’ll be in knee-deep.” “To be in knee (knee) -deep” means to be heavily involved in something, you are very much involved in it. Often, it’s a bad thing, but you could also say “I’m knee-deep in work this week,” I have so much work I can barely think, I’m heavily involved in it.

Saeed says, “There’s only one thing to do.” Becky asks, “What?” He says, “I have to put my money where my mouth is and go public with what we know.” This is an expression: “to put your money where your mouth is,” it means to stop talking about something and actually do it; not just to say you’re going to run a



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marathon, but actually to practice and run the marathon. We use it when someone has finally decided to do something that they've been talking about. It also is used sometimes when you give advice to someone, and you need to actually do something as part of that advice: "I'm going to help you find a job." I promise you something; I'm going to put my money where my mouth is, I'm actually going to call some people to find you a job. "To go public" means to share information with many people, especially the newspapers or the television news programs.

Saeed says, "I'll just have to let the chips fall where they may." This expression, "to let the chips (chips) fall where they may," means to do something even though something bad might be a result of your action, to do something and not think about the positive or negative ramifications, or consequences, of your action.

Becky, however, says, "Don't be too hasty" (hasty). That means don't be so rushed, don't do it quickly, think about this decision. She says, "Let's sleep on it and talk about it tomorrow." "To sleep on it" means to think about something overnight; to go home, to fall asleep, continue thinking about it, and the next day you make your decision. Saeed says, "You can do that if you want to, but I've made up my mind (I've decided). The question is: Are you with me?" meaning are you going to help me; support me; agree with me.

Let's listen to the dialogue now at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

The writer of this podcast dialogue is not anonymous; it's our own Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

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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