GLOSSARY

account – the business relationship between a company and one buyer of its products and services, including all paperwork related to those transactions
* As the vice-president of sales, you’ll be responsible for dozens of accounts representing more than three million dollars in sales.

to snatch – to take something quickly, unexpectedly, and without permission; to steal
* Justin puts passwords on all his digital files so that nobody can snatch his ideas.

to not know what hit (one) – to be completely surprised by something so that one was not expecting it, especially when there are negative consequences
* The severe flu season left thousands of people not knowing what hit them.

to watch (one’s) back – to be careful, especially when one might be hurt or killed by other people who are planning a secret attack
* The streets are dangerous, so our police officers have to know how to watch their back.

payback – revenge; vengeance; mean or cruel actions done to someone because that person did something mean or cruel previously
* Yes, I told lies about Mindy, but it was just payback for the things she said about me last week.

on the verge of – about to do something; ready to do something; very close to the point where something happens
* Blake was on the verge of proposing to his girlfriend when he found out that she was planning to break up with him.

to swoop in – to become involved in something very quickly and unexpectedly, having some effect on the people who were already involve in that thing
* Wouldn’t it be great if an investor swooped in and gave us thousands of dollars for advertising?

to snag (something) – to get something, especially to take something through trickery or deceit
* What did Zacharias have to do to snag those concert tickets?
to play fair – to follow the rules; to do something the way one is supposed to do it, following the same rules as everyone else and not having any secret advantage
* Anti-trust laws are designed to make sure companies play fair when they compete with one another.

feud – a long argument, often violent, that continues between two people, families, or groups of people for a very long time
* Their family feud began in 1892, when the Smiths accused the Harlands of stealing a cow.

to play hardball – to do everything possible to win, even if it is mean or unfair or creates problems for others
* If you want to be promoted, you’ll have to play hardball.

what’s good for the goose is good for the gander – a phrase meaning that if something is good, beneficial, or acceptable for one person, it is good, beneficial, or acceptable for everyone
* A: I know Ollie did that, but that doesn’t make it right for you to do it, too.
  B: I disagree. What’s good for the goose is good for the gander.

to up the ante – to raise the stakes, to increase the potential benefits of something even though that means increasing the risk associated with it
* Let’s up the ante and see if the competition is able to match these lower prices.

underhanded – dishonest, secretive, and unfair
* The article accuses the government of being involved in a lot of underhanded transactions.

to escalate – to increase and become bigger or more intense
* Instead of yelling at your spouse and making the situation escalate, try taking a deep breath and counting to 10 before responding.

if you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen – phrase used to tell someone that if a situation is too stressful or intense for him/her, he/she should leave and let someone else deal with it
* Stop complaining. Working on Wall Street is stressful and most analysts have ulcers and high blood pressure. If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Amanda have the file for Evan’s account on her desk?
   a) Because she thinks he made a mistake.
   b) Because she wants the account to be hers.
   c) Because Evan asked her to help him do some work.

2. Why does Amanda think her actions are acceptable?
   a) Because she hasn’t done anything wrong.
   b) Because she has an opportunity to make more money.
   c) Because Evan has done things that are equally bad.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

account
The word “account,” in this podcast, means the business relationship between a company and one buyer of its products and services, including all paperwork related to those transactions: “By the end of our first year, we had about 20 active accounts.” When talking about banking, an “account” is an arrangement where a bank holds one’s money temporarily: “They have two checking accounts and one savings account.” A “first-hand account” is one’s description of what one has seen or heard directly: “Becca’s first-hand account of the robbery helped the detectives catch the thief.” Finally, the phrase “to take (something) into account” means to consider something or to treat something as a factor in one’s decision: “Don’t forget to take inflation into account when you determine how much money you will need to save for retirement.”

to play fair
In this podcast, the phrase “to play fair” means to follow the rules or to do something the way one is supposed to do it, following the same rules as everyone else and not having any secret advantage: “At recess, the children often complain that other students aren’t playing fair.” The phrase “to play (something) by ear” means to be spontaneous and make decisions based on what happens: “We might go to the movies, or we might go out to dinner. We’ll just play it by ear.” Finally, the phrase “to play (one’s) cards right” means to do or say something that results in maximum benefits for oneself: “If you play your cards right during the negotiations, you could get your dream job with a great salary and plenty of vacation time.”
CULTURE NOTE

The Ethics and Compliance Officers Association

The Ethics and Compliance Officers Association (ECOA) is a “nonprofit organization” (an organization that serves some social purpose and whose main goal is not to make money) whose “members” (people who belong to an organization) represent individuals who are responsible for their organization’s “ethics” (rules about how one should behave), “compliance” (following the law), and business “conduct” (how one behaves) programs.

