



ESL Podcast 560 – Learning Work Rules and Routines

GLOSSARY

to give (someone) the rundown – to present basic information about something to another person; to give someone an overview of something

* There was a lot to learn very quickly, but the boss did a good job of giving us the rundown before the client came to the meeting.

well-oiled machine – a team or company that works very well and efficiently, without making mistakes or wasting time or money

* When Ivan bought the company, it was almost bankrupt, but he turned it into a well-oiled machine within a few months.

to pull (one's) weight – to do one's fair share of the work; to do what one is supposed to do as part of a team or group

* Meg was fired for not pulling her weight and for expecting her team members to do most of her work for her.

to run smoothly – to operate or function without any problems, as something should

* Our software is guaranteed to run smoothly, or we'll give you your money back.

to get up to speed – to learn all that needs to be learned, especially when one is a new employee and needs to learn everything that the other employees already know

* In general, it takes our new employees about seven weeks to get up to speed and feel comfortable in their job.

to know the drill – to know what will happen and what one should do; to know what to expect and what is expected of oneself

* Remember, we all talked about what each one of us will, so you all know the drill.

to fall in line – to do what is expected or to do what one has been asked to do without making any mistakes and without complaining

* Blake used to argue with his team leader all the time, but he has finally learned to fall in line and do what is asked of him.



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routine – something that is done the same way each time; the unchanging order in which things are done

* Don't you get tired of following the same routine at work each day? I prefer a job where there's always something new and different to do.

on the nose – exactly; precisely

* Jim tried to guess my age and his first guess was on the nose.

leeway – freedom to break the rules; freedom to do something the way one wants to do it, without too many rules or restrictions

* The sales representatives are expected to meet their sales goals each month, but they have a lot of leeway in deciding how they meet those goals.

whatsoever – not at all; not of any kind or type; used to give emphasis to a negative (not) sentence

* She has had no luck whatsoever in getting her novel published.

habitually – regularly; normally; with something happening often or almost always

* He habitually wears sunglasses, even when it's dark outside.

run-of-the-mill – ordinary; just like other things of the same type; not unusual or interesting

* Last weekend, we saw a run-of-the-mill movie. It was alright, but I wouldn't really recommend it to anyone.

tried and true – something that has been tested and shown to work well

* Pasindu has a tried-and-true system for storing information, so he doesn't plan to change it.

lockstep – doing things in the same way at the same time as other people, without making any changes

* The government plans to mandate that all first-grade teachers teach in lockstep, without making any changes to the curriculum.

to let (oneself) in for – to put oneself in a difficult or dangerous situation

* Doctors who specialize in emergency medicine are letting themselves in for a very stressful career.



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drill sergeant – a person who works in the military and whose job is to tell new soldiers what to do, often by shouting orders

* The drill sergeant shouted at Ahmed for wearing dirty boots.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the boss so worried about how Olivia does her job?
 - a) Because the company is doing very poorly and he wants it to improve.
 - b) Because the company wants to find the most creative employees.
 - c) Because the company knows what employees must do to do their job well.

2. What does the boss mean when he says he expects all the employees to follow lockstep?
 - a) They should always lock their office at the end of the day.
 - b) They should do exactly what they're told to do.
 - c) They should follow in his footsteps.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

on the nose

The phrase “on the nose,” in this podcast, means exactly or precisely: “If you can guess on the nose how many beans are in this jar, you’ll win \$1,000.” The phrase “to lead (someone) by the nose” means to force someone to go somewhere: “Yolanda has a terrible fear of dentists, and her friends had to lead her to her appointment by the nose.” The phrase “to be as plain as the nose on (one’s) face” means to be very obvious or easy to see or understand: “The answer is as plain as the nose on your face. I don’t know why you think this is so hard.” The phrase “to rub (someone’s) nose in (something)” means to remind someone about something that he or she has done wrong: “I know I made a mistake. You don’t have to keep talking about it and rubbing my nose in it.”

tried and true

In this podcast, the phrase “tried and true” describes something that has been tested and shown to work well: “Making micro loans to entrepreneurs is a tried-and-true way to stimulate the local economy.” The phrase “too good to be true” is used to describe something that is unbelievable because it seems too good:



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“An offer to sell you a big-screen TV for \$60 is too good to be true.” The phrase “true colors” describes one’s true beliefs, feelings, or opinions when one isn’t hiding anything: “When people are under a lot of stress, they start to show their true colors.” Finally, the phrase “true to (one’s) word” means keeping one’s promise, or doing what one has said one would do: “How do I know you’ll stay true to your word?”

