



ESL Podcast 1024 – Dealing with Crises

GLOSSARY

to postpone – to delay; to change the time or date of something so that it happens later than originally scheduled

* We're going to postpone the carnival due to heavy rain.

to put out fires – to quickly and repeatedly find solutions to many problems, without advance warning or time to plan, and without time to identify or address the cause of the problems

* During a major epidemic, doctors sometimes have to put out fires by treating symptoms before they have time to try to fight the underlying medical problem.

to clear (one's) schedule – to cancel all of one's appointments and meetings so that one can focus on something else, with no obligations during a certain period of time

* She asked her assistant to clear her schedule for the rest of the afternoon so that she could finish the report.

crisis – a major, important, and urgent problem that must be dealt with immediately

* If we don't get more food delivered soon, we'll have a crisis.

layoff – firing; an instance where someone is told that he or she no longer has a job, especially when the company is not performing well and needs to reduce the number of workers

* When the factory closed, there was a layoff of over 200 people.

to be pulled in several directions – to have many demands on one's time; to need to do many different things, especially more than one can comfortably do

* As a corporate executive, single father, and soccer coach, Leonardo often feels he is being pulled in several directions.

to make headway – to make progress; to advance toward a goal

* Cleaning out the garage is a huge project, but we're making headway.

thrown at (one) – imposed upon another person, especially when talking about a demand or responsibility that one would rather not have

* If they throw one more deadline at me, I won't be able to finish any of my work on time.



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crunch time – a period of time when many things are due or must be completed, and one must work very hard to be able to do everything

* Final exams are next week, so this is crunch time for students.

shorthanded – without enough people to do a job; understaffed

* Two cooks and three waiters have called in sick, so we're going to be very shorthanded at the restaurant tonight.

urgent – needing immediate attention; not able to wait

* The doctor found cancer and said there was an urgent need to operate.

ASAP – as soon as possible; without delay

* Please fill out these forms and return them to the human resources department ASAP.

to long for – to yearn for; to desire; to want very badly to have or do something

* Charlotte hasn't had a vacation in two years and is longing for a week at the beach.

timeline – schedule; a plan for when things should be completed

* We can follow this timeline only if we receive the necessary information from the other companies.

to quiet down – to become calmer and less rushed

* We had great sales and were really busy over the holidays, but business quieted down in January.

disaster – a major problem with significant negative consequences

* That earthquake was the worst disaster to hit our county in the past 15 years.

to avert – to prevent something from happening; to avoid

* The police officers caught the terrorist and averted a dangerous bombing incident.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why isn't Adrian going to the meeting?
 - a) Because he changed his mind about attending.
 - b) Because he wants to cancel it.
 - c) Because he wants to reschedule it for later.

 2. What does Teresa mean when she says, "We're so shorthanded"?
 - a) The company has many unfilled positions.
 - b) The employees don't have the necessary skills to do the job.
 - c) The company is no longer making money.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to put out fires

The phrase "to put out fires," in this podcast, means to quickly and repeatedly find solutions to many problems, without advance warning or time to plan, and without time to identify or address the cause of the problems: "Your job is to put out fires before they become major crises." The phrase "to light a fire under (someone)" means to motivate someone, or to somehow make someone want to do something, especially his or her job: "Robert lit a fire under his trainee by saying that if he makes another mistake, he'll lose his job." Finally, the phrase "fire in (one's) belly" describes a strong desire to do something: "Whenever Edgar is on the basketball court, his performance shows that he has a fire in his belly."

to long for

In this podcast, the phrase "to long for" means to yearn for or to desire or want something very badly: "Throughout her childhood, Carole longed for an opportunity to leave the city and move back to the countryside." Someone who is "long-winded" speaks for a long period of time and/or uses too many words to express an idea: "Audiences don't enjoy listening to long-winded speakers, so find a way to state your ideas in fewer words." The phrase "long-suffering" means doing something in spite of other people's negative behavior: "Becca was the long-suffering wife of an alcoholic." The phrase "long-running" means continuing for a long period of time: "This lawsuit is a long-running court battle that might continue for many more years." Finally, the word "longstanding" means having existed for a long time: "Thank you for your longstanding membership in our organization."