The organization tries to be the world leader in providing information and “resources” (useful materials) related to ethics, compliance, and “corporate governance” (how companies are structured and operated). The organization also provides “forums” (places where people can interact and share ideas) for its members to exchange ideas and “strategies” (planned ways of doing things) with each other.

The organization has four values: “integrity” (doing the right thing), “confidentiality” (not sharing private or confidential information), “collegiality” (being polite and friendly toward others), and “cooperation” (working together).

ECOA “stems from” (began as) a 1991 meeting of 30 “ethics officers” (a person whose job is to make sure that a company or organization behaves well and does the right thing) who wanted to create a new organization for discussions on the topics that interested them most. These people believed that an ethics officer is extremely important in “ensuring” (making sure) that a company is run ethically.

Today, many leading companies and organizations are members of ECOA. They include American Express, Dow Corning, Dun & Bradstreet, General Electric, Honeywell, the Internal Revenue Service, Levi Strauss, and Texas Instruments, among others.

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c
COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 988 – Playing Fair in Business.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 988. 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. Become a member of ESL Podcast by going to our website. You can also like us on Facebook at facebook.com/eslpod. And, why not follow us on Twitter at @eslpod.

This episode is a dialogue between Marcel and Amanda about being fair and honest in your work – at your job. Let’s get started.

[start of dialogue]

Marcel: Hey, why do you have the file for the Donovan account on your desk? I thought that was Evan’s account.

Amanda: It is, but I’m about to snatch it from him. He won’t know what hit him.

Marcel: You’re stealing his account? If you do that, you’d better watch your back.

Amanda: You’ve got it all wrong. This is payback. Three months ago, when I was on the verge of getting the Moralez account, Evan swooped in and snagged it. He doesn’t play fair, and now neither do I.

Marcel: This sounds like the beginning of a feud.

Amanda: Evan started it. If he wants to play hardball, then what’s good for the goose is good for the gander.

Marcel: You’re not worried that he’ll up the ante and try to do something even more underhanded?

Amanda: Evan doesn’t scare me.

Marcel: This could easily escalate.
Amanda: Like I said, I’m not afraid of Evan. This is business. If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.

[end of dialogue]

This dialogue begins with Marcel saying, “Hey, why do you have the file for the Donovan account on your desk?” Marcel is talking to Amanda, and he’s getting Amanda’s attention by saying, “Hey.” This is a very common, informal way of getting someone’s attention. He says, “Why do you have the file for” — the papers related to — “the Donovan account on your desk?” An “account” here refers to some sort of business relationship between your company and another company or someone who is buying something from your company. So, the Donovan account would be the purchases and other things related to the company called Donovan, or the person called Donovan, and your company.

Marcel says, “I thought that was Evan’s account.” Marcel is saying that he thought that the Donovan account — the sales that go to Donovan — belonged to another person, Evan. Amanda says, “It is,” meaning it is Evan’s account, “but I’m about to snatch it from him.” “To snatch” (snatch) is to take something quickly, unexpectedly, and without permission from someone else. Basically, it’s to steal something. We talk about “purse snatchers.” These are the thieves, crooks, criminals who go around and take women’s purses from them by grabbing them from behind and running. That’s related to this verb “to snatch.”

Amanda says, “He” — meaning Evan — “won’t know what hit him.” The expression “to not know what hit you” is to be completely surprised by something, usually something bad, something negative. Marcel says, “You’re stealing his account? If you do that, you better watch your back.” “To watch your back” is an expression meaning to be very careful. We say “watch your back” because you can’t see behind you, and it’s easy for someone to, say, take a knife and put it into your back. We would call that “stabbing (stabbing) your back.” You should “watch your back” because you’re doing something that might be dangerous or that someone might get angry about.