CULTURE NOTE

The U.S. “military” (the organizations and people who fight for a country) has many “ranks” (the level or amount of power a person has in an organization). People who “serve” (work for) their country well are rewarded with a higher rank. People with a higher rank have greater responsibility and receive greater respect from people with a lower rank. For example, people with a lower rank are supposed to “salute” (hold one’s hand to one’s forehead and then quickly move it away) people with a higher rank and call them “sir.” People with a higher rank also “earn” (make money) more than people with a lower rank.

The ranks are slightly different in each “branch” (part) of the “Armed Services” (the U.S. military; the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard). In the Army, a “Private” is a very common low rank, followed by “Private 2” and then “Private First Class.” A private can be promoted to a “Specialist” and then a “Corporal.” Then there are “Sergeants” and many “variations” (slight changes) on that rank, such as “Master Sergeant” and “Sergeant Major.” “Lieutenants,” “Captains,” and “Majors” are all high-ranking individuals, followed by “Colonels” and “Generals.” The highest-ranking individual in the U.S. Army is the “General of the Army.”

The U.S. Air Force has similar ranks. New “recruits” (people who have just begun to serve in the military) serve as low-ranking “Airmen.” Then they can become “Sergeants” and “Lieutenants,” followed by “Captains,” “Majors,” and “Colonels.” “Generals” are the highest-ranking officers, and the “General of the Air Force” has the highest ranking “of all” (higher than anyone else).

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast episode 560: Learning Work Rules and Routines.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 560. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Did you know that we have a website? Well, we do! It's eslpod.com. I invite you to go there and become a member of ESL Podcast, that way you will get all of our Learning Guides, 8- to 10-page guides we provide for all of our current episodes that will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is about a boss and someone who works for him, talking about learning the rules and the procedures at a new job. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

I was happy to finally get a job, but I wasn't ready for a first day of work like this one.

...

Boss: This is your first day and my job is to give you the rundown on how we do things around here. This is a well-oiled machine. Everybody has to pull his or her weight, or things don't run smoothly. Got that?

Olivia: Yes, I do. I'm here to learn and to get up to speed as quickly as possible.

Boss: Good. I expect you to know the drill and be able to fall in line by the end of the week.

Olivia: I will do my very best.

Boss: We don't like surprises around here, so we've built our workday around a lot of routines that every employee follows. We expect people to arrive at 8:30 on the nose. That's our start time and there is no leeway whatsoever. If you're habitually late, you're out. Got that?

Olivia: Got it.



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Boss: We're no run-of-the-mill company. We have a tried and true system here and we expect all of our employees to follow lockstep. Got that?

Olivia: Yes, sir.

...

I needed a job, but when I was offered this one, I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. I didn't have a new boss. I had a drill sergeant!

[end of dialogue]

The story begins with Olivia saying, "I was happy to finally get a job, but I wasn't ready for a first day of work like this one."

The boss says to Olivia, "This is your first day and my job is to give you the rundown on how we do things around here." The phrase "to give (someone) the rundown" (one word) means to present the basic information about something to another person. We might also call this an "overview," a general idea of what it is you are talking about. Olivia's boss is going to give her the rundown on how they do things in that office. The boss says, "This (meaning this business or this office) is a well-oiled machine." That expression, "a well-oiled (oiled) machine," means that it works very well, it works very efficiently, it doesn't make mistakes; they don't waste time or money. A well-oiled machine is something that works without problems; it's very efficient. In many machines, for example in the engine or motor of your car, you have oil so that the metal that is touching other metal is able to move freely or easily; that's where the expression originally comes from, I think.

The boss says, "Everybody has to pull his or her weight, or things don't run smoothly." "To pull your weight," or "to pull your own weight," means to do what you are supposed to do as part of the group or as part of the team. We might also say "to do your fair share," meaning you're supposed to do what you are told to do – assigned to do – in order to help the whole group. If not everyone pulls his or her weight, the boss says things don't run smoothly. "To run smoothly" means to operate or function without any problems, the way things are supposed to work. The boss then says to Olivia, "Got that?" "Got that?" as a question is an informal, somewhat impolite way of asking someone if they understand. We might also say, "You got it?" It's usually a parent to a child, or a boss to an employee, but it's still not a very nice way to ask someone if they understand



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something. You would instead say, “Do you understand what I’m saying?” or “Do you understand that?”

Olivia says, “Yes, I do. I’m here to learn and to get up to speed as quickly as possible.” The expression “to get up to speed” means to learn all that you need to learn, especially when you are a new employee or a new member of an organization, where all the other employees or members know everything. You don’t know anything, so you need to work hard to get up to speed – to know what the other people know.

