

WORK IT OUT

WITH BUSINESS IDIOMS

**TEACHING RESOURCE
B2-C1**

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PROSPERITY EDUCATION

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To infinity and beyond.

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About this book

Work It Out with Business Idioms

Designed for both new and experienced teachers, *Work It Out with Business Idioms* is uniquely focused on presenting and practising idioms in a business or work-related context. With its highly communicative, student-centred approach, *Work It Out with Business Idioms* offers downloadable and photocopiable lesson materials, extensive teaching notes and a variety of inclusive activities for B2–C1 level students.

Key features

- Detailed lesson plans to ensure clear and effective delivery, from start to finish, including lead-ins and activities for practice, production, extension and review
- Activities and lesson adaptations to accommodate the needs of mixed-ability classes, and discussion questions to encourage critical thinking
- Digital lesson alternatives and online-teaching tips to support a blended-learning environment
- Extension exercises for more-confident students and activities for fast finishers

Downloadable and photocopiable content

- Teaching tools
- Handouts
- Idiom dictionary

Accompanying resources available from www.prosperityeducation.net

- Student workbook (class sets available; individual copies available on Amazon)
- eBook: the content of this print edition in pdf

About the author

David Bohlke is an ELT author, editor, trainer and consultant with 35 years of expertise in creating market-driven publishing materials. He has commissioned, edited and written some of the world's top-selling courses and skills texts for the adult, secondary and academic English markets, including: *Four Corners* and *Final Draft* (Cambridge University Press); *Keynote* and *Reading Explorer* (National Geographic Learning); *Skillful* (Macmillan Education); *Next Generation Grammar* (Pearson); and *Speak Now* (Oxford University Press).

Introduction

Preparing to work it out

Idioms exist in every language. They are common in both written and spoken texts. It's a **no-brainer** that your English will sound better if you are able to recognise and understand idioms successfully. But in the past, did you have to **rack your brains** trying to learn idioms? Did they go in **one ear and then out the other**? Did you use an idiom incorrectly, resulting in **having egg on your face**? Learning idioms is no **piece of cake**, but this resource can help you from the **get-go**!

To make the most of the activities in this book and to maximise students' learning, you may wish to read this introductory section when using *Work It Out with Business Idioms* for the first time.

Work It Out with Business Idioms comprises:

- lesson themes that fit with common business English coursebooks
- 96 business idioms presented in both written and spoken contexts
- adaptable lessons to meet the unique needs of each class
- a dictionary with real-world examples

As classes come in all abilities and sizes, each unit offers a number of features:

- step-by-step teaching instructions
- adaptations for less-confident students
- activities for fast finishers
- extension and variation activities
- expected timings for each activity
- digital tips
- activities and games for review
- handouts and answer keys

Each of the twelve units is called a *Work out* and these can be worked through sequentially or used as standalone lessons.

What exactly is an idiom?

An idiom is a group of words whose collective meaning is not apparent from the meaning of its individual words. There is often **more than meets the eye** because an idiom's meaning is typically figurative, not literal. For example, you know what the individual words mean in the idiom 'hit the nail on the head'. However, you are not physically hitting a nail. Its meaning – to describe exactly what's causing a situation or problem – is not obvious from the words themselves.

How can I understand idioms?

You may recognise an idiom as you read and listen to English, but *recognising* an idiom is just **half the battle**. How do you actually understand its *meaning*? A good rule of thumb is that, once you recognise an idiom, you should look for context clues.

These are words that appear before or after the idiom in the sentence or in neighbouring sentences. There are several different types of context clues to look for:

Definition clues

There may be words before or after the idiom that essentially define the idiom.

- Aggressive communicators are honest. They like to 'tell it like it is' and **put their cards on the table** for all to see and hear.

If you 'put your cards on the table', you talk openly about your feelings and intentions. This is another way of saying you are being honest (and telling it like it is).

- It can **cost a corporation an arm and a leg** to be socially responsible. These additional expenses can lead to increased costs for the customer.

If something costs 'an arm and a leg', it's very expensive. The second sentence (these additional expenses ... increased costs for the customer) helps define the idiom.

Example clues

There may be words before or after the idiom that provide an example of what the idiom is describing.

- He tends to **go with the flow**. He ensures that everything goes smoothly by being an active listener and task facilitator.

If someone 'goes with the flow', they do what everyone else is doing. A good example of this is being an active listener and task facilitator.

