

AMERICAN IDIOMS FOR BUSINESS

**Essential English Expressions
that Play Well at Work**

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ISBN: 979-8-9902094-0-4 (Paperback)

979-8-9902094-1-1 (Ebook)

A shout-out to Cole for being my right-hand man,
going the extra mile,
and thinking outside the box with me.

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INTRODUCTION



This book aims to help non-native English speakers excel in business communications. Non-Americans can also benefit by learning new expressions in “Americanese” to enrich their vocabulary and fluency at work.

Even born-and-raised Americans can gain insights into the everyday expressions used in business and on the job.

Idioms are terms and phrases that mean something different than the literal meaning of the individual words. They’re like secret codes that native speakers use. This book will crack that code.

Authored by two expert educators, this book breaks down these essential American English business expressions, telling you where they came from and how you can use them correctly.

Chapter 1: **Starting Up** – Learn key terms to begin projects and discussions effectively.

Chapter 2: **Strategy & Planning** – Discover phrases for smart, innovative planning.

Chapter 3: **Teamwork & Communication** – Explore idioms for collaboration and understanding.

Chapter 4: **Setbacks & Challenges** – Find expressions for overcoming obstacles and starting over.

Chapter 5: **Success & Excellence** – Talk about achievements with motivational phrases.

These idioms are handy to use in emails, calls, and in-person conversations, preparing you to express yourself better and interact more intelligently in various professional and social situations.

By mastering them, you'll improve your understanding and the way you present yourself. You'll be able to build stronger relationships in and out of the workplace. You'll be able to navigate business communication with ease and confidence.

Most of the book is written in simplified English, to make it easier for non-native speakers. But after each chapter, we've also added a bonus story in five episodes, written at a higher level. Challenge yourself and enjoy the story!

We think you'll have fun learning and using idioms. Many expressions involve "plays on words," where humor and double meanings can bring a smile to your face. And if the words alone don't make you smile, the images that go with them will. Let the idioms play for you at work to help you win in the game of business.

So get ready to speak American English like a native, with confidence and humor, using these idioms you need to know!

Ready to get the ball rolling? If so, let's get down to business!

CHAPTER ONE

Starting Up



Kickoff

Get the Ball Rolling

Icebreaker

Brainstorm

Touch Base

Onboarding

In the fast-paced arenas of business and corporate strategy, the art of beginning is essential. These idioms use words from the worlds of sports and transportation that open the play or clear the way. Starting idioms play an essential role in setting the tone, pace, and direction of projects and relationships within the professional sphere. From initiating action to fostering a sense of belonging, the right idioms can launch ideas and meetings, build cohesive teams, and steer enterprises to success.

IN CONVERSATION

Manager: Good morning team! Let's *kick off* this week with a clear focus on our new project.

Employee: I've been looking forward to this. How do we *get the ball rolling*?

Manager: First, let's start with a quick *icebreaker*: share one innovative idea for the project.

Employee: Well, I've been considering messaging options for our marketing strategy.

Manager: Great idea! Let's *brainstorm* some expressions we can use to implement your idea.

Employee: Agreed. I'll *touch base* with Jenna and we can talk about different approaches.

Manager: Her *onboarding* is going well. She's learning quickly and seems comfortable in her new role.

KICKOFF

The beginning of an event



The term originates from American football, referring to the act of starting the game by kicking the ball from the center of the field. It has been adopted into the language of business to signify the commencement of a project or campaign. “Kick off” can be used as a verb phrase to indicate the act of beginning. As a noun, “kickoff” signifies a meeting to start a project. This event is intended to energize, motivate, and align the team.

GET THE BALL ROLLING

Start an activity or process



The expression originated from sports such as bowling, in which a ball is set in motion to start the action. In American business, it signifies the initiation of projects or strategies. To get the ball rolling, and keep the ball rolling, is to encourage teamwork and continuous progress to sustain movement once begun. In meetings and planning sessions, it's a call to action for participants to contribute and maintain the forward motion of business initiatives.

ICEBREAKER

Activity or conversation meant to reduce
initial tension



The term “icebreaker” comes from ships designed to break through ice so other vessels can pass. This concept in business refers to activities or conversations that reduce initial tension among people. Icebreakers are brief interactions used at the start of meetings or workshops to encourage participation. They help participants open up to the conversation and stimulate creative thinking.

