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## ESL Podcast 680 – Recognizing an Unsung Hero

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### GLOSSARY

**to fool (someone)** – to trick or deceive someone; to make someone believe something that isn't true

\* The salesman fooled me! I should have known the price was too good to be true.

**to work behind the scenes** – to do something that is necessary for a project to succeed, but isn't noticed by most people

\* TV reporters get all the recognition, but a lot of people work behind the scenes to create those news stories.

**to bolster** – to make something stronger; to help someone feel stronger and more confident; to improve something

\* We need a good meal to bolster the soldiers' strength before the next battle.

**up to the task** – ready and prepared to do something; with the necessary qualifications and abilities to do something

\* Being a parent is hard work. Do you really think you're up to the task?

**to be sunk** – to be in a position where one will fail or not be successful

\* Now that our two best players are injured, our team is sunk.

**limelight** – receiving a lot of attention from other people and possibly the media; at the center of everyone's interest and attention

\* Wendy loves the limelight. I wouldn't be surprised if she becomes a famous actress.

**linchpin** – the most important person or thing in a group; the person or thing that everyone and everything else depends on for success

\* That policy was the linchpin of her presidency.

**to have egg on (one's) face** – to be embarrassed publicly; to be in a position where one appears to be stupid or foolish, or where one's actions appear to have been stupid or foolish

\* If tomorrow's conference doesn't go well, we'll all have egg on our face.

**to give (someone) too much credit** – to praise someone too much; to give someone too many compliments; to believe that someone has done more work than he or she actually has

\* We know Janik did a good job, but it seems like you're giving him too much credit. A lot of his success was just due to luck.



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**unsung hero** – a person who makes an important contribution to a successful project, but is not recognized for his or her work

\* The police department is planning a ceremony to honor the unsung heroes who are doing good work in the community.

**to keep a low profile** – to do something in a way so that one will not be noticed by other people; to not want to have other people's attention

\* The boss can be really strict, but if you do your work well and keep a low profile, you shouldn't have any trouble.

**nothing of the kind** – not at all an example of what one has just been talking about; a phrase used to strongly deny something

\* A: You're one of the best painters in the world.

B: I'm nothing of the kind. I know a lot of better painters than me.

**modest** – humble; not wanting to talk about one's skills or abilities; not wanting to say that one does something better than another person

\* Seung is so modest. You'd never know he's such a great pianist, because he makes it sound like he can play only the easiest songs.

**to propose** – to suggest; to present an idea for what should be done, how, and when

\* Ali proposes that we increase profits by raising prices, but other people don't think that will work.

**ticker-tape parade** – a parade held in a downtown area to honor a person by throwing confetti (many small pieces of paper) down from building windows as he or she walks by below

\* One of the first ticker-tape parades occurred in 1886 when the Statue of Liberty was dedicated.

**to recognize** – to realize that something is important or noteworthy; to realize that something has certain characteristics

\* The mayor is going to recognize Sheryl as the city's teacher of the year.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the limelight?
  - a) Lighting in a small apartment.
  - b) A lot of attention.
  - c) The time right after sunrise.
  
2. What does Fumi mean when she says, “we’d all have egg on our faces”?
  - a) We’d all be eating breakfast.
  - b) We’d all be embarrassed.
  - c) We’d all be overweight.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **to fool**

The verb “to fool,” in this podcast, means to trick or deceive someone, or to make someone believe something that isn’t true: “How did you fool your little brother into giving you all his candy?” The phrase “to fool (oneself)” is used to talk about making oneself believe something that isn’t true: “If you think you can eat all this junk food and still lose weight, you’re fooling yourself.” The phrase “you could have fooled me” is used when one does not believe what another person has said: “You talk about wanting to be a better person, but you could have fooled me. I’ve seen what you do when you think nobody is looking.” Finally, the phrase “to fool around” can mean to have a sexual relationship with someone who is married or in another serious relationship: “When Annie caught Max fooling around with his secretary, she filed for divorce.”

#### **to be sunk**

In this podcast, the phrase “to be sunk” means to be in a position where one will fail or not be successful: “If I can’t find a job and start making some money soon, our family will be sunk.” The phrase “sink or swim” refers to a situation where one must learn to do something very quickly, without help from other people, or have a lot of problems: “Kevin became president of the company almost overnight, and it was sink or swim, because nobody there could tell him how to do the job.” The phrase “a sinking feeling” refers to one’s realization that something bad will happen: “I have a sinking feeling we’re going to run out of gas before we get to the next gas station.”



