



ESL Podcast 220 – Giving Opinions in a Meeting

GLOSSARY

feedback – thoughts and opinions given in reaction to an idea or thing

* The presenter asked them to complete the evaluation forms so that he could use their feedback to improve his future presentations.

to get something across – to make an idea understandable or acceptable

* I think I have found a great solution to the problem, but my boss never listens to me. How can I get my idea across to him?

colleague – co-worker; people who work together

* Are your colleagues complaining about the president's decision to change the company's vacation policy?

to give someone a hard time – to make things difficult for someone

* Please don't give him a hard time about not doing his homework last night. His mother is sick.

in (one's) opinion – according to what one believes

* In my opinion, running is more fun than swimming. What do you think?

perspective – a way of thinking about something; one's view of something based on a belief or opinion

* To understand his perspective on the war, we need to remember that he lived in that country for three years.

to really feel – to strongly believe

* The governor wants to build a new courthouse, but the mayor really feels that the city needs a new hospital first.

to tend to think that... – to usually or normally believe something; to have a natural feeling toward something

* My sister tends to think that eating at home is best, but when she doesn't have time to cook, she eats in restaurants.

the way (one) sees it – in one's opinion; according to one's beliefs

* José thinks that opening a new office is a wonderful idea, but the way I see it, we aren't ready to expand yet.



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to scratch the surface – to deal with only a small part of a topic or problem; to be at the beginning of a long task

* Even though people have walked on the moon, we have only scratched the surface of space exploration.

to get inside (one's) head – to understand what someone else is thinking

* The reporter will need to ask more difficult questions if she wants to get inside the criminal's head.

if you ask me – in my opinion; according to my beliefs

* I know that you believe that we should hire Jack, but if you ask me, I don't think he would be a good employee here.

to sink – to put time, money, or other resources into a project

* Why are you sinking so much time into this project? It isn't that important.

that's precisely (one's) point – exactly; that's what one is trying to say

* When Mom asked Dad to schedule a hearing exam, she had to repeat herself three times! That's precisely her point: he needs to have a get his hearing checked.

to be sure that – to believe that; to be certain; to have no doubt

* She is sure that it will be sunny this weekend, so she is planning a trip to the beach.

one step ahead – being better informed; being better prepared; being more ready

* He pays for a tutor so that he can be one step ahead of the rest of the students.

to side with – to agree with

* Most people are siding with Sela, because her opinion is the most logical one.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Marcelo want the company to do more market research?
 - a) Because customers aren't purchasing the company's product.
 - b) Because the company needs to understand its customers better.
 - c) Because other companies are doing more market research.

2. Ellen believes that:
 - a) The company already has enough information about its customers.
 - b) Other companies have done more research.
 - c) It is too early for the company to make any decisions.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to tend

In this podcast, the verb “to tend” means to usually or normally do something or believe something. For example, “My favorite class in high school was band class, so I tend to think that all high schools should have music programs.” Or, “My sister tends to be much more comfortable with strangers than I am.” More often, however, “to tend” means to take care or look after someone or something: “While she tended her dying grandmother at the hospital, her husband was tending their grocery store.” Or, “He worked in the fields all day, tending the sheep and goats.”

point

The word “point,” in this podcast, refers to the final or most important purpose of something: “That’s precisely my point.” Or, “I don’t see the point in continuing to argue about this.” “Point” can also be used to refer to a small mark, such as a period at the end of a sentence, or the tip of an object, such as the sharp end of a pencil. Points are also used when keeping score during a game or on an exam: “He scored ten points during last night’s basketball game.” Or, “Her parents are very proud of her because she earned 97 points on the exam.” When used as a verb, “to point” means to extend a finger and gesture toward an object far away: “I couldn’t find the stars he was talking about until he pointed to them.”



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CULTURE NOTE

An “employee grievance” is a complaint about something at work. Employee grievances are usually about “compensation” (payments received for work), work schedules, and hiring decisions. Other employee grievances are about “sexual harassment” (unwanted sexual jokes or touching) or “discrimination” (treating people differently because of their skin color, religion, or something else). Sometimes employee grievances are against the company, and sometimes they are against colleagues.

