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**ESL Podcast 440 – Being a Self-Made Man/Woman**

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**GLOSSARY**

**crock** – informal expression meaning something that is false; a lie; something that cannot be believed

\* This website says that it can teach anyone how to make \$1 million in just one month. What a crock!

**self-made** – a person who worked very hard and became rich and successful through his or her own work, without help from other people

\* When she came to this country, she didn't have anything, but today, 30 years later, she is a self-made millionaire.

**to pull (oneself) up by (one's) bootstraps** – to get out of a difficult situation and become rich or successful by oneself, without help from anyone else

\* When she lost all her money in the stock market, she pulled herself up by her bootstraps and worked hard to start saving money again.

**to be born with a silver spoon in (one's) mouth** – to be born into a rich family so that one has a lot of money without ever having had to work for it

\* Emil was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and has never had to work a day in his life.

**to be born into money** – to be born into a rich family so that one has a lot of money without ever having had to work for it

\* How many U.S. presidents were born into money, and how many of them have had to work really hard to make their fortune?

**privilege** – a special thing that only one or a few people can have or do; an advantage

\* One of the privileges of being a vice-president in the company is having a good parking space.

**riled up** – angry; upset; annoyed

\* The audience got very riled up when the speaker said some unpopular things, and some people started fighting with each other.

**country club** – a resort; a place where members can participate in sports and social activities, especially for very rich people

\* They spent the weekend at a country club, playing golf and drinking champagne with some of the most powerful people in the area.



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**humble beginnings** – an early childhood in a family and place without much money

\* He had humble beginning, growing up in a small, old house far away from the city.

**a leg up** – an advantage; a head start; something that helps one do something faster or better than one could do it without that thing

\* Her ability to learn languages quickly gave her a leg up while she was studying in Moldova.

**backer** – support; a person who helps one do something, especially by giving money

\* The organization is looking for backers for its new concert series, because it still needs another \$50,000.

**deep pockets** – with a lot of money; wealthy

\* Last year he bought a new house, a new boat, and two new cars. He must have deep pockets!

**people in high places** – people who are very powerful and rich and have a lot of influence

\* Mercedes was never a very good student, but she got into the best university in the country because she knows a lot of people in high places.

**to hobnob** – to network; to spend time speaking with people who have a lot of money, power, and influence

\* The holiday party at the office will be a great opportunity to hobnob with people who might be able to offer you a better job.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these phrases might describe someone who had humble beginnings?
  - a) He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.
  - b) He has deep pockets.
  - c) He pulled himself up by his bootstraps.
2. If you needed a backer, what kind of person would you look for?
  - a) Someone who is riled up.
  - b) Someone who has a leg up.
  - c) Someone who has deep pockets.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **privilege**

The word “privilege,” in this podcast, means an advantage, or a special thing that only one or a few people can have or do: “If she gets good grades, her parents give her the privilege of watching an extra half-hour of TV.” The word “privilege” also means an honor, or something that one is very happy and pleased to do: “It is my privilege to introduce our special speaker for today.” The phrase “privileged information” is confidential, private, or secret information that should not be shared with other people: “Anything you tell your lawyer is privileged information, so she shouldn’t share it with others.” Or, “People who work in the finance department have privileged information about the company’s plans to expand next year.”

#### **a leg up**

In this podcast, the phrase “a leg up” means an advantage, a head start, or something that helps one do something faster or better than one could do it without that thing: “This swimmer has very long arms that gave him a leg up in the swimming competition.” The phrase “to not have a leg to stand on” means to be unable to prove something or to be unable to argue something successfully: “Unless we can find that voice recording, your statement about what he said doesn’t have a leg to stand on.” Finally, the phrase “to pull (someone’s) leg” means to trick someone or to make someone else believe something that isn’t true: “He was just pulling your leg. He doesn’t really have thirteen brothers and twelve sisters.”



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**CULTURE NOTE**

Many “wealthy” (rich) people were born into rich families, but a few of them are self-made, having “built up” (created) their “fortunes” (wealth; the money that one has) on their own, without help from other people. Many people are familiar with stories of self-made men, but there are also many lesser-known self-made women.

