

Chatterbox #72 – Here's Michael Gilday!

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone. It's Maura. And I'm with Michael.

Michael: Hello guys.

Maura: And this is your Culips English Learning Podcast. Don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And there you can find all of our past episodes. You can also become a member, and when you're a member you have access to all the transcripts, more detailed explanations, and some quizzes. Today's episode is a Chatterbox episode. And that's where we chat about all kinds of different topics, including interviewing people and that is what we're going to do today. Today I'm gonna be interviewing Michael Gilday, and he is a member of the Canadian National Short Track Speed Skating Team. And he is currently training to be on the Olympic team to go to the Olympics in 2014 in Sochi, Russia. So, first I'm going to tell you about how we met, because it was just a few weeks ago that Michael and I were taking the train from Montreal to Toronto. I was on my way to take a vacation with my sisters and you were going to visit some family.

Michael: Yeah. I was on the way to visit my cousins and my grandparents who live in Toronto.

Maura: And as many of you know, I'm sure, who take the train or the plane or the bus somewhere, sometimes when you're travelling you end up **striking up a conversation** with the people beside you and sometimes you chat for a while and really get to know the other person.

Michael: Yeah, I know. I felt like this was one of the more interesting train rides I've had in my life, I guess, and it was really nice to get to know Maura and learn about her and Culips. And she invited me to come on the show, so I'm happy to be here.

Maura: Good. So, first we'll talk about how you ended up in Montreal. You told me that you've been here for about a year, so what brought you to Montreal?

Michael: Well, I am a short track speed skater. And for those of you who might not know what short track speed skating is, it is a winter sport where athletes—sometimes four, or up to eight athletes—compete **head to head** around a 111 metre track, which is on a hockey rink or an ice hockey rink. And, yeah, so I'm a member of the Canadian National Short Track Speed Skating Team, and we are based out of Montreal so I live and train here and I'm working my way towards competing at the 2014 Winter Olympic games in Sochi, Russia.

- Maura: That sounds pretty exciting. Is it? Is it exciting training to be in the Olympics one day?
- Michael: I think it is, otherwise I wouldn't have chosen to do it, but it's a challenge. It's something I enjoy doing. I get to live a healthy lifestyle where, you know, exercise is the main activity in my day. So I think it's fun and it's exciting.
- Maura: So what does your schedule look like? How many hours of training do you usually do? How much time do you spend in the gym? All that kind of stuff.
- Michael: Well, a normal week, we have anywhere between seven to ten ice sessions where we're on the ice doing various types of laps. Sometimes we're just going slow and working on our technique and our endurance, other times we're working on specific race strategies or speed. Being on the ice is the main part of our training, but we also go in the gym and lift weights to complement our training, as well as some other off ice training, especially in the summer—biking, running, **etc.** And then also from time to time we have the fun activity of physiotherapy, which I'm currently going through, since I ended my season this year with a fractured shoulder. So it's a full schedule. We train just over 11 months out of 12 in the year. And, yeah, so it's a full-time thing. Six days a week we train, Sundays we get off.
- Maura: So I'm also wondering how you got into speed skating.
- Michael: Well, I started speed skating when I was four years old and my best friend at the time, well he's still actually one of my best friends, and he was in it, and I thought I would like to go with him one day, so I went and I liked it. And I guess I've **never really turned back**. And he quit a long time ago, but I really enjoy what I do.
- Maura: So four years old, that seems quite young to decide to get into speed skating.
- Michael: I think at that time, it was more of a, sort of, I wanted to learn how to skate. And then as you get going, I think pretty quickly though you get into the full deal. But, yeah, that was when I joined the club or so I'm told by my parents...anyway.
- Maura: Are your parents athletes?
- Michael: In that they are recreational, they are active people. My dad was actually my coach for a long time but he didn't have any background in skating. He was just an interested parent and he volunteers and he liked to help out, so he was my coach for a long time until I moved away from my hometown to attend university and to skate at a higher level.