BRAINSTORM

Concentrate or collaborate on idea generation



The term was first coined by advertising executive Alex Osborn in the 1930s and later popularized in his 1953 book, *Applied Imagination*. It refers to a spontaneous group discussion to produce ideas and solve problems. In a business context, brainstorming is a common practice where team members come together in a free-thinking environment to generate innovative solutions and creative strategies, often using techniques to encourage collaboration.

TOUCH BASE

Make brief contact with someone



The phrase comes from the act of a baseball player touching a base, an essential rule of the game. In business, the expression means contacting someone for a brief update or discussion to confirm details, align, or keep an open line of communication. It's used to ensure that everyone is informed without the need for a lengthy meeting. "Off base" implies that an idea is not in the right place.

ONBOARDING

Integrating new employees into
an organization



The term refers to the integration of new employees into an organization, equipping them with needed knowledge, skills, and behaviors. The term comes from the phrase “on board,” present on a ship or airplane. Onboarding programs create a sense of belonging, explaining the company’s culture and clarifying the employee’s role. “On board” can also have a broader meaning, indicating agreement with a decision or plan, as in: “I’m on board with that.”

QUIZ YOURSELF

1. To help new team members feel comfortable and introduce themselves, the manager prepared a quick _____ activity.
2. The design team will _____ tomorrow to come up with innovative packaging ideas for the new product.
3. The team is ready to start their new project with enthusiasm and a clear agenda. Let's _____ the meeting with a motivational speech.
4. The HR department has a comprehensive _____ process to ensure new hires are well-equipped and feel part of the team from day one.
5. We've been discussing this concept for a while, but it's time to _____ with implementing our plan.
6. I haven't heard from the client in a few days. I should _____ with them to ensure everything is on track.

ANSWERS

1. Icebreaker
2. Brainstorm
3. Kickoff
4. Onboarding
5. Get the Ball Rolling
6. Touch Base

AN IDIOMATIC WORK WEEK

Part 1



MONDAY

In Quest of the Perfect Pitch

9:00 am: The Strategy Meeting

Agency kingpin Jason, sufficiently caffeinated, gathers his team for a brainstorming kickoff, welcoming the newest employees, Zack and Clare. “Team, we need to devise an ending and a pitch for the company’s new book on American idioms. The content is top-notch, and the illustrations are eye-catching. But we need something special to tie it all together,” he explains.

“What do you have in mind, Boss?” Zack asked, trying to make a good first impression.

“Well, the book feels more like a dictionary now, not a story. We need to convey the excitement of idioms. And not just any idioms: American idioms, reflecting our Yankee ingenuity.

Zack grumbles, under his breath, thinking that no New Yorkers could hear him: “Yankees are evil.”

Jason, overhearing, gives him a menacing stare. “I forgive you, Zack. This time. I feel sorry for the poor Red Sox Nation. But you can’t change where you were born.” Then, turning to the team: “Who wants to kick things off here?”

Clare, still going through her ‘onboarding,’ is eager to make a good first impression: “What if we showcase the process of creating a book? Like a story within a story that shows how idioms are not just words, but part of our daily lives and work culture?”

“Yes!” Zack exclaims. “And we could add personal references, anecdotes, and experiences to make the book more relatable and vivid. It would be truly ours.”

Jason strokes his chin. “OK, you guys have momentum. Let’s get the ball rolling!”

5:58 pm: Wrapping Up for the Day

In an epiphany, Clare suggests a possible structure for the book. “We’re living examples of how these idioms work,” she observes. “Documenting our week and our creative process, day by day, is the perfect way to show the practical application of these expressions for businesses.”

Zack jumps in, excitedly: “Let’s highlight how idioms animate our discussions and decisions. We’ll show the business value of expressions beyond their literal meanings.”

Clare concurs: “Let’s capture the creativity and collaboration that makes our brand stand out.”

Zack: “Sounds like a great plan. In fact, it sounds like a home run. You hit it out of the park!”

Clare looked sideways. “Yankee Stadium or Fenway Park?”

Zack didn’t miss a beat: “Fenway, of course. Over the Green Monster and onto Yawkey Way.”

Clare smiled. “OK, wise guy. Just don’t let Jason hear. For him, it’s three strikes and you’re out.”

Zack frowned. “I thought I had only one strike.”

Clare reminded him: “You insulted the Yankees. And you’re from Boston. You’re a strike away.”