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**ESL Podcast 908 – Being Territorial at Work**

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**GLOSSARY**

**to run (some/the) numbers** – to perform mathematical calculations; to analyze data

\* Don't you think we should run the numbers again before we make such a big investment?

**turf** – territory; an area that one feels possessive of or believes that one should have control over

\* Hey, the northern part of the city is my turf, so don't try to make any sales there.

**go-to person** – a person one relies on to get a certain task done; the person whom others should contact with requests for information or updates

\* Jerry is our go-to person for maintaining the client relationship, but any questions about the contract should be directed to our legal department.

**to step on (someone's) toes** – to interfere with someone else's business or area of responsibility; to become too involved in someone else's work when that person wants to keep control of it

\* This is your wedding and I don't want to step on your toes, but don't you think you're ordering too many flowers?

**to not take kindly to** – to dislike and resent something; to not like or to feel uncomfortable with something; to dislike and have bad feelings about something

\* Considering how many accidents you've had in the past three months, she won't take kindly to your request to borrow her car.

**to encroach** – to intrude on; to use something or to become involved in something that belongs to another person

\* Have you noticed how the neighbor's garden is encroaching on our property?

**territorial** – feeling strongly about a particular area of land and wanting to defend it as one's own and not let anyone else use it or be on it

\* Be careful, Heidi's dog is really territorial and it will bark and bite if you step into their yard.

**right this minute** – right away; immediately; without any delay

\* I'm on a deadline and can't help you right this minute, but come back after 2:30 and I'll see what I can do.



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**to gain control** – to begin to have power over someone or something, usually by taking that power away from another person

\* What is the government trying to do, gain control of private banks?

**fiefdom** – an area of land belonging to someone with a lot of power, traditionally referring to feudalism (the practice of receiving land and protection from a wealthy person in exchange for one's labor and/or fighting services)

\* When Danica sold her business and was no longer the CEO, it was hard for her to get used to the idea of not having her fiefdom anymore.

**entrenched** – unlikely to change; clearly established in a certain way

\* It's very difficult to change deeply entrenched beliefs.

**to muscle in** – to invade someone's area, space, or limits of responsibilities, especially while using physical force

\* When the bouncer at the dance club told them they weren't on the guest list, they tried to muscle in.

**motive** – one's motivation or reason for doing something

\* Everybody knows Liliana tried to cover up what happened, but what was her motive for causing so much trouble for so many people?

**to cover (one's) tracks** – to try to remove evidence so that others cannot determine what happened or what one has done

\* Shane tried to cover his tracks and put everything back on the desk exactly where it was before, but his teacher was still able to tell that someone had been going through her desk drawers.

**turf war** – a fight for territory; a struggle to get control of an area that one feels possessive of or believes that one should have control over

\* In the first few years of marriage, Yuki and Jun fought about household chores so much that it felt like a turf war.



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**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

3. What is Sita doing while she's "running the numbers"?
  - a) She's performing calculations.
  - b) She's finding ways to make more money.
  - c) She's rushing to meet a deadline.
  
2. Why does Andy warn Sita to "be careful about stepping on Delia's toes"?
  - a) Because Delia will be upset if anyone questions her calculations.
  - b) Because Delia won't like it if other people try to do her job.
  - c) Because Delia doesn't like anyone to touch her desk or papers.

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**WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?**

**turf**

The word "turf," in this podcast, means an area that one feels possessive of or believes that one should have control over: "The President and Congress are fighting for political turf." The word "turf" also describes grass-covered land: "The golf club uses a lot of fertilizer to make its turf look so nice." And "turf" can also describe artificial grass: "In areas where it rains a lot, outdoor soccer games are held on artificial turf, because if they play on real grass, everything gets too muddy." The phrase "home turf" describes where someone is from and where he or she feels comfortable: "It's easier to win games when we're playing on our home turf." Finally, the phrase "surf and turf" describes an entrée that combines beef and seafood, usually shrimp: "That surf and turf meal looks delicious!"

**to cover (one's) tracks**

In this podcast, the phrase "to cover (one's) tracks" means to try to remove the evidence so that others cannot determine what happened or what one has done: "Don't forget to cover your tracks so nobody can trace those emails back to your account." The phrase "to be on the right track" means to be going in the right direction and to be doing the right thing: "Please review this draft and let me know if I'm on the right track before I proceed to write the rest of the report." Finally, the phrase "to stop (dead) in (one's) tracks" means to stop abruptly, usually because one is in trouble or danger: "Shelly's scream made us stop dead in our tracks."