In the United States, most companies have grievance “policies” (written rules) that describe how employees should present their grievances. The policies also describe the procedures that the company should follow when responding to employees’ grievances. Employees are usually given a copy of the grievance policy when they are hired and they are expected to follow the policy while they are working for the company.

If the employees are members of a “union” (an organization for certain types of workers), they normally present their grievances to the union, which guides them through the process and represents the employees against the company. If the employees are not members of a union, they need to present their grievances by themselves.

In most cases, employees should first discuss their concerns with the director of the department where they work. If this doesn’t solve the problem, employees need to put their grievances in writing and present the document to another department, which then responds in writing. If this does not solve the employee’s grievance, it may be presented to a higher management level. In some companies, if the employee remains unhappy with the company’s response, the grievance may be presented to a committee, which then determines the company’s final response.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 220, “Giving Opinions in a Meeting.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 220. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com. There you can find a transcript of the dialogue part of this podcast for free. If you want to get all of the vocabulary words, the definitions, additional cultural notes and explanations, as well as the complete transcript of this podcast, you can become an ESL Podcast member. More information is on our website.

Today's podcast is called “Giving Opinions in a Meeting.” Let's go.

[Start of story]

I was in a department meeting and our manager was asking for our feedback on improving our product. I had a few ideas and I wanted to get them across, but one of my colleagues was giving me a hard time.

Marcelo: In my opinion, I think that we need to look at the question more from the customer's perspective. I really feel we need to do more market research.

Ellen: I tend to think that we have enough information already and it's time to make some decisions.

Marcelo: Well, the way I see it, we've only scratched the surface in getting to know our customers. We need to get inside their heads if we want to offer what they want and aren't getting right now.

Ellen: You may be right, but if you ask me, I just don't think it's worth it to sink more time and money into the type of market research you're proposing. It's far more than what other companies are doing.

Marcelo: That's precisely my point. I'm sure that if we can get information that other companies don't have, we'll be one step ahead.



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That's when the manager stepped in and offered her opinion. And, I'm happy to say, she sided with me.

[End of story]

The dialogue we just heard is about two people giving their ideas - giving their opinions or telling other people what they think in a meeting. It included several common expressions that we often use in giving our opinion.

The story begins with Marcelo saying that he has a meeting today; the manager has asked for their feedback on improving their product. Feedback, "feedback," is your opinion or your reaction. So, he's asking for their opinion; he's asking for their reaction - their feedback on improving what the company makes - their product.

The speaker here, Marcelo, says that he has some ideas and he wants "to get them across." "To get an idea across," means to communicate, to express your ideas, to tell someone what you are thinking. That is a common expression, "I'm trying to get my point across." "I'm trying to get my idea across," means I'm attempting to communicate my ideas.

The problem Marcelo is having is that one of the people that he works with, one of his colleagues, was giving him a hard time. A colleague, "colleague," is a person that you work with, not necessarily someone who is your boss, not someone above you but someone at the same level - the same type of work or the same type of job that you have. These would be your colleagues. So, when I worked at the University, my colleagues were other professors. The adjective is collegial. When we say something is or someone is collegial we mean that they get along, they are nice to the people they work with. The colleagues of Marcelo are not so nice; they've been giving him a hard time. To give someone a hard time means to make things difficult for them.

Then we go into the meeting. Marcelo says, "In my opinion, I think we need to take a look at the question more from the customer's perspective." The expression, "in my opinion," is a way that you can start a sentence when you are going to give your idea. Notice also that Marcelo talks about "the customer's perspective." Perspective, "perspective," means the point of view - the way that someone else sees things - the way they interpret things. That would be the customer's perspective, or the customer's view.



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“I really feel,” Marcelo says, “we need to do more market research.” We sometimes use the verb “to feel” to express our opinion - to say what we think. So, when someone says, “I feel that we need to do something,” they’re saying, “I think that we need to do something.”