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CULTURE NOTE

Smokey the Bear

“Smokey Bear,” often called “Smokey the Bear,” is a “mascot” (a cartoon animal or other character that represents a team or organization) for the United States Forest Service, the federal agency that protects America’s “forests” (areas with many trees). Smokey the Bear first appeared in an advertising campaign in 1944 with the “slogan” (a saying used in marketing and advertising) of “Smokey says care will prevent nine out of 10 forest fires.” Today, most people associate Smokey the Bear with a different slogan: “Only you can prevent forest fires.”

Smokey the Bear was created to encourage people to be more “cautious” (careful) and to prevent forest fires, especially by selecting appropriate “sites” (places) for “campfires” (fires burned for cooking, heat, and entertainment while outdoors) away from tree branches, and “dousing” (pouring water over) campfires before leaving them “unattended” (without someone nearby and watching something).

Smokey the Bear is “depicted” (shown) as a drawing of a brown bear wearing jeans and a large hat with his name in red letters, holding a “shovel” (tool with a long handle used for digging and moving dirt). Smokey can be found in television ads, promotional materials distributed at national parks and in schools, and even as a walking mascot at national parks.

The Ad Council reports that 95% of adults and 77% of American children recognize Smokey the Bear and his message. But some people argue that the campaign has been too successful in “vilifying” (making something seem bad or evil) wildfires. People have been taught that all forest fires are bad, but in reality, some forest fires are necessary to maintain forest health.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 1,024 – Dealing with Crises.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 1,024. 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. Become a member of ESL Podcast and download a Learning Guide for this episode.

This episode is a dialogue between Adrian and Teresa about managing, or handling, difficult situations. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Teresa: Hey, where are you going? We have a meeting in 10 minutes.

Adrian: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to postpone. I'm in the middle of putting out fires, and I've had to clear my schedule to deal with the latest crisis.

Teresa: Can I help?

Adrian: I wish you could. With the new layoffs, I feel like I'm being pulled in several directions at once. As soon as I feel like I'm making headway with one problem, I get another thrown at me.

Teresa: I know exactly what you mean. I always feel like it's crunch time around here because we're so shorthanded.

Adrian: I'm so tired of everything being urgent all the time and needing attention ASAP. I long for the days when projects had timelines and people followed them. I've got to go.

Teresa: Hey, when are we going to have that meeting?

Adrian: As soon as things quiet down.

Teresa: When will that be?

Adrian: I'll let you know as soon as the latest disaster has been averted.



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[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Teresa saying to Adrian, “Hey, where are you going? We have a meeting in 10 minutes.” Adrian says, “I’m sorry. I’m going to have to postpone.” “To postpone” (postpone) means to do something later than you had planned on or than had been originally scheduled. It’s to change the time or even the day of something. Usually we postpone something when there’s some problem, some difficulty in doing what we were planning on doing.

Adrian says, “I’m in the middle of putting out fires, and I’ve had to clear my schedule to deal with the latest crisis.” The expression “to put out” something, as a phrasal verb, means to either turn something off (for example, “I put out the lights”) or to extinguish a fire – to stop the fire from burning. “The firefighters put out the fire in the house.” Here, however, “putting out fires” is used to mean taking care of difficult situations, taking care and providing solutions for difficult problems – often, problems that come up without a lot of warning.

“To clear your schedule” means to free time in your day to cancel other things, usually so that you can spend time on, in this case, “putting out fires” – taking care of some immediate problems that must be solved right away. A “crisis” (crisis) is a very important and urgent or immediate problem – a problem you have to take care of or deal with right away. That’s a “crisis.”

Well, in our dialogue, it seems that Adrian has some sort of crisis. Teresa says, “Can I help?” Adrian says, “I wish you could,” meaning “I wish you could help, but you can’t.” He says, “With the new layoffs, I feel like I’m being pulled in several directions at once.” A “layoff,” as a noun, is when someone is fired from his or her job – when you lose your job. If a company is having difficulty and it’s not making very much money, there may be layoffs – people who are, to use the verb form now, “laid off.” “To lay off” is a phrasal verb and is two words. A “layoff” as a noun is one word.

