



## ESL Podcast 740 – Corporate Gift-Giving

### GLOSSARY

**to be stuck with** – to have to do something that one does not want to do, especially when it was assigned by someone else

\* Why am I stuck with cleaning up after the dog every day? Wouldn't it be more fair if we took turns?

**corporate** – related to a company, especially a large business

\* We have offices all over the country, but our corporate headquarters are in Miami.

**junior** – younger and with less experience than other people

\* Clarke is one of our most promising junior sales reps, so he's being considered for a promotion at the end of the year.

**to know the drill** – to understand how and why things are done a certain way; to be familiar with something

\* After a few months on the job, Beatriz feels like she knows the drill enough to begin training other employees.

**food basket** – a large, pretty container filled with beautifully packaged foods, given as a gift, especially for new clients or on a holiday

\* Whenever Janice sells a home, she gives the new owners a food basket with a bottle of wine and local jams.

**to bid on** – to submit a proposal stating how one will finish a project, how long it will take, and how much it will cost, so that the proposal can be compared against other proposals and one will be selected for the project

\* How many construction companies are bidding on the bridge project?

**contract** – a written legal agreement signed by two or more people or companies

\* During the job negotiations, we agreed on three weeks of vacation, but the contract says there are only two weeks of vacation. What happened?

**misconstrued** – misinterpreted and misunderstood; thought to mean something other than what was actually meant

\* She misconstrued his kindness as an interest in her romantically.

**bribe** – money or a gift given to someone to change his or her behavior or to influence his or her decision in an unfair way

\* The police officer lost his job as punishment for taking bribes from criminals.



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**impropriety** – behavior that is inappropriate or wrong; behavior that breaks the rules of how one is supposed to act

\* When Angela hired her sister, even though she was unqualified for the job, it was clearly an impropriety.

**charitable donation** – money or goods that are given to an organization so that it can continue to do good work

\* Last year, they made charitable donations to their church, a food bank, and the local university.

**perishable** – referring to food that spoils in a short period of time, especially if it is not refrigerated

\* Normally, milk is perishable, but now we can buy small servings in special boxes that don't need to be refrigerated.

**handwritten** – written down with a pen or pencil on paper, not typed or printed

\* My wife believes that a handwritten thank you note is much more meaningful than an email.

**logo** – a symbol or image that represents a company or organization

\* Kristin never wears shirts with company logos, because she doesn't want to be a walking advertisement.

**gift certificate** – a piece of paper that allows a person to spend a certain amount of money in a particular store or business, often given as a gift

\* Grandma doesn't want to spend a lot of money to send gifts across the country, so from now on, she's only going to send gift certificates to her grandchildren.

**to stick to** – to continue to do, use, or have something; to continue to rely on something; to not change what one has been doing

\* No matter what happens, stick to the original plan and don't get distracted!

**powers that be** – decision-makers; the people who have power and are in control in an organization; managers and executives

\* The powers that be have decided to let everyone work four-hour days, because they think it will reduce expenses.

**permanently** – forever; without end; not temporarily

\* Why would you get a tattoo when you know the design will be on your body permanently and you'll never be able to change it?



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Rafiq, why was Michelle chosen to buy the corporate gifts?
  - a) Because she is the youngest employee.
  - b) Because she is a female employee.
  - c) Because she is the newest employee.
2. Why does Rafiq want Michelle to speak more quietly?
  - a) Because he doesn't want to have to buy corporate gifts in the future.
  - b) Because he's afraid he might lose his job.
  - c) Because he isn't supposed to be helping her buy the gifts.

### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **junior**

The word "junior," in this podcast, means younger and with less experience than other people: "Avery is only a junior analyst right now, but he hopes to be a manager within five years and a senior vice-president within seven years." The phrase "to be (someone's) junior" means to be younger than another person: "His sister is three years his junior." A "junior" is also a high school or college student in the third year of study in a four-year program: "Most of Caroline's friends are juniors, but she is also friends with a few sophomores and seniors." Finally, sometimes the word "junior," abbreviated "Jr.," is added to the end of a boy's name when he has the same name as his father: "I can't believe Doran Cougherty named his son Doran Cougherty, Jr."

#### **to stick to**

In this podcast, the phrase "to stick to" means to continue to do, use, or have something and to not change what one has been doing: "Why do you stick to typing on a typewriter instead of using a word processor?" The phrase "to make (something) stick" means to make someone remember something, or to make something permanent: "Teachers are always looking for creative ways to make their lessons stick." The phrase "to stick in (someone's) head" means for a song or phrase to be remembered over and over again, even when the person is trying not to think about it: "Whenever I hear a song from The Sound of Music, it gets stuck in my head for days!" Finally, the phrase "to stick to (one's) ribs" describes food that is very filling and satisfying: "I can't just eat a salad. I need something that will stick to my ribs."