Ellen is Marcelo's colleague, and she doesn't agree with Marcelo. She says, “I tend to think that we have enough information already.” I tend, “tend,” to think. “To tend to think” means that this is the way I think, usually, or in a situation like this, “this is my opinion.” “I tend to think” is a somewhat more polite way of communicating your ideas. You are saying to the other person that this is my way of thinking; it may not necessarily be the only way of thinking. So, Ellen is trying to be nice here, and say, “I tend to think that we have enough information,” she's disagreeing with Marcelo. For additional explanations and additional meanings of this verb, to tend, see today's Learning Guide.

Marcelo continues to express his ideas, he says “Well, the way I see it, we’ve only scratched the surface in getting to know our customers.” “The way I see it” is another way of saying this is my opinion. It might be a way of expressing your opinion a little less politely. When you are starting to get into a disagreement with someone and you want to be a little stronger in how you give your opinion, you might use this expression.

“Well, the way I see it” - my perspective - my opinion is that “we've only scratched the surface.” To scratch, “scratch,” the surface, “surface,” means that we have only just begun to do something, that there is a lot more information or a lot more work that we have to do. What we have done so far is just preliminary - it's just the beginning. To scratch means normally to, for example, take your hand, and you have a funny feeling on your skin - it bothers you - so you take your hand - your fingers - your fingernails and you scratch. A cat uses his paws - his feet - to scratch the chair. That is the verb “to scratch.” The surface is just the top of something.

Well, Marcelo goes on to say that, “We need to get inside our customers' heads.” To get inside someone's head, which sounds very painful, actually means to understand someone's thinking - to understand their perspective - the way they look at the world. If you wanted to understand the way I think, you would need to get inside my head. I don't recommend that, however. There's nothing up there - nothing in my head!



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Ellen says to Marcelo, “You may be right, but if you ask me, I don’t think it is worth sinking more time and money into this market research.” “If you ask me” is another way of expressing your opinion. You are saying, “well, maybe you are not asking me - my opinion may not be important to you, but I am going to give it to you anyway, even if you don’t want to hear it.”

So, Ellen says, “if you ask me, I just don’t think it’s worth it to sink more money and time.” Sink, “sink,” as a verb means to spend. So, “I don’t think we should spend more time and money on this type of research.” Usually, we use that verb when you are spending money for the wrong thing - you are wasting money or that you have spent too much money already. Ellen goes on to say that it’s “more than what other companies are doing.”

Marcelo then responds, “That’s precisely my point.” That’s precisely, or exactly my idea; you are agreeing with me. That is the expression we would use when you are having a discussion and someone else says something that you think communicates the same idea, and maybe they don’t realize it so you say, “that’s exactly my point - that’s my idea.” The word “point” has many different meanings in English. We talk about those additional meanings in the Learning Guide for this episode.

Marcelo says, “I’m sure that if we can get information other companies don’t have, we will be one step ahead.” “I’m sure that” is a way of expressing your opinion that you are very confident in - that you know is correct. “I’m sure that if we can get information, we’ll be one step ahead,” meaning we will be more advanced or we will be in front of the other companies. A step, “step,” one meaning of that word is the distance that you take with your feet when you walk. So, if you move for your feet ten times that would be ten steps. Marcelo is saying. “we can be one step ahead.”

“The manager then stepped in,” or stopped the meeting, or stopped the discussion, “and offered her opinion. And,” Marcelo says, “she sided with” him. To side, “side,” with someone, as a verb, means to agree with someone. Usually, when two people are having an argument - a discussion - you are the third person, you can side with one of them - you can agree with one of them against the other one. Sometimes these disagreements or problems can get more serious, and so many American companies have a policy - have rules for what are called “grievances.” And, to find out more about that take a look at today’s Learning Guide.



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Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

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That's when the manager stepped in and offered her opinion. And, I'm happy to say, she sided with me.

[End of story]

The script for today's podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. Remember, you can email us at eslpod@eslpod.com if you have a question or a comment about our podcast.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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