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**CULTURE NOTE**

**Incorporated and Unincorporated Territories**

A U.S. “territory” is an area that is “overseen” (ruled, controlled, and monitored by) the “federal” (national) government of the United States, but that does not have “sovereign” (independent) authority over that area. Territories were originally intended to govern areas that were in the process of becoming a state, but were not yet ready to become a state.

U.S. territories can be “incorporated” or “unincorporated.” An “incorporated territory” is an “integral” (important) part of the United States, and the U.S. “Constitution” (the nation’s most important legal document) applies there. The Territory of Alaska and Territory of Hawaii were both incorporated territories until 1959, when they became states. Currently, the only incorporated territories are the Palmyra Atoll (a group of small islands south of Hawaii), “coastal waters” (oceanic waters within a certain distance of land), and “vessels” (ships).

“Unincorporated territories” are controlled by the U.S. government, but are not part of the United States. Unincorporated territories include Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Midway Islands, among others. Puerto Rico is generally considered an unincorporated territory, but courts are currently questioning whether Congressional actions have actually changed Puerto Rico’s status to that of an incorporated territory.

The residents of U.S. territories can vote locally and are represented by “delegates” (representatives) to Congress, but those delegates are limited in terms of the issues they may vote on. The residents of territories pay some taxes and receive some legal protections through U.S. courts, but “simultaneously” (at the same time) have their own self-government.

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



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 908 – Being Territorial at Work.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 908. 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. Go there, become a member of ESL Podcast, and download a Learning Guide for this episode.

This episode is a dialogue between Andy and Sita about responsibilities in the workplace. Let's get started.

[start of dialog]

Andy: What are you doing?

Sita: I'm running some numbers for the new project.

Andy: I thought that was Delia's turf.

Sita: She's usually the go-to person for this type of information, but I need this info right now.

Andy: I'd be careful about stepping on Delia's toes. She doesn't take kindly to people encroaching on her responsibilities.

Sita: I know she can be territorial at times, but I'm sure if I explain to her why I'm getting this information right this minute, she'd understand.

Andy: Okay, but don't be surprised if she thinks you're trying to gain control of her little fiefdom. She's really entrenched and she doesn't like anyone muscling in.

Sita: Do you really think she'll misunderstand my motives?

Andy: I wouldn't take any chances. Hurry up and finish what you're doing, cover your tracks, and get out. With any luck, she won't think this is the beginning of a turf war.



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[end of dialog]

Andy begins by asking Sita, “What are you doing?” Sita says, “I’m running some numbers on the new project.” “To run some numbers,” or “to run *the* numbers,” means to do some sort of mathematical calculation, to analyze data, to analyze information in the form of numbers. Sometimes we’ll say, “I’m going to run the numbers.” We might also say, “I’m going to crunch (crunch) the numbers.” Both of these are terms used in the business world to describe the activity of analyzing information using some sort of calculation, some sort of statistical analysis.

Andy says, “I thought that was Delia’s turf.” “Turf” (turf) means the area that you believe you have control over. It can also mean territory. The word “territory” (territory) is usually used in talking about countries – what territory belongs to this country, what area of land belongs to this country. However, it could also be used in a “smaller sense,” we could say, talking about responsibilities at work. Well, this is my territory. This is my turf. This is the area that I feel responsible for, that I am responsible for. The word “turf” usually is used to imply that someone feels strongly about the area that they have responsibility for, and doesn’t want anyone else interfering.

Sita says “She” – meaning Delia – “is usually the go to person for this type of information, but I need this info right now.” The expression “go-to person” means the person who you would normally ask to do a certain task because that person is an expert, that person is the best person to do that. Sita says that Delia is normally the person who would crunch or “run the numbers,” but she needs this “info” – this information – “right now.” Sita can’t wait for Delia to do the analysis, so she is doing it herself.

Andy says, “I’d be careful about stepping on Delia’s toes.” “To step on someone’s toes” (toes) means to interfere with their area of responsibility, to become involved in someone else’s work when that other person doesn’t want you to be involved. So, for example, if I am supposed to organize a meeting, and you decide that you’re going to help me organize the meeting even though I don’t want you to, that would be a case of you “stepping on my toes.” Your “toes” are the digits that are on your feet. You have fingers on your hands. On your feet, you have toes. The phrasal verb “to step on” means to put your foot on top of. “To step on someone’s toes,” then, is a metaphor, meaning to get in someone’s way, to interfere with someone else’s responsibilities.

