

Get the Ball Rolling: 4 Productivity Idioms for Work

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

101 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Martin, have you started planning the new podcast project?

I have opened a document.

And?

I have chosen a very professional font.

So the project has not started.

The document exists.

That feels like progress.

Today, we are going to get the ball rolling.

That sounds more active than choosing a font.

It is.

And it is the first of four productivity idioms in today's episode.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Today we are exploring lesson six of our free Idiom Toolbox course: Productivity.

You can find the course at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

Open the Idioms section and choose lesson six, Productivity.

You will find slow listening, clear meanings, multilingual support, examples and interactive retrieval practice.

The direct link to this free lesson is also in the episode description.

Let us begin with get the ball rolling.

To get the ball rolling means to start an activity or process.

You can say: Let's get the ball rolling with a short meeting.

Or: One phone call got the project rolling.



Notice that we often use get the ball rolling when people have been preparing or talking, but now it is time for real action.

So opening my document was preparation.

Choosing the font was decoration.

Fair enough.

I will call the team today and get the ball rolling.

Good.

But this is a new kind of project for you.

Yes.

I am still learning the ropes.

That is our second idiom: learn the ropes.

If you learn the ropes, you learn how a job, system or activity works.

For example: It took me a week to learn the ropes at my new job.

Or: A colleague helped her learn the ropes.

The expression comes from learning which ropes to use on a ship, but today we use it in many work and everyday situations.

Can I say: I am learning the ropes of podcast production?

Yes.

You are becoming familiar with the process, the tools and the unwritten rules.

It sounds more natural than saying I am learning how every small thing works.

Exactly.

Now, when people want to finish quickly, they sometimes cut corners.

To cut corners means to do something more cheaply or quickly by ignoring proper standards.

It is usually negative.

Very negative when quality or safety is involved.

For example: They cut corners, and the roof started leaking.

Or: Never cut corners on safety.

Could using a poor microphone be cutting corners?

If you know it will damage the final result just to save time or money, yes.

So working efficiently is not the same as cutting corners.

Correct.



Efficiency removes waste.

Cutting corners removes something important.

That distinction is useful.

And sometimes, even when you do not cut corners, the first plan fails.

Then it is back to the drawing board.

That is our fourth idiom.

Back to the drawing board means you must start planning again because the first attempt did not work.

For example: The prototype failed, so it's back to the drawing board.

Or: We may have to go back to the drawing board.

You can use the short form, it's back to the drawing board, or the longer form, go back to the drawing board.

Does it mean that every part of the work was useless?

Not necessarily.

It means the current plan needs a serious rethink.

You can keep what you learned from the failed attempt.

Exactly.

Failure gives you information.

Let us compare all four expressions.

Get the ball rolling means start a process.

Learn the ropes means understand how a job or activity works.

Cut corners means ignore proper standards to save time or money.

And back to the drawing board means plan again after an attempt fails.

Time for a quick challenge.

Situation one.

Your team has discussed an idea for weeks.

Today, you finally begin.

You get the ball rolling.

Situation two.

It is your first week in a new role, and a colleague shows you how everything works.

You are learning the ropes.

Situation three.



A builder uses weaker materials to finish faster.

The builder is cutting corners.

Situation four.

Your first design does not solve the problem, so you create a new plan.

It is back to the drawing board.

Now complete one sentence about your life.

I am still learning the ropes of...

Personal examples make new language easier to retrieve.

Continue with lesson six in the free Idiom Toolbox course at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

The interactive exercises help you recall the expressions without looking at the answers.

The direct lesson link is in the episode description.

So, what is your next real step for the project?

I will organise a short meeting and get the ball rolling.

No more fonts?

Only after the meeting.

Good.

You are learning the ropes already.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

