



# Idioms For HR

Idioms most used in the world of Human Resources

Working in human resources involves playing different roles and dealing with a vast range of diverse interlocutors in a context where jargon and bizspeak can really help one drive their point home.

Here are some common idioms that can help you as an HR professional sum up concepts, engage audiences, and show competence every time you have to work your way to success in international business.

## ! Do's and Don't's

An idiom is an expression with a figurative global meaning that differs from the literal meaning of its single words put together.

If they are used correctly, idioms can draw readers in and help them think creatively. In the wrong context, however, idiomatic expressions can come across as obscure or may even be misinterpreted.

## Do use idioms when

quick recap



You want to sum up ideas and actions in a few words

"We left the issue on the back burner" is much more succinct than "We had to postpone dealing with the issue because there were other priorities".



You want to add an artistic flair to your message

"You should save money" is a clear message, but "A penny saved is a penny earned" adds a sort of Dickensian dimension to the statement.



You are trying to sound friendly and casual

"I need to work hard to earn enough money to support my family" is a bit stiffer than "I've got to bring home the bacon."

## Don't use idioms when:



You are not sure you command it

If you're not sure of the figurative meaning of an idiom or you can't remember exactly the single words that make it up, your message may not get across.



You are not sure everyone will understand what it means

You don't really want to confuse your audience, so avoid using an idiom if you think someone may not understand what you mean.



### You want to show you are part of "the inner circle"

When you say, "We need to start from the low-hanging fruit", you aren't only saying you need to start from the things that are easy to achieve, you are also saying, "Trust me. I am competent: you can see it from the language I use!"



### You want to stimulate your audience to think differently

When telling one of your team members, "You are not on the ball today", not only are you letting them know they aren't reacting to things quickly enough, you are also reminding them that business is like a sport and that only one team wins a ball game.



### You are trying to get your audience to carry out a specific task

Let's face it. No one really knows what "thinking outside the box" means. If you want your team to come up with novel ideas to cut costs, say it clearly: you'll spare many people a great deal of time and effort.



### You have to sound very formal

Some idioms work well in formal English, but plenty tend to be informal (and it's tough to tell which do).

## Learning New Idioms and Using Them Too!



### Notice them

Be receptive during meetings, when watching talks online, or when reading newspapers. Ask yourself why a specific idiom caught your attention.

### Take note of them

Write down the idiom on a notebook (or a new notes file on your smartphone). Then, look it up on a good dictionary to check its use and form.

### Compare them to your native language

Think about similar expressions in your native language: if there's some kind of correspondence, you will remember the idiom more easily.

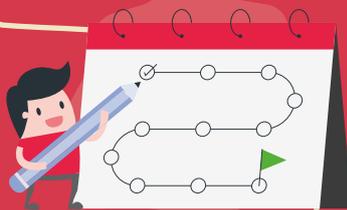
### Make them personal

Think of a sentence related to your job that could act as an example for the idiom and write it down.

### Use them in a safe environment

Only practice makes perfect. Start using the idioms you've learned in e-mails or PPT decks to get used to them without worrying about making mistakes.

## Career Path



### Get someone on board

**Hire someone**

With LinkedIn, it's easier to get skilled people on board.

### Give someone the sack/the pink slip/the boot

**Fire someone**

John was given the sack, and they are looking for a replacement.

### Climb the corporate ladder

**Get promoted and achieve higher positions**

Going to business school is no longer considered an essential step to climb the corporate ladder.

### A dead-end job

**A job in which there is no chance of promotion**

When he left us, he got stuck in a dead-end job at an insurance company.

### Rise through the ranks

**Be moved up from a low position to a higher one in a company**

We hired him ten years ago for a position on the shop floor, but he has been rising through the ranks ever since.



## Training and Development

### Be thrown in at the deep end

**Start a job/activity without being given any support**

Our onboarding process ensures recruits don't get thrown in at the deep end.

### Learn the ropes

**Learn how to do an activity/job**

For new hires, the first three months are spent learning the ropes.

### Learning curve

**The rate of someone's progress in learning a new skill (Steep= a lot to learn in a short time; Shallow= a little to learn and a lot of time to do it)**

You can join the team, but you have to know it's going to be a steep learning curve.

### Set someone up for success

**Ensure an employee is given all the instruments to achieve success**

Establishing clear short-term outcomes is a necessary step to set employees up for success.

### Fill the knowledge/skill/tech gap

**Reduce the lack of knowledge/skills/technology needed to do an activity**

Our salespeople aren't tech-savvy enough to use the new CRM system properly. We need to fill this skill gap.



