



## ESL Podcast 188 – Correcting Misunderstandings at Work

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### GLOSSARY

**counterpart** – a person who does the same job as you do, but in a different organization or different part of the same organization

\* Do you know who your counterpart is in the Washington DC office?

**corporate structure** – company organization

\* Looking at the corporate structure at this company, it's clear that the managers are responsible for each office's salespeople.

**to report directly to** – to have as your immediate boss; to be responsible to with no one in between

\* My manager won't listen to my ideas. I wish I could report directly to the president.

**CEO** – chief executive officer; a manager who is usually has the most power and responsibility in a company and is in charge of the money and planning for the whole company

\* The new CEO is planning to make some big changes to how we do business.

**that's not quite right** – a very polite way to say that someone is wrong or that they have misunderstood

\* When I saw the plan for the new garden, I told them, "That's not quit right. There should be more trees on this side."

**local** – something that belongs to or relates to an area or neighborhood

\* There are a lot of local musicians who would be interested in playing at our event.

**regional** – something that belongs to or relates to a region, usually including more than one smaller area

\* Now that she's won the local contest, she'll compete at the regional level.

**to supervise** – to watch and tell others how to do work

\* Can you supervise the workers at this location and make sure that the job is done right?



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**COO** – chief operating officer; a manager who is in charge of the day-to-day activities in a company

\* The employees are unhappy about how the office is being run and wants to have a meeting with the COO.

**oversight** – management or supervision

\* How will you have oversight of your project if you move to the Berlin office?

**that's not what I meant** – a polite way of saying that someone is wrong or have misunderstood, but more direct than “that's not quite right”

\* - You don't like my present?

- That's not what I meant. When I said that I don't usually wear this color, I meant that I'm glad to try this new color.

**we were actually thinking...** – a polite way to begin to correct someone who has just said what they believe you mean, but are incorrect

\* If you want, we could come back here after dinner, but we were actually thinking of going dancing.

**to free up** – to release from responsibility; to create free time

\* My schedule is really busy this week, but I can free up some time next week if you want to get together for a meeting.

**to attract** – to get someone's interest; to get others to like something/someone

\* Do you think the new TV shows on that channel will attract new viewers?

**that's not it** – a direct way of saying that someone is wrong or have misunderstood

\* You think that I don't want to go with you to visit your parents, but that's not it. I just don't have time right now to take a trip.

**what I'm trying to say is...** – a phrase that tells the listener that you are going to say something (again), but in a different way, because the listener has misunderstood; used also when you have difficulty saying something

\* What I'm trying to say is that no matter what you decide, I'm still going to move to Detroit.



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**to have (one's) wires crossed** – to have a miscommunication; to not understand each other

\* I think we had our wires crossed when we talked on the phone last week.

**that's fine with me** – that's okay; I agree

\* If you'd prefer to eat at a different restaurant than the I picked, that's fine with me.

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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Dean says that the reason for the new plan is that
  - a) the company needs a better chief executive office.
  - b) the company is getting too big for the old corporate structure.
  - c) the local managers are not doing their jobs
  
2. Dean and Rory decide to
  - a) go ahead with the plan.
  - b) ask the CEO and COO for their opinion of the plan.
  - c) talk about it again next week.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **oversight**

The word “oversight,” in this podcast, is a noun that means to supervise or manage something: “The reason we’re over budget is because there wasn’t enough oversight on how the money should be spent.” “Oversight” can also mean to forget to do something because you weren’t paying attention: “It was an oversight that he was the only who wasn’t invited to the event.” Or, “Because of an oversight, the work on this car has to stop while we wait for the parts to be ordered.”



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### to free up

In this podcast, the phrase “to free up” means to no longer have responsibility for something, often related to having more time for something else: “Do you think you can free up a few days to go with me on vacation?” You will also hear another phrase, “to be free of (something)” that means something very different. “To be free of (something)” means to get away from the responsibility or power of something or someone else, usually something bad or unpleasant: “I’m so glad to be free of that job so I don’t have to work long hours for low pay.” Or, “Gina got a divorce from her husband and is free of a bad relationship.”

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### CULTURE NOTE

Many companies in the U.S. today are organized around “cubicles,” or small areas in a larger room intended for one employee to use that usually has “partitions,” or short walls. Unlike individual offices, cubicles don’t give employees a lot of privacy since one side of cubicle is usually open to a walkway.