- Other types of skills are gained through personal relationships and **learning the ropes** through on-the-job experience.

When you 'learn the ropes', you learn how to do a task or job. On-the-job experience is one way of achieving this.

Comparison and contrast clues

There may be words before or after the idiom that make a comparison or a contrast.

- But if we look closely, we can see that sales remain steady in Europe and the Middle East. In the Americas, they've **gone through the roof**. Yet sales are way down in Asia.

Sales that have gone 'through the roof' have risen to a very high level. The sales in the Americas are compared to and contrasted with steady sales in Europe and the Middle East, and lower sales in Asia.

- It's time to decide on one solution. This is **a piece of cake** for some people, but others struggle to make a firm decision.

If a decision is 'a piece of cake', it's a very easy task. The opposite is true for those who struggle to make a firm decision.

I hope that this resource proves to be a useful companion to you as you help your students to get ahead of the curve!

David Bolwell

Work out **11****Leadership**

A gentle hand may lead even an elephant by a hair. – Iranian proverb

B2+

Resources	Handout 11.1	one copy per pair
	Handout 11.2	one copy per pair
	Handout 11.3	one copy per pair
	Handout 11.4	one copy per student
	Teaching tool 11.1	one copy for the class
	Teaching tool 11.2	one copy per group

Target language

Bend over backwards – to work extra hard to do something

Bring (something) to the table – to contribute something to a group effort

Call the shots – to tell others what to do

Down the line – at a later date

Go the extra mile – to do more than what is required

On the same page – in agreement on how things should be done

Set the bar high – to establish a high standard of quality

Toe the line – to follow the rules without causing trouble

1

- Write the following questions on the board:

*Who are some important leaders? What fields are they in?**What qualities make a good leader?**Do you think you're a good leader? Why or why not?*

- Put students in small groups to discuss the questions.
- Elicit ideas from the class.



5–10 mins

2

- Before class starts, cut up **Teaching tool 11.1** into six strips. Tape them in different places around the classroom.
- Have students work in pairs. Give each pair a copy of **Handout 11.1**.



20–25 mins

- Tell students that one of them is the 'runner' and the other is the 'writer'.
- Explain that each runner runs to any strip, memorises the letter and sentences, and then returns to dictate it to their partner. If a runner forgets something, they can go back and look again.
- The writer writes the information in the first column next to the appropriate letter (the second column will be used in the next section). Explain that the focus of this work out is on accuracy. Insist on correct spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.
- After three of the sentences are dictated, the students change roles.
- The first pair to finish raises their hands. Check their sentences. Circle the **letter** (A–F) if there are errors, but do not say what the errors are.
- Students continue until they think all sentences are correct. Check each time.
- The first pair to correctly dictate all the sentences without errors is the winner. Stop the activity when most pairs have correct sentences.
- Go over answers with the class. Ask the winning pair to slowly read their correct sentences.

Fast finishers

As each pair finishes, ask them to help others around them by checking sentences against their own. Remind them to circle the letters of the sentences with errors.

3

- Write the following six leadership styles on the board:

Commanding *Pace-setting* *Affiliative*
Democratic *Visionary* *Coaching*



20–25 mins

- Have students work in pairs to discuss which leadership style they think goes with each description. Ask them to write their guesses in the second column of Handout 11.1.
- Elicit answers from the class.
- Give each pair a copy of **Handout 11.2**. Tell the class to look at the first question. Ask:

Do Visionary leaders want people to do just enough, or more than is necessary? (Answer: more than is necessary.)

- Encourage students to refer to Handout 11.1 to help them find the answers.

- Ask them to write their answers in the *Answers* column of Handout 11.2.
- Have students look at Handout 11.1 again. Ask what words helped them answer the question.
- Elicit answer (*go the extra mile*).
- Have students write the words that helped them in the *Which words...?* column of Handout 11.2.
- If necessary, go over the second question as a class.
- Ask pairs to answer the rest of the questions.
- Elicit answers.

Answer key	A Visionary	B Affiliative	C Coaching
Handout 11.1	D Democratic	E Pace-setting	F Commanding

Answer key		Questions	Answers	Which words...?
Handout 11.2	1	Do Visionary leaders want people to do just enough, or more than is necessary?	more than is necessary	...go the extra mile...
	2	Do Visionary leaders expect people to be in agreement on how things should be done?	yes	...so that everyone is on the same page.
	3	Do Affiliative leaders work extra hard to keep people happy?	yes	...bend over backwards trying to keep everyone happy.
	4	Are Coaching leaders more interested in people's past or future development?	future	...help them to improve those skills down the line.
	5	Are Democratic leaders interested in what other people can contribute?	yes	...are interested in what others can bring to the table.
	6	What level of quality do Pace-setting leaders expect from others?	high	...setting the bar high.