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### CULTURE NOTE

Companies often try to improve employee “morale” (the way a group of people feel) and “motivate” (encourage someone to do something) them by having employee recognition programs for employees who are doing their job very well.

Many companies recognize an “employee of the month,” meaning that each month they choose to “honor” (recognize) a different employee for his or her contributions to the company. For example, many fast food restaurants have “plaques” (pieces of wood with small pieces of “engraved” (with text written on metal or glass) names) where people can read the names and possibly see photographs of the people who have won the award in the past.

Sometimes employee recognition programs have special “ceremonies” (official parties) where employees are honored in front of their “peers” (colleagues; co-workers). These employees might receive a “trophy” (a large metal cup or small statue) with an engraving of their name and the name of the award. They might also receive a “monetary” (with money) award or other honors. Sometimes the award winners are allowed to use the president’s parking spot, which is usually closest to the building, for a certain number of weeks. Other award winners might be invited to have lunch with “top management” (the CFO, COO, and other high-level employees).

In general, employee recognition programs seem to improve employee morale, but they can “backfire” (do the opposite of what something is supposed to do). This can happen if the employees believe the selection process is unfair. For example, if a company gives awards to the people who are friends with the owner, but not necessarily who are the best workers, it can be “demoralizing” (making someone not want to do something well) for the other workers.

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



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 680: Recognizing an Unsung Hero.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 680. 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](http://eslpod.com). Download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Recognizing an Unsung Hero." Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Fumi: You may have everyone else fooled, but I know the real reason for the success of this project.

Issac: What?

Fumi: You. You've been working behind the scenes to bolster the people who weren't up to the task. Without you, this project would have been sunk months ago.

Issac: That's nonsense.

Fumi: No, it's not. I know you don't like the limelight, but you were the linchpin of this operation. Without you, we'd all have egg on our faces today.

Issac: You're giving me way too much credit. I don't want to hear another word about it.

Fumi: I'm not surprised at your reaction. Most unsung heroes like to keep a low profile.

Issac: What?! I'm nothing of the kind!

Fumi: Yes, you are. You're far too modest. And soon, I won't be the only one who thinks so!

Issac: What are you proposing to do?



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Fumi: Don't worry. I'm not planning a ticker-tape parade, but it's time your contributions are recognized for what they are around here!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Fumi saying to Issac, "You may have everyone else fooled, but I know the real reason for the success of this project." "To fool (fool) (someone)" means to trick them, to deceive them, to make them believe something that isn't true, that is false. Fumi says to Issac that he has been fooling – he has been lying, in some ways, to everyone, but she knows the real reason why this project has been a success, whatever project they're working on. Issac says, "What?" Fumi says, "You," meaning you're the real reason for the success of this project. She says, "You've been working behind the scenes to bolster the people who weren't up to the task." The expression "to work behind the scenes" (scenes) means to do something that is necessary for a project to succeed but is not noticed by most people. The other people involved don't realize that you are doing this work; you're doing it in secret in some ways. A "scene" here refers, for example, to a play in a theater, where you have what are basically big paintings that give you the impression that you are in a different place. Those are called the "scenery," and so "to work behind the scenes" is to be, if you will, part of the play but no one actually sees you. That was me, by the way, in my high school play; I was in my high school play. In American high schools typically there's at least one play or musical every year. I was in mine, but I was on the lighting crew – so I turned the lights on and off! So I was in the play, but I was working behind the scenes you see. Not many people know that.

Anyway, Fumi says that Issac has been working behind the scenes to bolster the people who weren't up to the task. "To bolster" (bolster) means to make someone feel stronger and more confident, or simply to improve something. The expression "to be up to the task" means to be ready and prepared to do something, to have the abilities or the qualifications to perform a certain job or task. So, Fumi says that Issac was basically helping other people in the project who were not doing their job or who were not capable – able to do their job. She says, "Without you, this project would have been sunk months ago." "To be sunk" (sunk) literally means to be underwater, like a ship. If you sink a ship – "sunk" is the past of "sink" – then the ship, or boat, is underwater. "To be sunk," then, is a general expression that means to fail, not to be successful.