The boss says, “Good. I expect you to know the drill and be able to fall in line by the end of the week.” “To know the drill” (drill) means to know what is going to happen and what you need to do, to know what to expect and what is expected of you in particular. So, knowing the procedures is knowing the drill. The boss expects her to know the drill and be able to fall in line by the end of the week. “To fall in line” means to do what is expected of you, what you have been asked to do without complaining, without saying, “Oh, I don’t want to do this,” without making mistakes. That’s to fall in line. Sometimes we use this expression when you are trying to change people’s opinions or actions, and if one person changes their mind or starts doing something differently, the others, especially if that person is a leader, will fall in line.

Olivia says, “I will do my very best (I will do the best that I can).” The boss says, “We don’t like surprises around here (here at this company), so we’ve built our workday around a lot of routines that every employee follows.” “We’ve built our workday” – we’ve planned our work using these routines. A “routine” is something that is done the same way every time; the order doesn’t change. Most of us have routines when we get up in the morning. We may go into the bathroom and brush our teeth, or take a shower, or go exercise, and then eat breakfast, etc. That would be your routine, the way you do things every morning. Maybe your routine is every day you get up, you drink a bottle of beer, and you go to work. I hope that’s not your routine, but, you know, maybe somebody out there does that!

The boss says, “We expect people to arrive at 8:30 on the nose.” “On the nose” is an expression – an informal expression we use in talking about time when we mean exactly, precisely: “I want you here at 8:30 on the nose.” Not 8:29, not 8:31; 8:30. Two other ways of saying this are “on the button” (button) and “on the dot” (dot). The boss says, “That’s our start time (that’s the time we start working) and there is no leeway whatsoever.” “Leeway” (leeway – one word) is freedom



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to break the rules; freedom to do something the way you want to, not the way the rules are. It can also mean, more generally, flexibility. If someone says, “I want you here at 8:30, but I’ll give you some leeway,” meaning you could come at 8:35, maybe 8:40 without getting into trouble. Well, not at this company, there’s no leeway whatsoever. “Whatsoever” (one word) means not at all. It’s used to emphasize a negative in a sentence. “She had no luck whatsoever in getting her novel published.” She had no luck; the “whatsoever” is used for emphasis. The boss says, “If you’re habitually late, you’re out.” “Habitually” means regularly, normally, time and time again, something that often or always happens. “He habitually wears sunglasses, even at night.” He must be some sort of rock star; you know they all do that; they wear the sunglasses even though there’s no sun. Maybe because their routine when they get up in the morning is to drink a bottle of beer, then you can understand why the sunglasses are there! The boss says, “If you’re habitually late, you’re out,” meaning you will be fired; you will lose your job. Once again, he says, “Got that?”

Olivia responds by saying, “Got it,” meaning I understand. The boss then says, “We’re no run-of-the-mill company.” “Run-of-the-mill” (hyphens in between each word) means ordinary. We’re not like other companies, we’re not typical, we’re not ordinary; we’re special is what he’s saying. He says, “We have a tried and true system here and we expect all of our employees to follow lockstep.” “Tried and true” means something that has been tested and has been shown to work well. My friend had a tried and true system for finding a girlfriend in college. He would take classes that had mostly women in them so his odds – his chances – were better. For example, at my university the foreign language classes had more women, a lot more women than men. That’s why I was a Spanish major! The boss says that they expect the employees at the company to follow lockstep. “Lockstep” (one word) means doing things in the same way, at the same time as everyone else – no changes, no leeway, no flexibility.

Once again, the boss says, “Got that?” and Olivia says, “Yes, sir.” “Yes, sir” is rather formal. It’s almost something you would hear more often in the military, and that’s really the idea that Olivia wants to convey – wants to show. Olivia said, “I needed a job, but when I was offered this one, I didn’t know what I was letting myself in for.” “To let yourself in for (something)” means to put yourself in a difficult or even dangerous situation. If someone says to you, “You don’t know what you’re letting yourself in for,” they’re trying to warn you, they’re trying to tell you that this is going to be difficult, more difficult than you think. Olivia says, “I didn’t have a new boss (at her work). I had a drill sergeant!” A “drill sergeant” is a person who works in the military and whose job it is to tell new soldiers what to



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do. Usually drill sergeants are very tough, and they yell a lot to try to get the new soldiers to obey and to get used to being shouted at and being given orders. We use the expression to mean someone who is too authoritarian, somebody who is too tough, somebody who tries to operate their company as if it were the army. That's the joke that Olivia is making at the end here.

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

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

This dialogue was written by someone who is not your run-of-the-mill writer, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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

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