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### Advise for Giving Corporate Gifts

Many companies give gifts to their “clients” (customers) and “vendors” (suppliers) to maintain a good business relationship, show “appreciation” (gratitude and respect), and thank the people and organizations that make their own business “possible” (able to exist). But it is important to give the right type of corporate gift, or the “gift-giving” (the act of giving a gift) might “backfire” (have negative results that are the opposite of what one intended).

For example, it is important to “distinguish” (see and understand the difference between) personal and professional gifts. A “tie” (the colorful piece of fabric tied around a man’s neck while he is wearing a business suit) might be an appropriate personal gift for a friend or relative, but it would not be an appropriate corporate gift.

It is also important to spend the right amount of money. A “cheap” (with little value) gift, like a simple pen, might “offend” (make someone angry) the “recipient” (the person who receives the gift), because the gift “is symbolic of” (a way to show) how much the giver respects the recipient. “At the other extreme” (considering an opposite example), a gift that is very expensive might make the recipient uncomfortable, especially if he or she cannot “reciprocate” (give an equally nice or expensive gift).

When giving gifts to many people within an organization, or to many different clients or vendors, it is important to give “comparable” (similar) or “identical” (exactly the same) gifts to everyone. Otherwise, people may compare what they received and “assume” (believe without having a strong reason) that they are valued more or less than the recipients of the other gifts.

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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 740: Corporate Gift-Giving.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 740. 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. You can also go to our ESL Podcast Store and buy some additional courses in daily and business English.

This episode is called "Corporate Gift-Giving." Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Michelle: Why did I get stuck with buying corporate gifts for our clients this year? Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I'm good at buying gifts.

Rafiq: It's not because you're a woman. It's because you're the most junior employee of the company. I had the job three years ago when I started working here.

Michelle: Oh, so you know the drill. I was thinking of sending food baskets to McQ Corp.

Rafiq: I wouldn't advise doing that. We're bidding on a new contract with their company and the gift could be misconstrued as a bribe. You'll want to avoid any appearance of impropriety.

Michelle: Then I shouldn't send anything at all?

Rafiq: You could send a charitable donation in the company's name. This way, we show our appreciation for their business, and they get recognition for the contribution to a worthy cause, without seeming like we're trying to influence their decision.

Michelle: That seems like a good way to go. What about the other companies we're doing business with?



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Rafiq: A food basket would be fine for those companies. Just make sure there's nothing perishable in them and send a handwritten note. That adds a nice touch.

Michelle: I was also thinking of sending our smaller clients calendars and t-shirts with our company logo. What do you think?

Rafiq: I think they'd like gift certificates to stores or restaurants better.

Michelle: What about a bottle of wine? Wouldn't that be a good gift?

Rafiq: You never know how a client feels about alcohol, so stick to something safer, like the food baskets or gift certificates.

Michelle: You have all the answers. You're an expert at corporate gift-giving!

Rafiq: Shh, don't say that too loudly. If the powers that be hear about it, I might get stuck with the job – permanently!

Michelle: Your secret is safe with me.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Michelle saying, "Why did I get stuck with buying corporate gifts for our clients this year?" "To be stuck with (something)" means that you have to do something that you don't want to do, usually because your boss or someone else told you to do it or assigned you to do it: "I arrived late to the meeting and everyone else had gotten all of the good jobs. I got stuck with the worst job." "Corporate" means related to a company, especially a large company or large business. Michelle is talking about buying "corporate gifts." These would be gifts that you would give other companies for their business. She says, "Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I'm good at buying gifts."

Rafiq says, "It's not because you're a woman. It's because you're the most junior employee of the company." "Junior" (junior) is someone who is younger, with less experience than other people. The opposite of "junior" would be "senior" (senior). In companies we talk about junior employees and senior employees; this is especially true at, for example, law firms, a company of lawyers. So, Michelle is a junior employee, and that's why she has to do the job that perhaps no one else wanted to do.

Rafiq says, "I had the job three years ago when I started working here." Michelle says, "Oh, so you know the drill." The expression "to know the drill" (drill) means



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to understand how and why things are done a certain way; to be, in other words, familiar with something. She says, “I was thinking of sending food baskets to McQ Corp.” A “basket” is a container that you put something in, often that you are giving as a gift. A “food basket” would be sort of like a big bowl that you would put certain food in and give as a gift to someone. Michelle is thinking of sending food baskets to McQ Corp.