Issac says, "That's nonsense," saying that what Fumi is telling him is wrong. Fumi says, "No, it's not." She says, "I know you don't like the limelight, but you were the linchpin of this operation." The "limelight" (limelight – one word) is used



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to indicate that you are getting a lot of attention, that everyone is looking at you and paying attention to you including, for example, those in media: the television and newspaper people, and Internet bloggers, and whatever. Everyone is paying attention to you; you are in the limelight. But, Issac doesn't like the limelight. Fumi says he was the linchpin of this operation. A "linchpin" (linchpin – one word) is the most important person or thing in a group; it's the person or thing that everyone else depends on for success. Fumi says, "Without you, we'd all have egg on our faces." The expression "to have egg (egg) on your face" means that you would be embarrassed publicly, you would be in a position where you would look stupid or foolish and everyone would know about it. But Issac says, "You're giving me way too much credit." "To give (someone) too much credit" means to say that they did more than they actually have done. That is, you are saying that they are wonderful, you are saying how great they've been, but they don't really deserve that much praise – that much credit. The use of the word "way" here, as in "way too much credit," is just another way of saying too much credit – too, too much credit we might say, but we don't say that in English. It's like it's really too much credit. "Way" has been used this way for a long time, but it has become more popular in conversational English. For example, you might say to your friend, "Do I have too much makeup on my face?" and your friend says, "Way too much," meaning you really have too much, yes. My friends tell me that all the time!

So Issac says, "I don't want to hear another word about it (I don't want you to say anything else to me about what you think I have done)." Fumi says, "I'm not surprised at your reaction (the way that you reacted to what I said)." Most unsung heroes like to keep a low profile." An "unsung hero" is a person who makes an important contribution to a successful project but who is not recognized for what they do. Someone who does something great but nobody hears about it, nobody knows about it, that would be an unsung hero. "To keep a low profile" means to do something in a way that other people will not notice. It's another way of saying that other people are not paying attention to you. The opposite would be "to keep a high profile," which means everyone knows what you're doing; everyone knows where you are, for example. Issac says, "What?! I'm nothing of the kind!" "To be nothing of the kind" means that you are not an example of what the other person was just talking about. It's a phrase that we use to deny, to say no, to disagree with something. Fumi says that Issac is an unsung hero, and he says, "I'm nothing of the kind (no, I'm not)." Fumi says, "Yes, you are. You're far too modest." "To be far too modest" means to be very humble, not wanting to talk about your own accomplishments. Notice that "far" here has the same meaning – the same function as the word "way." We could have said, "you're way too modest," that's a little more informal; "far too modest"



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is a little more formal. Fumi says, “And soon, I won’t be the only one who thinks so (who thinks that you are an unsung hero).”

Issac says, “What are you proposing to do?” “To propose” means to suggest or to present an idea for what you think should be done and how it should be done. Fumi says, “Don’t worry. I’m not planning a ticker-tape parade, but it’s time your contributions are recognized for what they are around here!” A “ticker tape” is a long piece of paper, usually in a roll, that is used in a ticker tape machine, which is like a teletype or telegraph machine. It was a way of conveying messages electronically, over the radio, and it was a special machine that converted the radio signals into something that would then produce either typing or some sort of printing that you would be able to send information over a long distance. They were very popular in the old days, many years ago, for those that were involved in the New York and other stock exchanges. When you’re done with the ticker tape you can cut it up and use it as “confetti,” which are small, little pieces of paper that you cut up and then you throw on someone as a way of congratulating them. And, in New York City, when someone did something wonderful, the tradition was to give that person or those people a “ticker-tape parade,” meaning they would take the tape – the pieces paper – rip them up, and throw them from the tall buildings in New York City so they would come down on the heroes that were being honored, sort of like rain falling down but it is paper. In general, it’s used to indicate that you are going to have a big celebration. Fumi tells Issac that she’s not planning a ticker-tape parade, “but it’s time your contributions are recognized for what they are around here!” “To recognize” means to realize that they are important.

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

[start of dialogue]

Fumi: You may have everyone else fooled, but I know the real reason for the success of this project.

Issac: What?

Fumi: You. You’ve been working behind the scenes to bolster the people who weren’t up to the task. Without you, this project would have been sunk months ago.

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Fumi: I'm not surprised at your reaction. Most unsung heroes like to keep a low profile.

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Issac: What are you proposing to do?

Fumi: Don't worry. I'm not planning a ticker-tape parade, but it's time your contributions are recognized for what they are around here!

[end of dialogue]

One of the unsung heroes here at ESL Podcast, working behind the scenes, is our own Dr. Lucy Tse. Although since I talk about her, she really isn't unsung. I'm singing her praises, which is an expression that means to say good things about another person.

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

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