As in many countries, people who work in offices can be “territorial,” or feel that they have a claim over an area. To make sure you don’t cross into what someone else sees as their “territory,” or area, avoid doing the following:

- Don’t enter someone’s cubicle without asking. Think of the cubicle as having doors and wait for the person inside to give you permission to enter.
- Don’t “peek” or look over the top of the partitions as you walk by or to see if a person is available in their cubicle.
- Don’t stand outside of someone’s cubicle waiting for them to finish a telephone call. Come back later.
- Don’t “sneak up on,” or try to surprise someone by coming up behind them. Try to let them know that you are there right away.
- Don’t yell across several cubicles.

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



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 188, “Correcting Misunderstandings at Work.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 188. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles, in the wonderful state of California.

On this podcast, we're going to be correcting some mistakes that other people make. When you have a conversation and you need to tell someone they made a mistake or they are wrong, you need to do that politely, and today we'll find out how. Let's get started.

[Start of story]

I work in our company's Toledo office and I was meeting with my counterpart in our Raleigh office. I was trying to explain to her our new proposal to make some changes in the corporate structure. But, it wasn't going very well.

Rory: So, with the new plan, the managers would report directly to the CEO?

Dean: That's not quite right. The local managers would report to the regional managers, and the regional managers would be supervised by the COO. That would give the COO more oversight than he has now.

Rory: You're saying, then, that the managers aren't being well supervised now?

Dean: No, that's not what I meant. We were actually thinking that the new plan would free up the CEO to work on attracting new business.

Rory: So, you think that the problem is with the CEO. He's not doing his job.

Dean: No, that's not it at all. What I'm trying to say is that we need this new plan because our office has expanded so much in the past year.

Rory: Well, I don't really agree with you. I think that both the CEO and COO are doing a fine job now.



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Dean: I think we may have our wires crossed. Let's set up a meeting for next week to talk more about it.

Rory: Okay. That's fine with me.

[End of story]

We listened to a dialogue between two people, Rory and Dean, who work for the same company. The story begins by Dean saying that, "I work in our company's Toledo office." Toledo is a city in the state of Ohio, in the center eastern part of the United States. And, the person in this story says that "I was meeting with my counterpart in our Raleigh office." A "counterpart," all one word, is someone who does the same job as you, but in a different part of the company. Usually, when a big company has offices in different cities, there are people who do similar work, similar jobs, and that, those people have their counterpart in different offices. So, it's the person who does the same job as you, but in a different part of the company, or in a different office of the company. Raleigh is a city in North Carolina, which is in the southeast part of the United States. Notice also that when we are identifying the names of these offices we use the city. We don't normally say, "our office in Toledo," although that's possible, we would say simply, "our Toledo office," "our Raleigh office," "our Chicago office."

Well, Dean in the story here is trying to explain to Rory the new proposal, or the new plan, to make some changes in the corporate structure. The "corporate structure," two words, is the same as the corporate or company organization. "Corporate" is another word for company, in this case; and "structure" means the same as organization. So, you have the president and the vice president, and underneath the vice president, meaning working for the vice president, would be other managers and so forth. That's the organization, or corporate structure.

But, Dean is having some problems explaining this to Rory. Rory says, "So, with the new plan," the new proposal, "the managers would report directly to the CEO?" To "report" means, in this case, that these are the people who are your bosses. For example, if I work for my boss, I report to him, my boss reports to his boss, and his boss reports to his boss. So, the person that is your...is one level above you in the corporate organization is the person you report to. It's the person that is in charge of you, who gives you your instructions, who tells you what to do. So, to report directly means that they would talk to that person



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without talking to anyone else in between. The “CEO” is the “chief executive officer.” Often the highest person in the company is called the CEO. Well, Dean explains to Rory that that is not correct, but he wants to say it politely, to tell her that she's wrong, so he says, “That's not quite right.” “That's not quite right,” or quite correct, means that you haven't...you've made a mistake, you haven't gotten all the information correctly.

Dean says that “The local managers would report to the regional managers.” The “local managers” would be the managers of the individual offices. So for example, if a company had an office in Los Angeles, an office in London, an office in Tokyo, an office in Rome, those would be the local offices - the local managers, who would take care of things in those cities, in those offices. A regional manager would be manager who was in charge of, or who was responsible for more than one local office. So, there might be a European region...regional manager. That's the manager of the area, or region, of Europe, and there may be two or three offices that he is in charge of. The local manager, the Rome manager, for example, would report to the European regional manager.

Dean goes on to say that “the regional managers would be supervised by the COO.” “To supervise,” is a verb, which means to be the boss of, to be responsible for. The person who tells you what to do is your supervisor, and “to supervise” is the verb, the person who tells you, or the act of telling you what to do, giving you instructions and so forth.

