**32 North American Business English Idioms**

Below is a list of modern business English idioms taken from a funny TikTok video by @[claytonfarris4ever](https://www.tiktok.com/@claytonfarris4ever) . The conversation includes nearly every popular business English idiom in the current North American business environment.

**Video**: *The Corporate Breakup* by @[claytonfarris4ever](https://www.tiktok.com/@claytonfarris4ever)

* <https://www.tiktok.com/@claytonfarris4ever/video/7332137304342957354?is_from_webapp=1&web_id=7254221905070130694> (1:26, AmE)

**Possible Lesson Plan Structure**

Here’s an outline of a lesson for advanced/C1 EFL level.

Time: 1.5 hrs

**Warm-up Questions**

1. *In what ways does business English differ from casual English?*
2. *What business idioms do you know?*
3. *Have you ever been confused by an idiom in a professional situation?*

**Video Viewing**

1. Watch the [video](https:/www.tiktok.com/@claytonfarris4ever/video/7332137304342957354?is_from_webapp=1&web_id=7254221905070130694) twice.
2. Read the **comprehension questions** below and discuss the answers. Rewatch the video as necessary. (Answers on next page).

**Comprehension Questions**

1. *In your own words, what happens in the dialogue?*
2. *Based on the dialogue, what seems to be the relationship between the two speakers?*
3. *The woman mentions that she saw the man’s “Slack”, which is a business communication tool. What can we infer that she saw?*
4. *What does the woman say about the man’s performance?*
5. *What suggestions does the man make in order to save his job?*

**Controlled Practice With Idioms**

1. Distribute the **cloze worksheet** (pg. 3). Ask students to complete the blanks. When finished, watch the video again to check answers or use the transcript on page 5. Finally, students practice the dialogue with a partner twice, switching roles once.
2. Complete the Business English Idioms **quiz** on page 4.

**Possible Speaking Activities**

1. Distribute some interesting images related to business scenarios (or use the set provided on page 6). Students then try to either describe each situation using as many idioms as possible OR develop a coherent story using at least six idioms encompassing all images.
2. Assign each student an idiom and have them create a short presentation on how the idiom can be used in a business setting. The student should include an example in their presentation.

**Post-Activity Discussion Questions to Consolidate Learning**

1. Has a co-worker, teammate, or sibling ever *thrown you under the bus*?
2. If you had to *pivot* to another area of work (or study), what would it be?
3. Do you dream of a *C-Suite* position? Why or why not?
4. Can you think of a season of a TV series or a public figure who really *jumped the shark* to stay popular?
5. When it comes to doing your job (or doing the job you want to do), what are your *core competencies*?
6. When you need a fresh idea, whose *brain do you pick*?
7. If we *ran the numbers* on your monthly spending, would it show that you are a spender or a saver?
8. What takes up most of your *bandwidth* nowadays?

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*Comprehension Question Answer Key*

1. *The man appears to be trying to justify his position or actions in a business setting, while the woman is not satisfied with his performance or explanations. It ends with the woman letting the man go (terminating him) and directing him to HR.*
2. *The woman is a superior and the man is a subordinate, who is not a C-Suite employee.*
3. *We can guess that she saw messages which may not have been related to work and may have been related to finding work elsewhere (“keeping your eyes and ears open to other opportunities”). It suggests that she has evidence of his lack of commitment or attention to his work.*
4. *The woman states that the man's performance is lacking. She uses idioms like "You are bankrupt," indicating that he is not contributing value, and "B level," suggesting that his work quality is subpar. She also directly states that "We ran the numbers, and that's not true," in response to his claim of bringing a lot to the table.*
5. *The man suggests a few buzzwords to save his job: "hit the ground running," "think outside the box," "move the goalpost," and "incentivize a sustainable future." He also appeals to their shared "core values" and mentions his pursuit of a promotion to a "corner office" to position himself as ambitious and aligned with the company's goals. This doesn’t work though.*

*This lesson plan was created by Matthew Barton of EnglishCurrent.com (copyright). The video 'The Corporate Breakup' is the exclusive property of @*[*claytonfarris4ever*](https://www.tiktok.com/@claytonfarris4ever) *and is used here for educational purposes with acknowledgment. ChatGPT was used to generate answer keys help with vocabulary questions. For questions, contact the author.*

**Cloze Worksheet**

*M: Greetings. Sorry, I was out of pocket. I was getting all my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ . How are you?*

*F: Oh, put a \_\_\_\_\_\_ in it. Why didn’t you touch \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?*

