



ESL Podcast 716 – Working Without Supervision

GLOSSARY

to oversee – to monitor and supervise; to carefully watch how other people are doing their work, making sure everything is running smoothly

* The regional sales manager will be responsible for overseeing all of the sales representatives working in these 12 states.

day-to-day operations – the tasks and activities that must be completed to keep an office running well, without thinking about long-term strategy

* Christof is responsible for most of our day-to-day operations, from contacting potential customers to sending out invoices.

second-in-command – the person who is responsible for a project or organization when the person who is normally in charge is not available

* As executive vice-president, Henry is second-in-command and the president relies on him heavily whenever she travels.

MIA – missing in action; absent without an explanation; not where one should be

* Bill has a lot of family problems right now, and he has been MIA a few times this past week. I hope he's okay.

budget overrun – expenses that are greater than planned; with something costing more than it was expected to

* They'll be really pleased if we can finish this project on time and without any budget overruns.

to shirk (one's) responsibilities – to not do all of the things one is supposed to do

* Dan told his wife: "I know you're tired after a long day at work, but that doesn't mean you can shirk your responsibilities here at home."

to phone it in – to complete a task using very little effort and giving it little attention, as though it did not matter very much

* Jenny will start her new job in two weeks. In the meantime, she seems to be phoning it in at her old job.

to cover for (someone) – to do or say something to protect another person and not let him or her get in trouble, especially when that person isn't doing all the work he or she is supposed to do

* Why do you always cover for your co-workers? It's important that your boss knows you're the one doing all the hard work around here.



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to fill in – to try to help when and where it is needed, especially at work

* Hugo wasn't feeling well and had to go home early. Do you think you can fill in during this meeting?

loyalty – supporting another person and being faithful to him or her

* I've always admired his loyalty to his country.

when push comes to shove – under extreme circumstances; when there is a lot of pressure or a strong incentive to do something

* Normally, Ziet obeys all of the traffic laws, but when push comes to shove, he'll speed to avoid being late for work.

to look out for (one's) best interests – to do what will benefit oneself, even if it has negative consequences for other people

* It's nice that you want to help your sister, but at some point you have to look out for your best interests.

supervision – monitoring and being responsible for how well another person does his or her work, or for how well a project is completed

* Little children need constant supervision in the kitchen so that they don't hurt themselves.

promotion – an increase in the responsibilities, duties, and pay one receives for one's work within a single organization, usually accompanied with a new title for one's position

* Janik is hoping for a promotion from Analyst to Senior Analyst.

to fire – to tell someone that he or she no longer has a job and will not continue to work in a particular business or organization

* Amie was fired for stealing from the company.

backstabber – a person who secretly says bad things about another person or secretly does bad things to another person to get some advantage or benefit

* Franz is such a backstabber! I thought he was my friend, but apparently he was saying terrible things about me to our boss.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Veronica upset with Stan?
 - a) Because he hasn't been showing up for work.
 - b) Because he has been pushing and shoving co-workers.
 - c) Because he forgot to oversee the day-to-day operations.
2. Why doesn't Kyle immediately accept the promotion?
 - a) Because he thinks the work will be too difficult.
 - b) Because he doesn't have enough loyalty to the company.
 - c) Because he thinks Stan might be angry.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to phone it in

The phrase “to phone it in,” in this podcast, means to complete a task using very little effort and giving it little attention, as though it did not matter very much: “We thought that Emil was committed to helping our cause, but he’s just be phoning it in since he joined us.” The phrase “to phone (something) in” also means to report something: “If you see a drunk driver driving dangerously on the road, phone it in to the police.” The phrase “to phone (something) in” can also mean to place an order by telephone: “Every Thursday, the receptionist phones in everyone’s lunch order to the local deli.” Or, “The doctor has phoned your prescription in, so it should be ready for you to pick up at the pharmacy soon.”

to fire

In this podcast, the phrase “to fire” means to tell someone that he or she no longer has a job and will not continue to work in a particular business or organization: “You can’t fire someone for old age. That would be illegal.” The verb “to fire” also means to shoot bullets or cause an explosion with a bomb: “The police officers fired at the criminal because she had a gun.” The phrase “fired up” means very excited about something and eager to do something: “It’s fun to see how fired up young children are about the first day of school.” Finally, the phrase “to fire questions at (someone)” means to ask someone many questions very quickly: “The reporters fired questions at the newly elected mayor.”