	7	Do Commanding leaders let others make important decisions?	no	...top-down decision-making; ...call the shots...
	8	Do Commanding leaders want others to follow the rules they set, or break them?	follow	...expect others to toe the line...

Extra support

Have students work in small groups instead of pairs.

4

- Have students work in pairs.
- Ask them to find and underline the eight idioms they have written in Handout 11.1.
- Give each pair a copy of **Handout 11.3**.
- Ask students to check that the eight underlined idioms in Handout 11.3 are the same idioms that they underlined in Handout 11.1.
- Have pairs circle the meaning (a or b) of each underlined idiom.
- Elicit answers.



15–20 mins

Answer key	1 a	2 b	3 b	4 b	5 a	6 a	7 b	8 b
Handout 11.3								

Digital tip

Have students search in the 'News' section of a search engine to find real-world examples of the idioms. Remind them to put quotation marks around the idiom when they search.

5

- Have students work in groups of four.
- Give each student a copy of **Handout 11.4**.
- Ask students to discuss each question as a group. Tell them that they do not need to agree on the answers, only to give their own opinion.
- Tell students to ask each other *Why?* to get more information for each response. Encourage them to use idioms in their responses.
- Have students write each other's responses (a–f) in the appropriate column and add any additional notes.



15–20 mins

- Tell them to mark their own answers in the last column.
- When students have finished their discussion, write the following information on the board:

Mostly a answers = a Democratic leader

Mostly b answers = a Pace-setting leader

Mostly c answers = a Commanding leader

Mostly d answers = a Visionary leader

Mostly e answers = an Affiliative leader

Mostly f answers = a Coaching leader

- Ask students whether they agree or disagree with the quiz results. Mention that a person can have more than one leadership style, depending on the situation.

Extra support

If students do not know all of the people listed in Question 4, allow them to search for them online.

Extension activity

Have groups list another leader (alive or dead) for each style. Elicit ideas. Ask the class whether they agree with each group's ideas.

6

- Before class starts, copy **Teaching tool 11.2** for each group. Cut into 16 cards.
- Have students work in groups. Give each group a set of 16 cards.
- Tell groups to mix all the cards together and spread them face down, in rows, in the centre of a table.
- The first student chooses a card and turns it over. They then try to find its match (idiom + definition) by turning over another card. The student leaves the two cards face up where they are so all the students can see them.
- If the cards match, the student keeps both cards. If they don't match, the student turns the cards back over, face down, keeping them in the original place. If they are unsure if there is a match, they can ask you.
- The next student takes a turn. The group continue to play until all the cards are gone.
- The student with the most pairs at the end is the winner.



15-20 mins

- If there is time, have students play again.

Extra challenge

Tell students to make a sentence with the idiom after they have found a matching pair. If the sentence does not make sense or shows that the student does not understand the meaning of the idiom, the student loses a turn and must put the cards back in their place.

Write the information alongside the appropriate letter.

A		
B		
C		
D		
E		
F		

	Questions	Answers	Which words...?
1	Do Visionary leaders want people to do just enough, or more than is necessary?		
2	Do Visionary leaders expect people to be in agreement on how things should be done?		
3	Do Affiliative leaders work extra hard to keep people happy?		
4	Are Coaching leaders more interested in people's past or future development?		
5	Are Democratic leaders interested in what other people can contribute?		
6	What level of quality do Pace-setting leaders expect from others?		
7	Do Commanding leaders let others make important decisions?		
8	Do Commanding leaders want others to follow the rules they set, or break them?		

Circle the meaning (a or b) of each underlined idiom.