Amanda says, “You’ve got it all wrong,” meaning you don’t understand the situation here. “This is payback.” “Payback” (payback) — one word — is revenge, vengeance, something mean or cruel that you do to someone because that person was mean or cruel to you. If someone tells lies about you at your workplace, you might tell lies about them as payback. Of course, we don’t recommend that.
Amanda says, “Three months ago, when I was on the verge of getting the Morales account, Evan swooped in and snagged it.” “To be on the verge” (verge) of something is to be about to do something, ready to do something. “I was on the verge of walking over and asking the woman for her telephone number, when my friend arrived first and started talking to her.” I was on the verge of doing it. I was just about to do it.

Amanda says she was on the verge of getting another account, of getting the business from another person for the company, when Evan “swooped in.” “To swoop (swoop) in” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to become involved in something very quickly – to have some effect on people who were already involved in that thing. So, usually “to swoop in” would be to suddenly be involved in the situation. Sometimes it could be a positive thing. Sometimes it could be a negative thing. For example, we were running out of money – we didn’t have enough money for our company – when an investor swooped in and gave us $500,000 to help us continue our business.

Here, it’s not a good thing but a bad thing that Evan did. He swooped in and snagged this account. “To snag” (snag) means to get – to get something usually by doing something tricky or perhaps dishonest, although it’s not always the case. This is an informal use of the verb “to snag.” You could talk about snagging a good table at a restaurant, meaning you were able to obtain or get a good table at a restaurant. It’s not always a bad thing.

Amanda, however, is talking about a bad thing that Evan did a few months ago when he swooped in and snagged the Morales account that Amanda was on the verge of getting. Amanda says, “Evan doesn’t play fair, and now neither do I.” “To play fair” (fair) is to be honest – not to do anything mean or dishonest in dealing with other people. Because Evan is not being honest, Amanda says she’s not going to be honest.

Marcel says, “This sounds like the beginning of a feud.” A “feud” (feud) is a long argument that often takes place over many months or even years. Amanda says, “Evan started it,” meaning Evan was the first one to do something bad. “If he wants to play hardball, then what’s good for the goose is good for the gander.” “To play hardball” (hardball) is to do everything possible in order to win – even to cheat in order to win, sometimes.

The expression “what’s good for the goose (goose) is good for the gander (gander)” means if something is good or acceptable for one person, it’s good or acceptable for everyone else. A “goose” is a type of bird. In this expression, it refers to the female of the bird. “Gander” is a male goose. So, sometimes this
expression is used when talking about treating men and women equally, but more generally, it just means what’s good for one person is good for everyone. In other words, if you think it’s good for you, then it should be good for me too or acceptable for me to do. Amanda is using this expression to say that if Evan plays hardball, then she can play hardball. She should be able to – she should be allowed to play hardball.

Marcel says, “You’re not worried that he’ll up the ante and try to do something even more underhanded?” “To up the ante” (ante) is an expression that comes from gambling or betting. The “ante” is the money that you are betting, especially in something like a card game like poker. “To up the ante” would be to increase your bet. Here, it just means to increase the risk associated with doing something, to make something more serious. “Underhanded” (underhanded) means dishonest, secretive – something that is deceitful or not fair would be underhanded. Amanda says, “Evan doesn’t scare me,” meaning she is not afraid of Evan.

But Marcel says, “This could easily escalate.” “To escalate” (escalate) means to increase or become bigger – or in this case, more serious. If the violence escalates in a war, it becomes greater and greater. There is more and more violence. You’ll sometimes hear this verb used nowadays when you have a problem with a company, and you contact the company, and the first person you talk to is unable to help you. That person might escalate your issue to his or her boss. Your “issue,” or problem, will then be handled by someone with more authority or more knowledge.

Amanda says, “Like I said, I’m not afraid of Evan. This is business. If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.” This expression, “If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen” is used to tell someone that if they are unable to take the stress or the difficulty of a certain situation, then they shouldn’t be in that situation. They should leave. They should let somebody else do it. A kitchen is where, in a house or in a restaurant, you prepare food. “Kitchens” are often hot because of course you’re cooking the food with heat, typically. If you can’t stand – if you can’t put up with or tolerate – the heat of the kitchen, then you shouldn’t be in the kitchen.

This expression became famous in the United States in the mid-twentieth century because it was often used by President Harry Truman. Truman was known to be a very practical, level-headed, somewhat tough politician. It was his use of the expression that made it popular in twentieth-century American English, and it’s still used nowadays in precisely this situation. Amanda is saying that if Evan isn’t tough enough to handle the situation, then he shouldn’t be involved in it.
Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

Thanks to our wonderful scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse, for her wonderful scripts.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on ESL Podcast.

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