Meg Whitman joined ebay.com, a popular online “auction site” (a website where people buy and sell things) when it was a very small company with only 30 employees. She became its “CEO” (chief executive officer; the leader of a company) in 1998 and as the company grew she “amassed” (accumulated; collected) a fortune of \$2.5 billion.

Oprah Winfrey is another famous self-made female American with an “estimated” (likely; probable) fortune of \$2.5 billion. She became famous for her popular daytime “talk show” (a TV show where people discuss different topics each day) called Oprah. Since then, she has created many other shows, networks (television channels), magazines, and more. She uses much of her money for “philanthropy” (giving money to help other people).

Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen are “twins” (brothers or sister born at the same time) who had a fortune of about \$34 million when they were just 21 years old. They made their money in “Hollywood” (the entertainment industry; where many movies and TV shows are made), “starring” (having an important acting role) in TV programs and movies. Then they created “product lines” (things that are sold under one brand or name) for young girls, and these products have been very “profitable” (making a lot of money).

Many girls and young women find “inspiration” (hope and motivation) when they hear stories about self-made women.

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



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 440: Being a Self-Made Man or Woman.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 440. 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). You can download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions, comprehension checks, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of everything you hear on this episode.

This episode is called "Being a Self-Made Man," or "Being a Self-Made Woman." It's a dialogue between Ann and Edgar over what it means to become successful. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Edgar: What a crock!

Ann: What is it?

Edgar: I'm reading an article about successful business people who were self-made men and women. I don't believe a word of it.

Ann: What don't you believe?

Edgar: These people didn't pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They were all born with silver spoons in their mouths.

Ann: Not all successful people were born into money and privilege.

Edgar: That's true, but it gets me riled up when people who grew up at the country club claim to have had humble beginnings.

Ann: Just because some people were born with a leg up doesn't mean they didn't work hard to get where they are.



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Edgar: Where would that hard work have gotten them if they didn't have backers with deep pockets, or if they didn't know people in high places? I know plenty of hard-working people who aren't hobnobbing with the rich and famous.

Ann: That's true enough. Who needs the rich and famous? I'll take my hard-working man over any of them any day.

Edgar: That's why I married you – a woman with beauty and brains!

[end of dialogue]

In the United States there has always been a belief that anyone can be successful, even though that is not always true. This dialogue uses some expressions that we often will say to talk about being successful and the reasons people are successful in life.

The dialogue begins by Edgar saying, "What a crock!" "Crock" (crock) is a very informal expression meaning that something is false, something is a lie; you should not believe this thing. Ann says, "What is it?" Edgar says, "I'm reading an article about successful business people who were self-made men and women. I don't believe a word of it" – I don't believe any of it is true. "Self-made" means that you became successful or rich because you worked hard, not because you received help from other people.

Ann asks, "What don't you believe?" Edgar says, "These people didn't pull themselves up by their bootstraps." The expression "to pull yourself up by your bootstraps" means to become successful because of your own efforts – because of your own work, especially if you started as a very poor person or unsuccessful person. To pull yourself up by your bootstraps means to get out of this difficult life situation and become rich or successful, without the help of anyone else.

Edgar says, "They were all born with silver spoons in their mouths." He's talking about the people in the article that he's reading who say they are self-made. But Edgar says no, "They were born with silver spoons in their mouths." This is an expression, "to be born with a silver spoon in your mouth," that means that you were born into a rich family, because only a rich family could afford a spoon made of silver. I'm not quite sure why it has to be born with the spoon in your mouth, other than perhaps we feed little babies with small spoons, and put the spoon in their mouth – that makes sense. So, to be born with a silver spoon in your mouth means that you were born a very rich person. You come from a rich



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family, and therefore you weren't pulling yourself up by your bootstraps if you became successful.