1 My team is always ready to go the extra mile to make sure our projects succeed.

- a) to do more than what is required
- b) to do less than what is required

2 We can't move forward until everyone is on the same page.

- a) present at a meeting
- b) in agreement on how things should be done

3 The servers bend over backwards to make sure our experience is positive.

- a) to break all the rules
- b) to work extra hard to do something

4 We can't say what will happen to our agreement down the line.

- a) without your input
- b) at a later date

5 I have no idea what Jason can bring to the table.

- a) to contribute something to a group effort
- b) to include everyone in a discussion

6 Be sure to set the bar high if you want to get the most out of your employees.

- a) to establish a high standard of quality
- b) to offer a very large salary

7 Our opinions are valuable, but it's the directors here who call the shots.

- a) to get input from key players
- b) to tell others what to do

8 If you want our boss to like you, I suggest that you toe the line.

- a) to ask questions when you don't understand
- b) to follow the rules without causing trouble

	Which type of leader are you?	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	You
1	<p>What's the role of a leader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To find agreement through participation b) To set high performance standards c) To insist that people do things their way d) To get others to see their vision e) To create emotional bonds f) To develop people for the future 				
2	<p>What's the most important quality in a leader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Collaborative working style b) Results-oriented c) Authority d) Self-confidence e) Team building f) Self-awareness 				
3	<p>Which of the following best describes your leadership style?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 'What do <i>you</i> think?' b) 'Follow my lead.' c) 'Do exactly what I tell you.' d) 'Come with me on a journey.' e) 'People come first.' f) 'Why don't you try this?' 				
4	<p>Which leader do you identify most with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) U.S. President Abraham Lincoln b) SpaceX founder Elon Musk c) Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher d) Apple founder Steve Jobs e) Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres f) Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi 				



.....

A These leaders are interested in motivating people to see their way of doing things. They inspire others to go the extra mile so that everyone is on the same page.

.....

B These leaders are interested in creating harmony. They want to be everyone's friend and bend over backwards trying to keep everyone happy.

.....

C These leaders are interested in human development. They identify the skills people have so that they can help them to improve those skills down the line.

.....

D These leaders are interested in what others can bring to the table. They value people's ideas and make decisions based on their input.

.....

E These leaders are interested in setting the bar high. They often do tasks themselves to serve as an example to others.

.....

F These leaders are interested in top-down decision-making. They call the shots and expect others to toe the line without questioning orders.

.....



Bend over backwards	Bring (something) to the table
Call the shots	Down the line
Go the extra mile	On the same page
Toe the line	Set the bar high

to work extra hard to do something	to contribute (something) to a group effort
to tell others what to do	at a later date
to do more than what is required	in agreement on how things should be done
to follow the rules without causing trouble	to establish a high standard of quality



<p>Go through something with a fine-toothed comb</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>examine</i></p> <p><i>hair</i></p>	<p>Have time to kill</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>period</i></p> <p><i>nothing</i></p>
<p>In the driver's seat</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>car</i></p> <p><i>control</i></p>	<p>Err on the side of caution</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>careful</i></p> <p><i>risk</i></p>
<p>Keep one's cool</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>cold</i></p> <p><i>upset</i></p>	<p>Leave no stone unturned</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>rock</i></p> <p><i>move</i></p>
<p>Talk someone's ear off</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>speak</i></p> <p><i>nonstop</i></p>	<p>Up in the air</p> <p>Words you cannot say:</p> <p><i>undecided</i></p> <p><i>above</i></p>

Idiom dictionary

A force to be reckoned with – a person or thing that is strong and powerful

- A. *The new board member is young and seems to lack experience.*
- B. *Don't be fooled by appearances. He's **a force to be reckoned with** in the boardroom.*

A new study explains why women in their 40s, 50s and beyond are considered **a force to be reckoned with** in the workplace.

A no-brainer – something that is very obvious

- A. *It was smart to promote Jan from assistant manager to manager.*
- B. *I agree. It was **a no-brainer**.*

Installing solar energy at your place of business is **a no-brainer**. It reduces energy costs and provides long-term price stability.

A piece of cake – a very easy task

- A. *I'm worried about tomorrow's job interview.*
- B. *Don't worry. It will be **a piece of cake** for you. You have all the skills they need.*

Any students who have tried to create a bibliography or a reference list know that it's not **a piece of cake**.

Origin: The idiom may have originated in the 1870s when cake was often given as a prize for winning a competition.

A rule of thumb – a principle that is based on experience

- A. *Should I address people at my new job by their first names, or should I be more formal?*
- B. ***A good rule of thumb** is to wait until they invite you to call them by their first names.*

A good rule of thumb is that you should save at least 10% of your income for retirement.

Origin: The idiom is believed to date back to the 1600s when accurate measuring tools were not available in England. A builder's thumb would typically be used to give an approximate measurement.