# Productivity



## A pressure cooker

**A situation in which people are under a lot of pressure**

*Our workers on the shop floor have been working in a pressure cooker since January.*

## Be snowed under

**Have too much work to deal with it properly**

*Sorry, but I'm snowed under this week. Can this wait until next Monday?*

## Get your ducks in a row

**Be well prepared or organized for something that is going to happen**

*We should have our ducks in a row beforehand, so we can be ready to start production when it's required.*

## Go the extra mile

**Make more effort than is expected of you**

*If you want that promotion, you'll have to show me you can go the extra mile.*

## Nip something in the bud

**Stop something bad before it has an opportunity to develop**

*We need to stop the unrest on the shop floor in the bud, or strikes will soon start.*



# Performance



## Up to par

**Of the usual or expected standard**

*His work hasn't been up to par lately.*

## Raise the bar

**Set higher standards to quality for something**

*It's time we raised the bar for inclusion with a new diversity policy.*

## Not cut the mustard

**Fail to deal with issues satisfactorily**

*The boss fired him because he couldn't cut the mustard.*

## Move the needle

**Change a situation so that it generates noticeable profit/advantages**

*We canceled the campaign when we noticed it didn't move the needle in sales.*

## Room for improvement

**The possibility to improve**

*She did a great job this year and reached all her targets, but there's still room for improvement for her leadership-wise.*



# Creativity



## Big-picture thinking

**The ability to come up with ideas that aren't limited in scope or too focused on details**

*Big-picture thinking is one of the critical attributes of a manager.*

## Think outside the box

**Think creatively**

*Her best contribution to the team lies in her ability to think outside the box.*

## Put one's thinking cap on

**Start thinking seriously about something**

*We need some suggestions, so I'd be grateful if you put your thinking cap on.*

## Back to the drawing board

**Back to the beginning of a process because it's not working**

*If the predictions are wrong, I guess we'll have to go back to the drawing board.*

## Blue-sky thinking

**Ways of thinking about something that are often impractical but very original**

*We need to develop some new leadership training courses for our white collars, so it's time for some blue-sky thinking.*



# Teamwork



## Play a part in doing something

**Help to achieve something**

*Our thanks go to everyone who played a part in achieving this excellent result.*

## Be in the driver's seat

**Be in charge of a situation**

*I'm in the driver's seat now, so it's up to me to decide how we'll solve this.*

## Keep someone in the loop

**Keep someone informed about a situation**

*I'll be on a business trip for the next seven days. Please, keep me in the loop.*

## Put someone in the picture

**Tell someone the facts about a situation**

*Just make sure you put the boss in the picture about the status of the project.*

## Pull your weight

**Work as hard as other people or as hard as needed**

*If we want this project to be successful, I expect everyone to pull their weight.*



# Negotiations



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## Cut corners

Using the easiest, fastest, and cheapest way to do something

If we cut corners, we could probably reach our targets this year.

## Win-win situation

A situation in which everyone wins

This partnership will allow us to train our workforce better and bring you a lot of visibility. It's a win-win (situation).

## Back to square one

Again from the beginning because the first try didn't work

Sorry but this isn't negotiable. If you don't accept it, it's back to square one.

## At stake

Involved

I don't know if I can do that. My reputation is at stake here.

## The ball is in your court

It's up to you

This is our offer. The ball is in your court now.



# Time management



## Round-the-clock

24 hours a day

We have round-the-clock production at all our plants.

## Beat the clock

Perform a task quickly and within a fixed time limit

The deadline is tomorrow, so work faster: we have to beat the clock!

## At the eleventh hour

At the last minute

We were doing great, and then they changed their plans at the eleventh hour.

# Prioritizing



## On the back burner

Postponed or suspended because of a low priority

Ever since the merger, training has been left on the back burner, but it's time we focused on it again.

## The be-all-and-end-all

The most important thing or concern

People are our priority. Profit can't be the be-all-and-end-all.

## Put something on ice

Suspend something

We had some budget cuts and were forced to put training on ice.

## The low-hanging fruit

Something easy to reach or achieve

When considering new perks to offer our employees, we thought we'd start from the low-hanging fruit: discounts on our products will make them happy and increase productivity at once.

## The bottom line

The most important point to consider

The bottom line is that we have to improve performance.



# Finance



## Put all one's eggs in one basket

Invest in different things to reduce risk

Our stock options are a good way to make sure you don't put all your eggs in one basket.

## On a shoestring

With a tight budget

Dealing with this project on a shoestring is going to be a challenge, but we'll try our best.

## Crunch the numbers

Do calculations

I'll ask the accounting department to crunch the numbers and get back to you with a plan.

## In the red/in the black

Have less money than you spent/have more money than you spend

The company was in the red last quarter, but we've managed to make it back in the black.

## Belt-tightening

A reduction in spending due to financial problems

Given our budget review, I think we will have to go through some belt-tightening next year.