Dean says that the regional managers are, or will be supervised by the COO. “COO” is the “chief operating officer.” In big companies there are usually...there's usually one person who is in charge of the whole company, that person is usually the chief executive officer. “Officer” here just means the person. So, the CEO is the top person, then there are other chief officers that work for the CEO, or report directly to the CEO. This would include the COO, which is the chief operating officer, and that's the person who takes care of the daily things, or supervises the daily activities of the company. For example, if the company makes cars, the COO is the person responsible for making sure that the cars get made. Other people in the company could also be in charge of different parts of it. The “CIO” is the “chief information officer,” this would be a person in charge of the way the company uses information, communicates with other companies. You could also have, in a big company, a “CTO,” which would be the “chief technology officer.” And there are other possibilities depending on





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the company. Not all companies have all of these positions, but some big companies do.

Well, Dean says that “the regional managers would be supervised by the COO. That would give the COO more oversight than he has now.” “Oversight” here means more control, more ability to be able to know what is going on in the different regions of the company. When someone says they have oversight over something, or oversight of something is probably what we would say, to have oversight of a company, or oversight of a part of a company, means that you are in charge. It's another way of saying that you are the supervisor and that you can see all the things happening in that part of the company.

Well, Rory doesn't quite understand what Dean is saying, She thinks that Dean is criticizing the managers right now. So she says, “You’re saying, then, that the managers aren’t being well supervised now,” and that's why we have to change the plan? And Dean says, “No, that’s not what I meant.” Again, this is a polite way of saying you have misunderstood me, you made a mistake in understanding me. “That's not what I meant,” that's not the meaning of what I am saying.

Dean says that, “We were actually thinking that the new plan would free up the CEO to work on attracting new business.” “We were actually thinking,” is a way of saying you've made a mistake, here's what we...here's the correct answer, here's the correct version of what I was saying. You could also use the word really instead of actually. “What we were really thinking,” means this is the correct way that we were thinking, or the correct idea behind what I was saying. So, Dean says what “We were actually thinking is that the new plan would free up the CEO.” To “free up,” two words, means to allow someone, who was working on something else, to have more time to work on a different project. “I'm trying to free up some time,” means I'm trying to find some time, more time, to do something. In this case, the CEO is going to be freed up, meaning that he will have more time to do these other things. So, to free up means to, usually, to take something away from someone, some responsibility or some part of their job, to give them more time to do something else.

Dean says that the CEO would have time “to work on attracting new business.” “To attract business,” as a verb, means to find new business for the company, to make more money for the company by finding new customers or clients. Rory says, again misunderstanding Dean, she says, “So, you think that the problem is





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with the CEO. He's not doing his job." Again, Rory thinks that Dean is criticizing the CEO, and Dean says, "No, that's not it at all." "That's not it at all" is a polite, but a little more direct way of telling someone that they're wrong. If you say, "that's not it's at all," that means you have it completely wrong. And, you will notice that Dean starts out being very polite by saying, "that's not quite right," and then he says, "that's not what I meant," and now he's saying, "that's not it at all." He's being even more direct with Rory, saying no, you are wrong. "What I am trying to say is that we need a new plan because our office has expanded so much in the past year." "What I am trying to say is" is an expression that means here's what I'm really saying, here's the correct version. Usually, you are going to say it in a different way so the person can understand. And what Dean is telling Rory is that the company is growing, is getting bigger, and that's why they need a new corporate structure.

Rory says, again still not understanding, "Well, I don't really agree with you. I think that both the CEO and COO are doing a fine job now." Once again, she still thinks that Dean is criticizing the bosses of the company. Dean finally says, "I think we may have our wires crossed." "To have your wires" means that we are not communicating correctly, that we each have a different idea and that we are misunderstanding each other, and that of course, is what is happening in this dialogue. "Wire" is something, a piece of metal, usually long and thin that carries information. For example, in a telephone, you have telephone wires. And, to have the wires crossed means that you are miscommunicating; you are not understanding each other.

Dean suggests that they "set up a meeting for next week to talk more about it." And Rory says, "Okay. That's fine with me," which means that's okay for me, that's acceptable for me.

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

[Start of story]

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Dean: I think we have our wires crossed. Let's set up a meeting for next week to talk more about it.

Rory: Okay. That's fine with me.

[End of story]

The script for today's podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. Be sure to go to our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com) to get the Learning Guide that goes with this podcast. It will give you all of the words, definitions, additional ways of using some of the vocabulary, culture notes, and a complete transcript of this 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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