- Maura: OK, cool. Now, I know that through all of your competitions you've been all around the world. So what are some of the most memorable places you've been to?
- Michael: Yeah, well I'm really lucky because when we travel to World Cup competitions, they are all over the world. So I've been to many different countries. This year actually we were... One of my favourite trips of all time was actually to Nagoya, which is in Japan. We got to do a little bit of adventuring there, especially with the food and that let us sort of get immersed a bit more in Japanese culture. And even though we were often playing sign language, because I really **don't speak a lick of** Japanese, it was fun and it was a new adventure and it was something that I really enjoyed.
- Maura: Sounds pretty exciting, to be able to visit so many different places.
- Michael: Yeah, no. I think that's definitely one of the major **perks** of the job but unfortunately, with that, too, when we go to other countries we aren't there to travel, to see the sites, we're there to compete. So I do end up getting a pretty good tour of what an arena looks like in other parts of the world and I can tell you from experience that an arena is the same whether you're in Canada, whether you're in Japan, Russia, or China, or anywhere else in Europe. They might have small differences, but it's pretty much the same thing.
- Maura: That's funny. But that's interesting too, that no matter where you go they're very similar.
- Michael: Yeah, no. It's kind of nice for us as athletes because when you know what to expect, it makes everything else a little easier in terms of performance. So I guess that's one variable that's taken care of.
- Maura: Cool. Now, you've been to all of these different places, but there's also something very interesting about where you're from. And I said this to you when we met and I'm sure many people are curious about your hometown.
- Michael: Yeah, no. I'm from **Yellowknife**, which is the capital city of the Northwest Territories. And the Northwest Territories is one of three territories in Canada and it's in the very northern half. When I tell people I'm from **Yellowknife**, a lot of the reaction I get is "Wow, that's far away." And "Do you **a) live in an igloo** or **b) drive a dogsled** to school or to work every day?" And the answer to both of those questions is no. We do live in a city and it's a modern city. But yeah, I'm very proud to be from the Northwest Territories and I think it's a great place to live and work and play. So if you're ever in Canada, I encourage you to visit.

- Maura: It's funny, because a lot of the **stereotypes** that you get asked by Canadians about, like, igloos and using a dogsled are the exact **stereotypes** that Canada has as a country internationally.
- Michael: Right. Well, here we are in Montreal, where it was 26 degrees on, whatever, March 20th or so. Maybe the **stereotypes** are not all that they were **cracked up to be**. And I think that the same goes for people who think that anyone from northern Canada is an igloo-living, dogsled-driving person.
- Maura: Yup, it's true. But there are some really interesting things about living in the North that are true. For example, you have **the aurora borealis**.
- Michael: **Yeah, the aurora borealis, or the** northern lights as they're also known, are...I guess they're a phenomenon that is only really seen in either the northern polar region or the southern polar regions. And, yeah, if you get a chance, I would highly recommend going on to Google and throwing **aurora borealis** or **northern lights** into the search bar and taking a look at some images. They're fantastic, sort of psychedelic futuristic green, red, pink lights that swirl around in the sky and they're just absolutely gorgeous. It's tough to explain to someone who hasn't seen them live what it is like but to just be able to go out and lie on a frozen lake and look at up at the stars and **the northern lights** and see them swirling around, it's really a very unique experience and it's something that I feel lucky to have had for most of my life so available to me.
- Maura: Yeah. When this episode is uploaded, we'll put some links to some of those videos because I think you're right, that you really do have to see what it looks like to understand.
- Michael: Absolutely. And if you ever get the chance to travel north, I know, you know, any country that's sort of up high in the Northern Hemisphere you have an opportunity to see them. If you ever get a chance, take it, 'cause I don't think you'll regret it.
- Maura: Yeah, you know, I've pretty much never seen **the northern lights** at all. Once, when I was in Alberta, near Banff, Lake Louise, in that area, I saw a small little spark in the sky that looked like it could have been something like **the aurora**. But it was really is nothing like what I'm sure you've seen.
- Michael: No, yeah. When you see the majority of the night sky lit up with these giant swirling bands of colour, it really is something else. I'm gonna be back in **Yellowknife** in April and I'm really looking forward to getting out and hopefully there'll be some clear nights without clouds and I can check them out.
- Maura: Nice. The other thing that I find really interesting about living up north is the extended hours of sunlight and darkness.