Rafiq says, “I wouldn’t advise doing that.” In other words, that’s not a good idea; I don’t think you should do that. “We’re bidding on a new contract with their company and the gift could be misconstrued as a bribe.” “To bid (bid) on (something)” is an expression meaning to submit a proposal stating how you would finish a project, how long it will take, and how much it will cost. Companies often ask other companies to bid on a certain job that they want done, and the other companies say, “Well, I’ll do it for 500 dollars,” “I’ll do it for 5,000 dollars,” and so forth. Rafiq says that their company is bidding on a new “contract,” which is a written agreement to do something, with the McQ Company and a gift could be misconstrued as a bribe. “To construe” (construe) means to interpret something. “To misconstrue” would be to misinterpret, or not to interpret correctly, not to understand. You don’t want the gift to be seen as a bribe when it isn’t a bribe. A “bribe” (bribe) is when you give someone money or things in order to influence them in some sort of illegal way or some unfair way. You don’t want to bribe your teacher for a good grade. You could bribe your favorite podcaster however – possible!

Rafiq says, “You’ll want to avoid any appearance of impropriety.” “Impropriety” (impropriety) is inappropriate or incorrect or wrong behavior, behavior that breaks the rules about how you are supposed to act. It’s a very formal word; you won’t hear it very much in normal conversation. It is often used in talking about businesses doing things that are wrong or that seem wrong. So, Rafiq is saying you’ll want to avoid (you don’t want to do) anything that will give an appearance (a image) of impropriety, even if it isn’t wrong.

Michelle says, “Then I shouldn’t send anything at all?” Rafiq says, “You could send a charitable donation in the company’s name.” A “charitable donation” is money or goods – that is, things – that you to give an organization to help its work, such as a hospital, a school, a church. What Rafiq is suggesting is that Michelle can give something to an organization in the name of the company, and that’s sometimes how people give a gift. It’s not a gift directly to the person, it’s a gift to an organization that perhaps that person supports or wants to help. Rafiq says, “This way, we’ll show our appreciation for their business, and they get recognition for the contribution to a worthy (or good) cause (or activity), without seeming like we’re trying to influence their decision.”





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Michelle says, “That seems like a good way to go,” meaning that seems like a good way to do things. “That seems like a good way to go. What about the other companies we’re doing business with?” Rafiq says, “A food basket would be fine for those companies (meaning yes, that’s okay). Just make sure there’s nothing perishable in them and send a handwritten note.” Food that is “perishable” is food that if you leave it for too long will go bad, especially if it’s not put in a refrigerator – if it’s not cooled. So for example, if you were going to give them a frozen turkey – which would be kind of a strange gift, although sometimes companies, at least they used to, at Thanksgiving, the holiday in November where we eat turkey traditionally in the U.S. – companies would sometimes give their employees turkeys as gifts to take home and eat. Well, that would be an example of a perishable food. If you left the turkey on a table for a day it, of course, would no longer be good to eat. A “handwritten note” is, just what it says, a small note or letter that you write by your hand, not by typing on a typewriter – if anyone still types on typewriters – or typing in a computer, which is how we do things mostly nowadays. Rafiq says, “That adds a nice touch,” meaning that’s a nice additional thing to do for the company.

Michelle says, “I was also thinking of sending our smaller clients (that is, our less important clients) calendars and t-shirts with our company logo.” A “logo” (logo) is a symbol or an image created by a company to represent it. Michelle says, “What do you think (about sending calendars and t-shirts)?” Rafiq says, “I think they’d like gift certificates to stores or restaurants better.” A “gift certificate” is a piece of paper, more commonly now a little card – a little plastic card like a credit card that the person can use to buy gifts at a certain store or even online by using a special “code,” a special series of numbers and letters.

Michelle says, “What about a bottle of wine? Wouldn’t that be a good gift?” Rafiq says, “You never know how a client feels about alcohol.” You don’t know what the other business might think of alcohol; maybe they don’t like alcohol. He says, “so stick to something safer.” “To stick to (something)” is a phrasal verb meaning to continue to do something or to use something or not to change what you are doing now. “Stick to it” means continue with it, continue on. Usually we use that expression when there’s some sort of difficulty involved, but not always. You could go to a restaurant where you normally eat, and let’s say you always order steak, and your wife says, “Why don’t you try chicken tonight?” You might say, “No, I’m going to stick with (or stick to) my normal meal,” which is a steak. So, Rafiq says that Michelle should stick to something safer like the food baskets or gift certificates.





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Michelle says, “You have all the answers. You’re an expert at corporate gift-giving!” Rafiq says, “Shh, don’t say that too loudly. If the powers that be hear about it, I might get stuck with the job – permanently!” “The powers that be” is another way of referring to the bosses, the decision makers, the people who are the leaders of a company or organization. Rafiq says that if the powers that be hear that he is an expert at giving gifts, he might get stuck with the job permanently. “Permanently” means forever, without end; it’s the opposite of temporary or temporarily.

Michelle says, sort of as a joke at the end, “Your secret is safe with me.” This expression, “your secret is safe with me,” is a way of telling the person I won’t tell anyone else, don’t worry. But Michelle is sort of making a joke; it’s not really a secret that Rafiq is good at buying corporate gifts, at least not one that he probably cares too much that other people find out.

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

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

You don't need to send a hand-written note, but it might be nice to email us at [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).

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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