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## ESL Podcast 688 – Ending a Business Relationship

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### GLOSSARY

**to break the news** – to tell someone something he or she does not want to hear; to share bad news with someone

\* The hardest part of being a doctor is having to break the news to the family when the patient has passed away.

**to pull the plug** – to end a project, relationship, or agreement; to stop doing something

\* Why did you decide to pull the plug on the contract negotiations?

**contract** – a legal agreement; an official, written agreement

\* According to the contract, we have to pay the full amount by the 4<sup>th</sup> of each month.

**to be up** – to end; to finish on a particular date and time

\* The lease is up at the end of the summer, and then we'll need to look for new tenants.

**to hold off on** – to delay; to postpone; to wait to do something until later

\* Please hold off on buying your airplane tickets until you're sure you are eligible for a visa to enter the country.

**in the hopper** – active; currently being used or worked on; in process

\* Grant has published five novels, and he has two more in the hopper.

**to drag (one's) feet** – to procrastinate; to do something very slowly or later than one should

\* If we hadn't dragged our feet this morning, we could have left work early this afternoon.

**professional courtesy** – something that one does or says in a business environment because it is nice, kind, and polite

\* As a professional courtesy, please call to tell us if you're going to arrive late.

**to let (someone) down** – to disappoint someone by not meeting expectations or by not doing what one was supposed to do

\* Pierre promised he could get \$2 million in sales last year, so he really let us down by getting only \$750,000.



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**airtight** – completed very carefully so that there are no mistakes or errors; having no weaknesses

\* This proposal is airtight. There's no way they won't choose us over our competitors.

**old habits die hard** – a phrase used to mean that it is difficult for people or organizations to change, and they are more likely to continue doing things as they have done them in the past, even if those ways are not very good

\* Mariah weighs 300 pounds and she says she would like to lose weight, but old habits die hard.

**on (one's) last legs** – about to die or fail; very weak and worn out; almost finished

\* The investigation is on its last legs, and if the detectives don't find a suspect soon, they're going to close the case.

**it's only a matter of time** – a phrase used to mean that something will happen in the future, although one doesn't know exactly when

\* It's only a matter of time before someone invents a car that can fly.

**at the rate (one) is going** – a phrase used to refer to how someone is acting or performing or how someone has been acting or performing in the recent past, assuming that it will not change in the future

\* At the rate they're going, they will have spent all their savings by the end of the year.

**PR rep** – a public relations representative; a person whose job is to influence how people view a particular company or organization, especially whether they think it is good or bad

\* The company hired a PR rep to help management deal with the scandal.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What will happen when they pull the plug on Tech Experts' services?
    - a) They'll unplug all the equipment.
    - b) They'll ask the company to work more quickly.
    - c) They'll stop working with the company.
  
  2. According to Camila, what will happen to Tech Experts?
    - a) It will go out of business.
    - b) It will start charging a higher hourly rate.
    - c) It will learn to work faster.
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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **to be up**

The phrase "to be up," in this podcast, means to end or finish on a particular date and time: "Time is up. Please put down your pencil and turn in your exam." The phrase "to be up to (someone)" means that someone can make a particular decision: "Do you want to sign up for a Basic or Premium Membership? It's up to you." The phrase "to be up to (something)" means to feel prepared to do something: "I don't think Harouki is up to medical school." The phrase "to be up to doing (something)" means to want to do something: "Are you up to going to the party tonight?" Finally, the phrase "to be up on (something)" means to have a lot of knowledge or to be very well informed about something: "Are you up on events in the Middle East?"

#### **to let (someone) down**

In this podcast, the phrase "to let (someone) down" means to disappoint someone by not meeting expectations or by not doing what one was supposed to do: "I think I let my parents down by not becoming a lawyer." The phrase "to let (oneself) go" means to stop paying attention to one's physical appearance or to stop trying to look nice: "After getting married, Kaitlin really let herself go, gaining almost 30 pounds." The phrase "to let (something) go" means to stop worry about something or to decide to forget something: "That happened more than 10 years ago! Why can't you just let it go?" Finally, the phrase "to let up" means to become softer or gentler: "Why don't you stay here where it's warm and wait for the storm to let up?"



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### Common Legal Clauses

Legal contracts contain many common “clauses” (sections of a legal contract dealing with one particular part of the law) that are seen “over and over again” (many times). Often these clauses are just copied and pasted from one contract to the next, and only a small “portion” (part) of the contract is actually written “from scratch” (without using a model).