Ann says, "Not all successful people were born into money and privilege." "To be born into money" means that you were born into a rich family. "Privilege" (privilege) is something that is special for only a small number of people – for very few people. Very few people can have this. It's often used to mean, simply, "advantage." "He has a lot of privileges" – he has a lot of advantages, coming from a rich family. So, Ann is saying that not all successful people were born into money and born into privilege, having these economic, financial advantages. "Privilege" has a couple of different meanings in English; go to our Learning Guide for this episode for some additional explanations.

Edgar says, "That's true, but it gets me riled up when people who grew up at the country club claim to have had humble beginnings." "To be riled (riled) up" means to be angry, to be upset, to be annoyed. Edgar says he gets riled up when people who grew up at the country club say that they come from humble beginnings. The "country club," here, refers to a place where members can participate in sports and social activities. Usually this is a very exclusive club that costs a lot of money to become a member of. Country clubs often have golf courses, and require a lot of money if you want to become a member and use the country club. In general, when someone says or refers to "the country club," they're referring to people who are very rich, people who are living in a very rich manner, or rich way. "Humble beginnings" means that you grew up in a family that did not have a lot of money. "Humble," here, means poor; "beginnings" means when you were a child, so, to have "humble beginnings" means that you had a childhood where you lived with a family that was poor, or grew up with a family that did not have a lot of money.

So, what riles Edgar – what gets him riled up – is that people who are rich say they came from poor families. Ann says, "Just because some people were born with a leg up doesn't mean they didn't work hard to get where they are." A "leg up," here, means an advantage, a head start, something that helps you do something faster or better. If you are, for example, trying to learn French and you already know Spanish and Italian, you have a leg up on other people who do not know those two romance languages, because Italian, French, and Spanish have many similarities. They are similar languages, so to know one means that you have a leg up on learning the other languages. "Leg" has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.



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Edgar says, “Where would that hard work have gotten them if they didn’t have backers with deep pockets.” So, Ann is saying, well, just because someone is rich doesn’t mean they don’t work hard, or didn’t work hard to get where they are today. Edgar is saying, well, they may work hard but that would not have gotten them their position today if they didn’t have backers. A “backer” is a supporter, usually someone who gives you money. If I’m going to start a new company, I want to start a record company so I can become a famous singing star, I would ask for some backers. I would get people who would invest, or give me money to help me start my new company.

Edgar is saying that these people who are successful have backers – people who give them money, like their parents – with deep pockets. The expression “to have deep pockets” means to be very rich, to have a lot of money. A “pocket” is what we call that part of your pants that you can put money into, or keys, and so forth. Usually you have two pockets in front and two pockets in back. Edgar says these people would not have been successful if they didn’t know people in high places.” “In high places” means people who are powerful or rich or successful, and have a lot of influence. If someone says to you, “I know people in high places,” they mean I know people who are very important, who have a lot of influence and therefore could help me.

Edgar says, “I know plenty (I know many) hard-working people who aren’t hobnobbing with the rich and famous. “To hobnob” (hobnob) means to spend time talking with people who have a lot of money, power, or influence. We might also say, nowadays, “to network.” “Network” sounds better than “hobnobbing.” “Hobnobbing” has the idea you are trying to become successful by talking to other people and getting them to help you. “To network” sounds like you are looking for opportunities to become successful. So, “hobnobbing” is probably considered a little more negatively. “Networking” is a term we use now in the business world to refer to making contacts, getting to know people who may help us in the future.

Ann says, “That’s true enough.” She’s agreeing with Edgar. “Who needs the rich and famous? I’ll take my hard-working man over any of them any day.” Edgar says, “That’s why I married you – a woman with beauty and brains!” Edgar, of course, is complimenting himself, saying his wife is very intelligent because she married him even though he doesn’t have a lot of money.

Let’s listen now to the dialogue at a normal speed.





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Edgar: Where would that hard work have gotten them if they didn't have backers with deep pockets, or if they didn't know people in high places? I know plenty of hard-working people who aren't hobnobbing with the rich and famous.

Ann: That's true enough. Who needs the rich and famous? I'll take my hard-working man over any of them any day.

Edgar: That's why I married you – a woman with beauty and brains!

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by a woman who was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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



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