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CULTURE NOTE

The POW/MIA Flag

During the Vietnam War, many American soldiers became “prisoners of war” (POWs; people who are held by the enemy and not allowed to leave during a war) or were “missing in action” (MIA; without one’s location being known). The POW/MIA flag was created to honor and remember POWs and MIAs, and to remind Americans “back home” (in the United States) of the need to “determine” (identify) the “fates” (what happened to a person, or how a person died) of the men and women who serve in the military.

The POW/MIA flag is black and white. It has a “silhouette” (an outline drawing) of a man, a “watch tower” (a tall structure that guards sit in to watch what happens in a prison and make sure prisoners do not escape) and “barbed wire” (thin lines of sharp metal used to make fences that people cannot cross). “POW ★ MIA” is written on top, and the phrase “YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN” is written on the bottom.

The POW/MIA flag is flown on six special days: Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day, and National POW/MIA Recognition Day. It is also flown at many “military installations” (places where members of the military work), police stations, fire stations, and similar places. In addition, military “mess halls” (cafeterias) usually leave one table and chair empty, “draped” (covered with a cloth) with the POW/MIA flag to serve as a reminder of the soldiers who are missing and “symbolize” (mean; represent) a chair waiting for their return.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 716: Working Without Supervision.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 716. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. Download a Learning Guide for this episode by becoming a member of ESL Podcast and supporting our efforts.

This episode is a dialogue between Veronica and Kyle talked about working without someone watching you – without someone telling you what to do. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Veronica: Where's Stan?

Kyle: He's not here.

Veronica: When will he be back?

Kyle: I'm not sure. He hasn't been here for a couple of days.

Veronica: A couple of days?! He's supposed to be here overseeing the day-to-day operations. You're his second-in-command. Where is he?

Kyle: I honestly don't know. He's been MIA since Tuesday.

Veronica: I come all the way here to talk to him about budget overruns and I find that he's been shirking his responsibilities, too. I've a feeling he's been phoning it in for a long time now. So have you been covering for him?

Kyle: Me? I'm just trying to do my job. When Stan isn't here, I do my best to fill in. But I'm not saying anything against Stan.

Veronica: I appreciate your loyalty, but when push comes to shove, you've got to look out for yourself, right?

Kyle: Uh, I guess. I'm not sure.



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Veronica: Well, I do. I need to look out for my best interests and that's making sure this place has proper supervision. How would you like a promotion?

Kyle: You mean you're firing Stan and giving me his job?

Veronica: Do you want the job or don't you?

Kyle: Can I talk to Stan first? I don't want him to think I'm a backstabber.

Veronica: You can...if you can find him.

[end of dialogue]

Veronica begins by saying, "Where's Stan?" Stan is one of the employees. Kyle says, "He's not here." Veronica says, "When will he be back?" When will he return? Kyle says, "I'm not sure (I don't really know). He hasn't been here for a couple of days." Maybe two days or three days.

Veronica says, "A couple of days?! He's supposed to be here overseeing the day-to-day operations." "To oversee" (oversee – one word) means to monitor and supervise; to carefully watch how other people are doing their work, making sure that they are doing it correctly. It's what a boss does, or a supervisor. The "day-to-day operations" are the things that a business does every day, repeatedly, or just the normal, regular things that a business, an office, or a factory for example does in order to keep their business going. It doesn't refer to long-term planning or coming up with a strategy for the future. Day-to-day operations are the things that are done on a daily basis or things that are a normal part of what the business does.

Veronica says to Kyle, "You're his second-in-command." When we say someone is "second-in-command" we're using a military phrase to refer to the person who is in charge – who is the leader when the normal leader isn't there, the person who is below the leader of a group or organization. Veronica says to Kyle that he is the second-in-command; but, of course, Stan, who hasn't been there for a couple of days, is the leader. "Where is he?" Kyle says, "I honestly don't know," meaning I really don't know. He's using that word for emphasis. "He's been MIA since Tuesday." "MIA" is another military expression – there seems to be a lot of military expressions in the business world – meaning missing in action. It's someone who, in a war, has not been found dead, is not a known prisoner, they're just missing; we don't know where they are. They may be alive; they may



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be dead. In the business world, in more general conversation, to say someone's "MIA" means that they're not there, they're absent, but we don't know why.