For example, an “arbitration clause” “stipulates” (states) how “conflicts” and “disputes” (disagreements) should be “resolved” (ended by reaching a solution). They often establish how the “parties” (the people or organizations that sign a contract) should communicate their dispute and when a “mediator” (a person who helps the parties resolve their conflict) should be brought into the situation. The clause also indicates whether the arbitration will occur within a specific “jurisdiction” (the area where a particular person or entity can make legal decisions).

Another common contract clause is the “statute of limitations.” This clause establishes the maximum amount of time after a particular event that something may happen. For example, a statute of limitations might state that people can be “prosecuted” (charged in court) for certain crimes for only five years after the crime occurred. If more than five years have “elapsed” (passed by), they cannot be taken to court for the crime.

An “attorney fees clause” establishes that if there is “litigation” (legal action) between the two parties, the party that does not win must pay all the “reasonable” (fair and just) “legal fees” (amounts of money paid to a lawyer) “incurred by” (needing to be paid by) the winning party.

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



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 688: Ending a Business Relationship.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 688. 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 to download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English even faster. Even faster than what, you ask? Even faster than drinking beer!

On this episode, we're going to hear a dialogue between Jerry and Camila about what happens when two companies or two people decide to end their business partnership or relationship. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Jerry: Who's going to break the news to Tech Experts?

Camila: You mean about pulling the plug on using their services?

Jerry: Yeah, the contract we signed with them last year is almost up, and as we decided last month, we'll be going with another company.

Camila: I think we should hold off on telling them until after all of our current projects are done. We still have two more in the hopper.

Jerry: Okay, but I don't want to drag our feet in telling them, even if we're not happy with their service. As a professional courtesy, we should let them know soon.

Camila: That may be true with other companies, but Tech Experts has really let us down this past year. If we didn't have an airtight contract with them, we would have switched companies long ago.

Jerry: Well, maybe they'll learn from their mistakes. After all, they've been in business a long time.



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Camila: Yeah, but old habits die hard. And if you ask me, the company is on its last legs. It's only a matter of time before they lose most of their customers, at the rate they're going.

Jerry: I don't know about that, but I do know one thing. It's a good thing you're not their PR rep!

[end of dialogue]

Jerry says to Camila, "Who's going to break the news to Tech Experts?" Tech Experts is the name of a company. The expression "to break the news" means to tell someone something that he or she does not want to hear, to give bad news to someone. People may say something like, "I hate to break the news, but it's raining today and our baseball game is cancelled. We won't be playing baseball." So Jerry, here, is asking who's going to break the news, who's going to give this company they've been working with the bad news.

Camila says, "You mean about pulling the plug on using their services?" "To pull the plug" (plug) here means to end a project or to end a relationship or agreement. More generally, it means to stop doing something. The expression comes from or has its origin in the fact that when you have a machine many times it needs electricity, and the wire that runs between the machine and, for example, the wall, where there is a place to put the wire into to get electricity, that wire is called a "cord." The thing that goes into the wall itself is called a "plug." So, "to pull the plug" means the same as to disconnect, "to unplug," you could also say, a machine. Here, it means to end a relationship. So, Camila answers Jerry's question about who's going to break the news to Tech Experts with another question, clarifying what news Jerry is talking about. She says, "You mean (the news) about pulling the plug on using their services (on keeping Tech Experts as one of the businesses they have a relationship with)?"

Jerry says, "Yeah (an informal way of saying yes), the contract we signed with them last year is almost up." A "contract" is a legal agreement, typically written though it doesn't have to be. "To be up" is an expression – a phrasal verb meaning to end, to finish at a particular time or date. Someone might say to you, "Your time is up." A teacher, for example, to her students if they are taking a test and the hour is finished, she might say, "Your time is up," you have no more time, you must stop. Well here, Jerry is saying that the contract is up, meaning the contract will end. He says, "as we decided last month, we'll be going with another company," meaning we'll be using another company after the contract between their company and Tech Experts is finished.



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Camila says, “I think we should hold off on telling them until after all of our current projects are done.” “To hold off on (something)” is a phrasal verb meaning to delay, to postpone, to wait to do something until later. For example: “John decided to hold off on asking the pretty girl in his Spanish class for a date until he ended his relationship with the other pretty girl from his math class.” Isn’t John a nice guy? He’s going to wait, he’s going to hold off on getting a new girlfriend until he gets rid of his old girlfriend. Camila uses this same structure, “to hold off on,” and then later in the sentence “until.” She says, “I think we should hold off on telling them until after all of our current projects are done.” For those interested in the grammar behind this expression, notice that “on” is a preposition, and so the object of the prepositional phrase must be a noun. “Telling” is a gerund, which is a form of a verb that acts as a noun. So, you can’t say, “I’m going to hold off on to tell him,” because “to tell” is a verb. You can say, “I’m going to hold off on telling him,” because “telling” is a noun in this case.