Andy says, “Delia doesn’t take kindly to people encroaching on her responsibilities.” The expression “does not take kindly to” means dislikes, resents, does not like something, is very uncomfortable with something. You



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don't hear this expression too frequently, but you will still read it and hear it, about someone “not taking kindly to” some action that another person does. In this case, Delia does not take kindly to people “encroaching on her responsibilities.” “To encroach” (encroach) means to become involved in something that belongs to someone else, to become involved in some activity that another person is responsible for. It's very similar to the phrase “to step on someone's toes.” “To encroach” means to start to move in someone else turf, especially when we're talking about a work environment. Delia does not take kindly to other people encroaching on her responsibilities, taking over for responsibilities.

Sita says, “I know she can be territorial at times.” Sita says that Delia can be “territorial” (territorial). “To be territorial” is related to the noun “territory.” The idea that this is my area of responsibility, this is my turf, and I don't want anyone else interfering with me. Sita says, “I'm sure if I explained to her” – to Delia – “why I'm getting this information right this minute, she'd understand.” “Right this minute” means right now, immediately, right away. “I need this information right this minute.” I need this information *now*.

Andy says, “Okay, but don't be surprised if she thinks you're trying to gain control of her little fiefdom.” “To gain control” means to have power over someone or something, usually power that you get by taking it from another person. So, you have someone at your work who is responsible for the annual meeting with your entire company. You try to gain control of that job, of that task, of that responsibility, by taking over the power from that person.

The word “fiefdom” (fiefdom) refers to an area of land belonging to someone with a lot of power. It's an old word that describes a system, common in the Middle Ages in Europe, called “feudalism” (feudalism). Feudalism involved receiving land and protection from a very wealthy person in exchange for working for that person or giving some sort of service to that person. Here, and in modern usage, “fiefdom” refers to an area that you are responsible for and that you are very territorial about, an area of responsibility that you don't want anyone else interfering with.

Andy says, “Delia is really entrenched and she doesn't like anyone muscling in.” “To be entrenched” (entrenched) means you are unlikely to change. You have your established ways, the ways you do things, and you're not going to change for anyone. That's me. I'm very entrenched in some of my ideas! Well, Andy says, Delia is entrenched, “and she doesn't like anyone muscling in.” “To muscle (muscle) in” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to go into someone else's space, someone else's area of responsibility, in this case. It can literally mean to



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use physical force to get into someone's territory or someone's area, but here it means something like gaining control of someone else's responsibility, by using some sort of pressure, using some tactic that allows you to gain control even if the other person doesn't want you to.

Sita says, “Do you really think she'll misunderstand” – or not understand – “my motives?” Your “motive” is your motivation, your reason for doing something. Andy says, “I wouldn't take any chances,” meaning you shouldn't try to do this unless you're absolutely sure. You shouldn't risk anything. He says, “Hurry up and finish what you're doing, cover your tracks, and get out.” “To cover your tracks” (tracks) means to remove evidence so that other people don't know where you've been or what you have done. We use this expression when someone is doing something wrong and you don't want anyone else to know about it, so you're going to hide the evidence or get rid of any indication that you were there or that you did something wrong.

Andy says, “With any luck” – if you're lucky – “she won't think this is the beginning of a turf war.” A “turf war” is when two different people or two different groups are fighting each other for responsibility of a certain task, usually in a large organization such as a company.

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

[start of dialog]

Andy: What are you doing?

Sita: I'm running some numbers for the new project.

Andy: I thought that was Delia's turf.

Sita: She's usually the go-to person for this type of information, but I need this info right now.

Andy: I'd be careful about stepping on Delia's toes. She doesn't take kindly to people encroaching on her responsibilities.

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Andy: Okay, but don't be surprised if she thinks you're trying to gain control of her little fiefdom. She's really entrenched and she doesn't like anyone muscling in.

Sita: Do you really think she'll misunderstand my motives?

Andy: I wouldn't take any chances. Hurry up and finish what you're doing, cover your tracks, and get out. With any luck, she won't think this is the beginning of a turf war.

[end of dialog]

She's our go-to person when it comes to writing amazing scripts. I speak, of course, of our very 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 again right here on ESL Podcast.

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