



# Idioms About Negotiations



bargain cards chip court cut driving-seat game ground  
line poker shots sleep stake stick sweetener table trump

Insert the words from above into the most appropriate sentences below.

- 1) He is an important client but we need him to know that it is us who are calling the \_\_\_\_\_ during these negotiations. (The people controlling the situation)
- 2) Clearly our department has got the short end of the \_\_\_\_\_ in the budget. (The worst deal)
- 3) Everybody needs to be prepared for next Wednesday's negotiations with the new customers. There is a lot at \_\_\_\_\_. (Potentially at risk)
- 4) The competition was able to offer a good price for the tender but we still managed to \_\_\_\_\_ them thanks to us having our own transport fleet. (Improve the offer even more)
- 5) The customer has offered us a price for our services. It is now up to us to say "yes" or "no." The ball is in our \_\_\_\_\_. (Time for us to decide)
- 6) While the country is not very important in terms of international diplomacy, its gas reserves are an important bargaining \_\_\_\_\_ during the negotiations. (An advantage, something that can be conceded or induced.)
- 7) The union feels it has a strong case, as does the company. It will be very difficult to find common \_\_\_\_\_ during the forthcoming negotiations. (Ways to compromise)
- 8) The human resources department has offered 3 extra days' holidays as a \_\_\_\_\_ to anybody willing to do overtime on the run-up to the Christmas period. (Incentive)
- 9) We made them an offer and the chief negotiator said they would like to \_\_\_\_\_ on it. (Spend 24 hours thinking about it)
- 10) Our main competitor has complained about us changing our initial offer so as to undercut theirs. They don't like it when we play them at their own \_\_\_\_\_. (Do the same as they once did.)
- 11) The union has drawn the \_\_\_\_\_ at obligatory work for some on Sundays but is ready to make concessions regarding work on Saturdays. (Set a limit)
- 12) She is a very good negotiator and has the perfect \_\_\_\_\_ face. (Difficult to know her intentions)
- 13) It is going to be difficult to negotiate a good deal with them given that they are holding all the \_\_\_\_\_. (They have all the advantages.)
- 14) After a few hours of negotiating, the union and the company were able to \_\_\_\_\_ a deal that made both sides happy. (Reached an agreement.)
- 15) He is a hard negotiator but he always lays his cards on the \_\_\_\_\_ right away. (Open and honest.)
- 16) She drives a hard \_\_\_\_\_ but she is a good customer. (Good at negotiating.)
- 17) The current energy crisis has put oil-producing countries into the \_\_\_\_\_. (In control)

## Follow up!

Now write five sentences using the expressions from above:  
e.g. *I told them that they could take it or leave it. etc.*



# Idioms about Negotiations: - Origins



Which stories below do you think are the true origins of the expressions?

## 1) What is the origin of the expression "calling the shots?"

- This comes from the American military and relates to snipers. Whether in battle or training, the person observing where the sniper's shots hit, controls the count. The observer calls out whether or not the shots hit the target.
- This expression comes from drinking and bar work. Doing shots, or lining up shots (small glasses of strong alcoholic drinks), is controlled by the bartender. The bartender is the one calling the shots and is in control of the drinking and festivities. The bartender is the boss.
- This refers to the athletics event of "shot put." When a shot putter throws a metal ball, the person who marks the distance and calls out the distance "calls the shot." In other words, this person controls the game.

## 2) What is the origin of the expression "short end of the stick?"

- This refers to robbery with violence in London in the 1800s. Robbers would creep up on people with a short, but very thick stick. They would hit these people over the head which would render them senseless for a few seconds. The robber would then go through their pockets and then make their get-away once they had what they wanted. If you had been robbed this way, you had received *the short end of the stick*.
- This refers to the walking sticks that used to be known as "staves" until the 16 century. Staves were used to help people walk over great distances but they were also used for fighting. If your staff was short, your opponent had a better chance of winning a physical combat. If that was the case, you had the short end of the staff. The expressions changed to "stick" around the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- This refers to a game that was (and still is) played for money. Small sticks were placed in somebody's hand and the players would put money in a hat for the bet. The sticks would be held in the host's hand in a way that made them all seem to be the same length. If you drew the long stick, you won the money. Everybody else drew the short end of the stick, and lost.

## 3) What is the origin of the expression "at stake?"

- This expression refers to horror stories and vampires. The popular penny dreadful known as Varney the Vampire was very well-known in the mid-1800s and read by many people. The main character, Sir Francis Varney, is pursued by the Bannerworth family, and often fears being "put to the stake" by them. In other words, killed by having a wooden stake thrust through his heart. Several times, he is "at stake" but ends up being rescued by his vampire lover. The expression became popular because of the books.
- This is a corruption of "steak" and referred to having meat for dinner. *Stake* used to be used as an alternative spelling to "steak" by illiterate people in some parts of the UK. If something was at steak/stake, it was in danger of being eaten by a rival. This term exists because it was quite common in medieval times to take people's food from them.
- This is from mediaeval times and refers to the barbaric practice of bear-baiting. A bear would be chained to a stake and vicious dogs would be released into a pit to fight with the animal. Eventually, the bear would be killed and people would bet on how many dogs it would take to kill the unfortunate animal. The money would be left close to the stake so that nobody would try and run away with it during the excitement.

## 4) What is the origin of the expression "to trump somebody?"

- This expression comes from an old card game that came to the UK from Italy in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was called "triumph" but was shortened to trump as it was easier to pronounce. If you had a "trump card" it would beat other cards and you would win the game.
- This expression is recent and relates to the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Donald Trump. Mr Trump is known for always saying that he is the best at everything. If a politician says that they have achieved something, Donald Trump would say that he did it much better. He would *Trump* that person.
- This expression refers to trumpets and alludes to how kings of old would blow trumpets to announce something during medieval times. If you trumped somebody or something, this was because it came with the blessing of the king and it would be announced with trumpets which gave it a higher status.

## 5) What is the origin of the expression "the ball is in one's court?"

- An expression used by English football players from medieval times in English cities. In those days, houses and apartments were arranged into courts and football was played all over the town. If you were playing a game of football and the ball landed in your court, you controlled the game with more players.
- This expression comes from the British Judiciary. Decisions by juries were decided with white and black balls. White for "not guilty" or black for "guilty." When you were given the two balls to decide the fate of somebody, the "ball was in your court."
- This expression refers to tennis. When the tennis ball is in your half of the court, it is your turn to try and control the game. "The ball is in your court."

Follow up!

Now write five false origins for the expressions from the other page.