Anyway, getting back to the story, Camila says, “We still have two more in the hopper.” She means we have two more projects with this company in the hopper (hopper). Something that is “in the hopper” is something that is in process, things that you are currently working on. You haven’t finished them yet, but you are working on them or will be working on them very soon. Camila says we still have two projects with this company, we shouldn’t tell them we’re going to end after the expiration of their contract until we finish with these projects.

Jerry says, “Okay, but I don’t want to drag our feet in telling them.” “To drag your feet” means to do something very slowly, more slowly than you should, to delay, to procrastinate. “I’ve been dragging my feet on cleaning the kitchen.” Really I have, I need to clean my kitchen. My wife is not happy with me just between me and you, don’t tell anyone! Anyway, Jerry says, “I don’t want to drag our feet in telling them.” Notice “in” is also a preposition, and therefore it needs a noun, “telling” is a noun form and that works. You can’t say, “I don’t want to drag our feet in to tell them,” just like the previous example of “to hold off on.” Jerry says, “As a professional courtesy, we should let them know soon.” He’s saying even though they are not happy with the service that Tech Experts has given them, as a professional courtesy we should tell them about our decision soon. “Professional courtesy” is something that you do or say in business because it is considered the correct, the polite, the nice thing to do. You don’t have to do it, but it’s nice if you do it.

Well, Camila doesn’t want to be nice. She says, “That may be true with other companies (that is, we should let them know as a professional courtesy), but Tech Experts has really let us down this past year.” “To let (someone) down” means to disappoint someone, to do something not as well as someone was





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expecting you to do, or not do what someone was expecting you to do. You let them down, they became disappointed. Camila says, “If we didn’t have an airtight contract with them, we would have switched companies long ago.” “Airtight” (one word) means very carefully written, something that has no mistakes, no errors. It’s often used to describe something in a legal situation, where a contract, for example, doesn’t have any weaknesses; there are no things you can use as an exception. That’s “airtight.”

Jerry says, “Well, maybe they’ll learn from their mistakes. After all, they’ve been in business a long time.” That is, Tech Experts will learn from their mistakes. Camila doesn’t agree; she says, “Yeah, but old habits die hard.” This expression means it’s difficult for people or organizations to change. They are much more likely to continue doing the same things they have done in the past even if they’re not very good or very successful. “Old habits die hard.” “Die hard,” just like the movie Die Hard, “to die hard” means it dies a difficult death, it is something that dies with a lot of pain perhaps. That’s also what is going on here when we say “old habits die hard,” it’s very difficult for you to change or kill your habits, the things you’re used to doing.

Camila says, “And if you ask me, the company is on its last legs.” “To be on your last legs” (legs), like the legs you walk on, means that you are about to die or about to fail, that you’re very weak, that you’re almost finished. In this case, we’re talking about a company on its last legs. Camila says, “It’s only a matter of time before they lose most of their customers.” “It’s only a matter of time” means that it is, we would say, “inevitable,” that is, it’s going to happen, it’s not something you can avoid. It will happen, it’s just a matter of when it will happen; it could be today, it could be next week, it could be 10 years from now, but eventually this thing will happen. Camila says it’s only a matter of time before Tech Experts loses most of their customers at the rate they’re going. The expression “at the rate they’re going” is used to show how someone is performing or acting, assuming that it will not change. So for example, you’re spending 10 dollars every week on buying sandwiches. At the rate you’re going, by the end of the year you will have spent 520 dollars on sandwiches if you continue doing what you have done in the past. That’s the idea.

Jerry says, “I don’t know about that (meaning I’m not sure you are correct), but I do know one thing. It’s a good thing you’re not their PR rep!” He’s making a little joke; he’s saying Camila is being so critical of the company it’s a good thing she doesn’t work as that company’s public relations or PR rep. “Rep” stands for representative. A “PR rep” is someone who works for a company who tries to give a positive image – a good image of the company, especially to news organizations, to newspapers, television stations, and so forth. “Public relations”





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is about getting a positive message out about your company to your customers or your potential customers, people who might want to buy your product or service.

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

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

We don't want to pull the plug on our scriptwriter, the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse, because she does such a wonderful job.



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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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