*M: I was knee deep in emails.*

*F: Spare me the details. That's not resonating with me.*

*M: But can't we just hit the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?*

*F: Buddy, I saw your Slack.*

*M: Can we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on that?*

*F: It's become evident that you've been keeping your \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_ open to other opportunities.*

*M: I'm just trying to think \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*F: I don't have the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for this.*

*M: But I. I thought we were moving the needle.*

*F: We weren't. The pain point is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*M: Okay, then we move the goalpost.*

*F: We're not moving needles or the goalpost. You are bankrupt.*

*M: Why are you throwing me \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?*

*F: Hard stop. I feel like I'm \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with you.*

*M: I thought we had synergistically aligned our core values.*

*F: Well, I'm \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*M: Please. My goal here is to incentivize a sustainable future.*

*F: It's not gonna happen, amigo.*

*M: But I'm on the path to a promotion. I could be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*F: You’re giving B level, and I'm looking for someone in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .*

*M: I feel like I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to the table.*

*F: We ran the numbers, and that's not true.*

*M: I'm gonna let that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*F: I need to make hay while the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*M: Just give me actionable items. I'll change.*

*F: Jump the shark, man. You're low hanging fruit.*

*M: You're not seeing my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*F: I'm taking this offline.*

*M: So when are we finished?*

*F: EOD.*

*M: Can I at least \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ one last time?*

*F: I'm gonna need you to head up to HR. Kind regards.*

*M: It was a pleasure to e-meet you.*

**Business Idioms Quiz - Controlled Practice**

1. Once we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , we’ll start designing our website.

a. have our ducks in a row b. take this offline d. think outside the box

1. To keep the project on schedule, we need to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by the end of the week.

a. jump the shark b. touch base c. resonate d. take this offline

1. When brainstorming new solutions, it's crucial to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, considering ideas that might initially seem unusual.

a. make hay while the sun shines b. think outside the box c. run the numbers

1. "The team can't begin the analysis until we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with the latest market data."

a. circle back b. resonate with me c. pick your brain d. run the numbers

1. The manager suggested we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the discussion on the budget until the next quarter's projections were available.

a. put a pin in b. circle back to c. run the numbers for

1. "During the merger, the leaders were \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to find the best strategy that benefited both companies."

a. thrown under the bus b. synergistically aligned c. moving the goalposts d. herding cats

1. After our team's review, we've identified a few \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that we can address immediately to improve efficiency.

a. core competencies b. actionable items c. EOD deadlines d. pivots

1. The CEO is known for his ability to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; he's successfully led the company through several innovative changes."

a. hit the ground running b. make hay when the sun shines c. pivot

1. We need someone with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in digital marketing for the new campaign to reach a wider audience.

a. C-Suites b. core competencies c. low hanging fruit

1. . “Before we conclude, let's ensure we have a list of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to review at tomorrow's meeting."

a. hard stops b. actionable items c. core competencies d. C-Suites

1. She was not only talented but truly \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with her diverse experience and strong leadership skills.

a. moved the goalposts b. brought a lot to the table c. picked our brains

1. With all the current projects, I just don’t have the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to take on another client right now.