So, at Adrian’s company, it seems as though there have been layoffs, and this means, we’re guessing, that he has to do more work since there are fewer people working there. That’s why he says, “I feel like I’m being pulled in several directions at once.” “To be pulled (pulled) in several directions at once” means to need to do a lot of different things, especially when the number of things that you have to do is great. There are a lot of things that you have to do all at the same time or with some sense of urgency.



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Adrian says, “As soon as I feel like I’m making headway with one problem, I get another thrown at me.” “To make headway” (headway) is a phrasal verb meaning to make progress, to advance toward some goal. “We’re making headway on the paperwork we have to complete” – we’re making progress, we’re doing better.

Every time that Adrian feels as though he is making headway with one problem, he says, “I get another thrown at me.” “Thrown (thrown) at” is an expression that means “imposed on another person,” especially when it’s some responsibility that you would rather not have. “My boss has thrown several problems at me.” I have to take care of them. He has told me to take care of them. “Thrown” is, obviously, the past participle of the verb “to throw.”

Teresa says, “I know exactly what you mean. I always feel like it’s crunch time around here because we’re so shorthanded.” The phrase “crunch (crunch) time” refers to a period of time when a lot of things have to be completed, and you have to work really hard in order to complete them. Many students, for example, wait until the last week of their class to do their big project – then, it’s crunch time. They have to get a lot of things done in a small amount of time. “To be shorthanded” means to not have enough people to do a job. Teresa complains that the company is shorthanded; it doesn’t have enough employees, enough people to do all the work that needs to be done.

Adrian says, “I’m so tired of everything being urgent all the time and needing attention ASAP.” “To be urgent” (urgent) means to need immediate attention – something that you have to do right away. It can’t wait – that’s urgent. In Adrian’s case, he says he’s “tired of everything being urgent all the time and needing attention ASAP.” “ASAP” is an acronym for “as soon as possible.” As soon as possible – without delay, in other words.

Adrian continues, “I long for the days when projects had timelines and people followed them.” “He longs for the day” means he wants very badly to return to the time when this certain thing happened – in this case, “when projects had timelines and people followed them.” So, “to long for” something means to desire something, to want it a great deal. “Timelines” (timelines) are schedules, plans about when things are going to be completed. Adrian says, “I’ve got to go,” meaning I have to leave now.

Teresa says, “Hey, when are we going to have that meeting?” In other words, when are we going to have the meeting that we were supposed to have in 10 minutes? Adrian says, “As soon as things quiet down.” “To quiet (quiet) down” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to become calmer, to not be rushing so much. “To rush” (rush) means to go fast. So, to be relaxed, to be calm.



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Sometimes we use this phrasal verb to mean to not talk so loud or to be quiet. “To quiet down a group of students” would be to get the students to stop talking so loudly. Teachers have to do that all the time.

Teresa says, “When will that be?” That is, when will things quiet down? Adrian says, “I’ll let you know as soon as the latest disaster has been averted.” A “disaster” (disaster) is a serious, large problem that has very negative consequences. We sometimes talk about “natural disasters”— that would be an earthquake or a flood or a big snowstorm. These things cause damage and therefore have negative consequences. You can also have a disaster in your own life; something bad could happen to you. Maybe you lose your cat. Would that be a disaster? Maybe. Not for me.

The verb “to avert” (avert) means to prevent something from happening or to avoid something. You’ll often hear this verb or see this verb in writing with the word “disaster.” “We’re trying to avert a disaster”— we’re trying to prevent something bad from happening. Adrian is saying here that he won’t have time, until there are no crises, to meet with Teresa.

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

[start of dialogue]

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Teresa: Hey, when are we going to have that meeting?



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Adrian:As soon as things quiet down.

Teresa:When will that be?

Adrian:I'll let you know as soon as the latest disaster has been averted.

[end of dialogue]

Her scripts will help you make headway with your English. I'm speaking, of course, of our wonderful scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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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