Michael: And not sunlight.

Maura: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah. People out there in the Internet world may or may not have heard of 24-hour sunlight or 24-hour darkness. **Yellowknife**, where I'm from, doesn't quite get full all light or full all dark, but we get fairly close. In the middle of the summer you can pretty much stay up all night and not have to turn on too many lights. You can definitely be outside enjoying a bonfire or concert or anything like that and not have to worry about the darkness. The only thing you might have to worry about are the mosquitoes. But it's a different experience to be, you know, sort of, maybe you're heading home, one night and it's 11:00 or 11:30 and you're thinking, "I'm not tired at all. Why am I going home now? I'm ready to go out and have more fun." On the totally opposite spectrum of that, in the winter, you could easily wake up, look at your clock and see it's 9:30 in the morning and be surrounded by complete darkness and go back to sleep for a few hours. So it's definitely sort of polar opposites. But, you know, when it's light all day in the summer it makes those dark days in the winter worthwhile, I think.

Maura: Yeah. That's the one part I find so amazing; just how much energy you have from the sunlight, because, like you said, when it's light for almost the whole day, you feel awake even when it's 11:30 or midnight.

Michael: Yeah. It sort of **screws up** your circadian rhythms. You don't feel tired when you're supposed to feel tired, or at the other side you feel tired when you know you should feel awake. And I guess that's tough, but you get used to it living there. And you learn how to take advantage and how to enjoy it and how to live with it.

Maura: Yeah, for sure. I guess that's it. Wherever you are born and grow up, you just get used to the way life is there.

Michael: Yeah.

Maura: So, I imagine way up north in **Yellowknife** there aren't very many people who speak French. But I know you told me that when you were in school, you learned French. In fact, you went to French immersion.

- Michael: I did. And you're right, there's not a very large francophone population. But the francophone population in **Yellowknife** is very active and they are very involved with the community, and I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to learn French when I went to school. I started taking it when I was in grade 4 and I was in French immersion until I graduated after grade 12 and it was something that at the time there were definitely struggles, I would say. I definitely had days where I thought, "Why am I doing this? Why am I adding this additional stress or, you know, the additional difficulty to my learning experience?" Because, you know, school can be tough on its own. And now that I'm living in Montreal and I am on the Canadian National Team that is actually primarily French, I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to learn French and to be exposed to that, because now I can communicate with twice as many people as I could before and it just makes my day-to-day life so much easier. You know, so I know that many of the people listening to this podcast are listening to it because they're interested in learning English, which is another language for them and I congratulate you and I think what you guys are doing is awesome because it's really cool to just **broaden your horizons** and to be able to meet people all over the place. It's fantastic.
- Maura: Now, you've been in Montreal, you were saying, for about a year. What do you think of this city? What do you like about it?
- Michael: Montreal is an interesting city. I find it to be a very vibrant city. Formerly I lived in Calgary, which is in Alberta. And if you went downtown on a Friday or Saturday night in Calgary, Alberta, you would find not too many people. It would be pretty deserted. But if you go downtown in Montreal on a Friday or Saturday night, in any time of the year, you're gonna find streets that are packed with people. You know, people just outside enjoying a cold beer on a patio or just having a good time with their friends. And they'll be out all night, as well. So I find it to be a very vibrant city. There's a lot going on but at the same time, coming from a small town, I like to be able to get out into the wilderness and into, you know, nature or whatever, and sort of experience the outside. And I find that a little bit hard to access because it is such a big city. But I think Montreal has a lot going for it and I know that many, many people wouldn't want to live anywhere else.
- Maura: Now, what are your plans for the future? You moved to Montreal, you're doing some training here, what're your long term plans to get to the Olympics?
- Michael: Well yeah, the Olympics are two seasons away now. So, I plan on being here in Montreal, living, getting to know the city and residents a bit more, but at the same time I'm here to work and to do the training that I need to to get into the Olympics in Sochi. So, you know, I'm here, I'm working hard, and I'm gonna try to have a good time while I'm doing it as well.

