

14 Essential Business English Idioms for the Workplace

I. Read the idioms and make sure you remember what they mean.

hit a nerve	= to say or do something that upsets someone because it's true or sensitive for them
in hot water	= to be in trouble for doing something wrong
rub someone the wrong way	= to annoy someone without meaning to
add fuel to the fire	= to make a bad situation worse by saying or doing something
backed into a corner	= having no good options left
throw someone under the bus	= to blame someone else or let them take the fall to protect yourself
face the music	= to accept the results or punishment for what you did

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up against it	= dealing with a very difficult situation or a lot of pressure
the ball is in your court	= it's your turn to make a decision or take action
in a jam	= in trouble or in a difficult situation
throw in the towel	= to stop trying, to give up after failing or getting tired of trying
under the gun	= feeling a lot of pressure to do something quickly
buy time	= to do or say something to get more time before you must decide or act
move the goalposts	= to change the rules or conditions after something has already started

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II. Choose the correct idiom from the box to complete each sentence. Use the correct form.

move the goalposts the ball is in your court add fuel to the fire

1. I've sent over all the data, so now _____. Just let me know when you're done.

in a jam up against it hit a nerve

2. Your comment about poor communication really _____. They didn't take it well.

hit ... a nerve throw ... under the bus buy ... time

3. He kept talking just to _____ himself a little _____ to find the file.

face the music move the goalposts backed into a corner

4. They keep _____ — first they wanted the report by Friday, now they want a full presentation too.

buy time under the gun add fuel to the fire

5. Bringing up old mistakes right now would only _____ — everyone's already frustrated.

buy ... time throw ... under the bus rub ... the wrong way

6. She totally _____ her teammate _____ in that meeting to save herself — she blamed him for the delay even though it wasn't his fault.

throw in the towel in hot water move the goalposts

7. After two failed launches and constant budget cuts, my team almost _____ but we decided to give it one more shot.

add fuel to the fire throw them under the bus feel backed into a corner

8. He _____ — they kept questioning his numbers, and he couldn't defend them without more data.

move the goalposts face the music hit a nerve

9. I guess we'll have to _____ when the boss gets back — he'll see the mistake. He is not gonna like it.





II.

1. the ball is in your court
2. hit a nerve
3. buy ... time
4. moving the goalposts
5. add fuel to the fire
6. threw ... under the bus
7. threw in the towel
8. felt backed into a corner
9. face the music

For more practice, check out the links below:

[Business English Phrasal Verbs for Work: Show Up, Set Up, Kick Off, Push Back, Look Into, Turn In \(with Quiz\)](#)

[6 Common Business English Collocations for Risks and Challenges](#)

[Working from Home? Learn These Everyday Business English Phrasal Verbs \(B1/B2\)](#)

[Essential Business English Vocabulary for Work: Backlog, Inventory, Bottleneck & More](#)

[Business English Phrasal Verbs for Work \(with Examples + Free PDF Worksheet\)](#)

✓ *Thank you for learning with us!*