A win-win situation – a situation that is good for everyone involved

- A. *Do you think it's a good idea for our company to adopt a 'flexible hours' programme?*
- B. *Absolutely. It's a **win-win situation** for both employer and employee.*

Hiring students as consultants for start-ups is a **win-win situation**. The start-ups get extra help, and the students get a look behind the scenes at a new company.

Variation: a win-win solution; a win-win strategy

Ahead of the curve – ahead of current thinking or trends

- A. *Her ideas are very innovative.*
- B. *Yes, she's very much **ahead of the curve**. She may be running the company someday.*

The company's president said that we need to get **ahead of the curve** on our climate challenges in order to remain sustainable and continue to thrive.

Origin: The idiom may stem from the shape of a bell curve. If you are ahead of the bell graph's curve, you are staying ahead of everything else.

All hands on deck – everyone is needed

- A. *The director wants our team's report by 5pm today.*
- B. *So, it's going to be **all hands on deck** for the rest of the day.*

It was **all hands on deck** to restore power in Alabama after Hurricane Zeta hit.

Origin: The idiom was originally a naval expression. A ship's captain would call for **all hands** (sailors) **on deck** (a part of a ship) to help during an emergency.

At the drop of a hat – immediately and without delay

- A. *Who should I talk to if I need help with this?*
- B. *I'd call Lucy in IT. She can usually come and help **at the drop of a hat**.*

Workers now need to shift roles **at the drop of a hat**, and that requires training in new skills, processes and technology.

Origin: The idiom probably dates back to the 19th century, when a man would signal the start of a race or contest by grabbing his hat and thrusting it towards the ground.

At the eleventh hour – at the latest possible moment

- A. *Did they submit their proposal in time?*
- B. *Yes, they did it **at the eleventh hour**, just minutes before the deadline.*

The blood cancer survivor who found a donor **at the eleventh hour** is highlighting the importance of stem-cell donations.

At the end of one's rope – (US) having no strength or patience left

- A. *I'm worried about Matt. He's been **at the end of his rope** for weeks.*
- B. *I think it may be time for him to look for another job.*

As a single parent, he was **at the end of his rope** trying to keep some normalcy in his young son's life.

Origin: The idiom derives from tying a rope around the neck of a domesticated animal, limiting its movement. By doing this, the animal could graze on grass only as far as the rope allowed.

Variation: to reach the end of one's rope; at the end of one's tether (UK)

At this stage of the game – at this point in the process or situation

- A. *Do you think now is a good time to sell stock?*
- B. ***At this stage of the game** I would have to say no.*

'**At this stage of the game,**' the fire chief said, 'I wouldn't even want to guess what caused the fire.'

Bang for one's buck – (US) good value for money

- A. *Which of these speakers do you think I should buy?*
- B. *This one's a little more expensive, but its additional features offer you more **bang for your buck**.*

To no one's surprise, Florida is the US state in which your retirement dollars will get you the most **bang for your buck**.

Origin: The idiom has been in use since the 1950s, when the US Army suggested that a stockpile of nuclear weapons (bang) was better value (buck) than a large army. The word 'buck' is a slang word meaning 'dollar.'

Beat around the bush – to avoid or delay talking about something

- A. *I really don't know how to say this.*
- B. *Don't **beat around the bush**. Just tell me.*

Let's not **beat around the bush**. The country's future looks grim and young people are looking for opportunities overseas.

Origin: The idiom comes from a 15th-century hunting practice in which rich hunters hired 'beaters' to drive birds and small animals out of bushes so that the hunters could easily get to them. The beaters would use sticks to beat around the bushes to force the animals out.

Beat (someone) to the punch – to achieve something before someone else does

- A. *Did you suggest your slogan idea to your boss in today's meeting?*
- B. *I was planning to, but Sandra raised her hand first and **beat me to the punch**.*

By the time the company announced that it was adding the new technology across its latest lineup of mobile phones, much of its competition had already **beaten them to the punch**.

Origin: The idiom comes from the sport of boxing, where the winner beats their opponent by delivering a final punch resulting in a knockout.

Bend over backwards – to work extra hard to do something

- A. *There is a lot of competition in the travel industry these days.*
- B. *Many companies are **bending over backwards** to hang on to their existing customers.*

The street vendor wears a Spider-Man suit every day. He's **bending over backwards** to make a sale.

Between a rock and a hard place – in a situation with two equally bad alternatives