a. low hanging fruit b. corner office c. bandwidth d. actionable items

**Transcript with Definitions**

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| M: Greetings. Sorry, I was out of pocket.1 I was getting all my ducks in a row.2 How are you?  F: Oh, put a pin in it.3 Why didn’t you touch base4?  M: I was knee deep5 in emails.  F: Spare me the details. That's not resonating6 with me.  M: But can't we just hit the ground running7?  F: Buddy, I saw your Slack.  M: Can we circle back8 on that?  F: It's become evident that you've been keeping your eyes and ears open9 to other opportunities.  M: I'm just trying to think outside the box.10  F: I don't have the bandwidth11 for this.  M: But I. I thought we were moving the needle.12  F: We weren't. The pain point is baked in.13  M: Okay, then we move the goalpost.14  F: We're not moving needles or the goalpost. You are bankrupt.  M: Why are you throwing me under the bus15?  F: Hard stop16. I feel like I'm herding cats17 with you.  M: I thought we had synergistically aligned18 our core values.  F: Well, I'm pivoting.19  M: Please. My goal here is to incentivize a sustainable future.  F: It's not gonna happen, amigo.  M: But I'm on the path to a promotion. I could be corner office.20  F: Giving B level, and I'm looking for someone in the C-Suites.21  M: I feel like I bring a lot to the table.22  F: We ran the numbers,23 and that's not true.  M: I'm gonna let that marinate.24  F: I need to make hay while the sun still shines.25  M: Just give me actionable items.26 I'll change.  F: Jump the shark,27\* man. You're low hanging fruit.28  M: You're not seeing my core competencies.29  F: I'm taking this offline.30  M: So when are we finished?  F: EOD.31  M: Can I at least pick your brain32 one last time?  F: I'm gonna need you to head up to HR. Kind regards.  M: It was a pleasure to e-meet you. | 1. temporarily unavailable  2. organizing things well and making sure all details are accounted for  3. to temporarily pause a discussion to return to it later  4. make contact with someone to discuss something briefly  5. very involved or preoccupied with something  6. feeling in agreement with someone's ideas or opinions  7. to start something and proceed at a fast pace with enthusiasm  (Slack is business communication software.)  8. to return to an earlier point or topic  9. to stay alert or be keen to notice opportunities  10. to think creatively, not limited by conventional thinking  11. the capacity to deal with something  12. to make a noticeable difference or progress  13. the problem is deeply embedded and likely not easily resolved  14. to change the rules while something is already in progress  15. to betray/sacrifice someone, often to avoid blame  16. a non-negotiable end point  17. trying to control a group that is uncontrollable  18. working together in a mutually beneficial way  19. changing direction or strategy  20. a symbol of a high-status position in a company  21. Executive-level managers within a company (like CEO, CFO, COO).  22. to have many skills, ideas, or resources to offer  23. to do the required calculations  24. to take time to think or reflect on something  25. to take advantage of a good opportunity while it lasts  26. tasks that can be acted upon or carried out  27. to do something absurd to attract attention, especially when it's a sign of decline (\*the idiom is not used properly in this dialogue)  28. the easiest tasks that can be addressed first  29. the main strengths of a person  30. to discuss something privately (\*in this dialogue, it means to end the conversation)  31. By the end of the business day  32. to ask someone for their thoughts or feedback on a topic |

**Images for Speaking Roleplays**

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**Business English Idiom Definitions**

1. **Out of pocket**: Temporarily unreachable or unavailable, usually because you're not in your usual place or at work.
2. **Getting all my ducks in a row**: Organizing things well and making sure all details are accounted for.
3. **Put a pin in it**: To temporarily pause a discussion or an idea to return to it later.
4. **Touch base**: To make contact with someone to discuss something briefly.
5. **Knee deep in something**: To be very involved or preoccupied with something, often with work or a task.
6. **Resonate with me**: To feel familiar or be in agreement with someone's ideas or opinions.
7. **Hit the ground running**: To start something and proceed at a fast pace with enthusiasm.
8. **Circle back**: To revisit or return to an earlier point or topic.
9. **Keeping your eyes and ears open**: To stay alert or be keen to notice opportunities.
10. **Think outside the box**: To think creatively, not bound by conventional thinking.
11. **Bandwidth**: The capacity or ability to handle or deal with something.
12. **Moving the needle**: To make a noticeable difference or progress.
13. **The pain point is baked in**: The problem is deeply embedded and likely not easily resolved.
14. **Move the goalpost**: To change the criteria or rules while something is already in progress.
15. **Throwing me under the bus**: To betray or sacrifice someone, often to avoid blame oneself.
16. **Hard stop**: A non-negotiable end point or deadline.
17. **Herding cats**: Trying to control or organize a group that is uncontrollable or chaotic.
18. **Synergistically aligned**: Working together effectively and in a mutually beneficial way.
19. **Pivoting**: Changing direction or strategy, usually in business.
20. **Corner office**: A symbol of a high-status job or position in a company.
21. **C-Suites**: Executive-level managers within a company (like CEO, CFO, COO).
22. **Bring a lot to the table**: To have many skills, ideas, or resources to offer.
23. **Run the numbers:** To do the required calculations
24. **Let that marinate**: To take time to think or reflect on something.
25. **Make hay while the sun shines**: To take advantage of a good situation or opportunity while it lasts.
26. **Actionable items**: Tasks that can be acted upon or carried out.
27. **Jump the shark**: To do something absurd to attract attention, especially when it's a sign of decline.
28. **Low hanging fruit**: The easiest tasks or opportunities that can be addressed first.
29. **Core competencies**: The main strengths or strategic advantages of a person or organization.
30. **Taking this offline**: To discuss something privately or not in a public or formal setting.
31. **EOD (End of Day)**: By the end of the business day.
32. **Pick your brain**: To ask someone for their thoughts, feedback, or ideas on a topic.