Veronica says, "I come all the way here to talk to him about budget overruns and I find that he's been shirking his responsibilities, too." So, Veronica went all the way, meaning she probably traveled from another office or another part of town, maybe even another city, in order to talk to Stan about budget overruns.

"Budget" is a word to describe your plan of how you are going to spend your money – how much money you will make in your business, how much you will spend. A "budget overrun" is when you spend more than you planned, when you spend more than you expected to. Veronica wanted to talk to Stan about budget overruns, and instead she finds that Stan has been shirking his responsibilities.

So not only is Stan spending too much money, he's shirking his responsibilities.

"To shirk (shirk) your responsibilities" means not to do all the things you are supposed to do, not doing your duty. "Duty" is another word for responsibilities.

So, "to shirk your duties" or "shirk your responsibilities" is not to do them.

Veronica says, "I have a feeling that Stan has been phoning it in for a long time now." The expression "to phone it in" means to do something, especially something for work, but without giving it a lot of effort and attention, treating it as though it doesn't really matter very much. You could say this, really, about any kind of job, or the performance of someone on their job. They're doing their job, but they're not doing it very well; they're phoning it in. The idea is, of course, if you're phoning something in you're calling someone, you're not actually there doing what you should be doing; you're doing it from a distance by simply picking up the telephone instead of going and doing something. I guess that's where it probably comes, but it means completing a task with very little effort or attention.

Veronica says, "have you been covering for him (meaning Stan)?" "To cover for (someone)" means to do or say something to protect another person, to make sure the other person doesn't get in trouble; you are covering for them. Kyle says, "Me? I'm just trying to do my job. When Stan isn't here, I do my best to fill in." "To fill in" here means to do the work of someone else or to take someone else's place in doing the work that they normally do. Kyle says, "But I'm not saying anything against Stan," that is, I'm not criticizing Stan.

Veronica replies, "I appreciate (I thank you for) your loyalty." "Loyalty" (loyalty) is supporting another person or another organization, supporting your family, being faithful to them, protecting them. That's loyalty. Veronica says, "when push comes to shove, you've got to look out for yourself, right?" "When push comes to shove" means under extreme circumstances, when there is a lot of pressure to do something. The idea here is that yes, Kyle is loyal and he's protecting Stan,



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but when the situation becomes more serious or more critical then he has to look out for himself; he has to protect himself, not Stan.

Kyle says, “Uh, I guess. I’m not sure.” He’s not sure he agrees with Veronica. Veronica says, “Well, I do. I need to look out for my best interests and that’s making sure that this place has proper supervision.” “To look out for your best interests” means to do what is best for you even if it’s negative or has negative consequences for someone else. Well, Veronica is trying to look out for her own best interests; she’s the boss, so she’s responsible for what happens, and she needs to make sure that this office has proper or appropriate – correct – supervision. “Supervision” is overseeing, monitoring, and being responsible for a group of people.

Veronica says to Kyle, “How would you like a promotion?” A “promotion” is when you get an increase in responsibilities, an increase in your duties at work; usually it means that you get paid more money. So, you used to be a salesperson, now you’re the director of sales; you get a promotion, now you are the boss.

Kyle says, “You mean you’re firing Stan and giving me his job?” “To fire” here means to tell someone they are no longer working there, to tell someone they no longer have a job, to get rid of someone. “Fire” has a number of different meanings in English however; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Veronica says, “Do you want the job or don’t you?” He has to give her an answer right now. Kyle says, “Can I talk to Stan first? I don’t want him to think I’m a backstabber.” “To stab (stab) someone in the back” means to take a knife and put it in their back in order to kill them. So, a “backstabber” is a person who, literally, stabs someone in the back. However, we normally don’t mean someone who goes and kills someone else, we mean someone who says things about another person – bad things, negative things – without that person knowing that you are saying it. Usually you do this in order to get some sort of benefit for yourself. So you, for example, tell your boss that the other person working in your department is lazy and doesn’t do his job. You, of course, want to get rid of that person so that you, perhaps, can get that person’s job. That would be a backstabber, to do something behind someone’s back, which is another way of saying without their knowledge – without them knowing.

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

[start of dialogue]



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Veronica: You can...if you can find him.

[end of dialogue]

Our scriptwriter never shirks her responsibilities; she's always up to the job. That's because it's the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse. I think she needs a promotion, don't you?



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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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