- Maura: So tell us what it takes to make the Olympic team. Because everyone knows what the Olympics are, but most people don't know how to get there.
- Michael: Yeah, well getting on to the Canadian Olympic team, in short track speed skating, anyways, is quite difficult. We have a very deep program here in Canada. So each Olympic cycle, and a cycle is four years, we have a trials and that trials is a competition which serves to select the top five men and women who will represent Canada at the Olympics. So, that competition will be in 2013, probably in August 2013. That will be for the 2014 Olympics. The last one of that was in August of 2009, which was selecting for the 2010 games. And at that trials, I took part and I missed the team by a single spot. So they take five, and I was number six. So as much as that was devastating or, you know, disappointing for me, I knew that the next Olympic cycle starts right away, so it starts the next day. So from that day I had four years less a week to prepare myself to find whatever that extra little bit was that I need to go from six to five, or from six to two or three or whatever. To become a member of an Olympic team is not **an overnight thing**; it's a yearlong or a month-long, week-long, yearlong process that stretches over what can seem like a lifetime. But hopefully it's all worthwhile in the end and I think, too, that one thing that people sort of don't realize is that sometimes it's not necessarily about the result of making the Olympic team, but it's all the events that happen up to that point that make the experience worthwhile.
- Maura: Yeah. I've heard that before about life. It's not about the destination, it's the journey.
- Michael: Exactly. And you hear that half the time... You probably heard me just say that type of thing and you're like, "That is so corny. It's totally lame." But, and I said the same thing, but I can relate now and it just makes that experience so much more rich when you can look back and realize, you know, wow, I met **so-and-so** people and they were very interesting and I never would have met these people if I wasn't involved with sport, or I got to travel to this country or that country or, you know, just have experiences in different cultures and stuff. And when you look back and realize that, I think not only does it make doing what you do easier, because you know that you've gained from that, but it makes it that much more rewarding as well.
- Maura: So is that how you're able to stay focused with a goal that's so many years in front of you?

- Michael: Absolutely. I think you can't get so caught up on one thing, otherwise you'll go totally insane and it actually is a hindrance to performance. So to be able to say, you know, I have this coming up in only two weeks or, you know, I can look forward to these little goals. Or this week, my goal is going to be to have a slightly better lap time or whatever. Just, you know, if you're learning a language, you might say, you know, this week I'm gonna learn five new words so that in two years from now, I've become, you know, proficient in a language. I think it's the same sort of idea and it's easier to take small steps or small bites, 'cause otherwise it can get overwhelming if you have a massive goal you're working towards.
- Maura: And what about the people that you train with then? Because they're your friends and your teammates, but at the same time you're competing against them eventually to make the team. That must be a strange relationship.
- Michael: Yeah, you're absolutely right. When we have the Olympic selection competition in 2013, I will be competing against the same people that I've trained with, sweat with, bled with, cried with, that sort of thing, for the last five or six years. And I have to look at them, most of whom are my closest friends and people that I've known for the longest and I have to say, "You're going down. And I will **not take any prisoners** in jumping over you, going around, doing whatever I have to do to make that team." And I think that's a unique situation. When you think of team sports, in soccer you might have Team Canada versus Team Germany. Well, they might have never seen each other, so there's no emotional connection there, but I go to training every day and I see the same guys and I'm hanging out with them on the weekends. And, you know, I'm getting to know them on a very personal basis. But in the end, we'll still be friends, but we're enemies for that one minute that we're on the ice.
- Maura: That's what I was going to ask. After, for example, you have a competition, like to make the Olympic team, and some people don't make it, can you talk to these people right after? Can you talk about it? Or do you kind of have to go into your separate spaces?

- Michael: I think it's important to take your separate spaces, 'cause obviously there's going to be animosities, there's going to be, you know, jealousies or whatever. That's human nature. But ultimately, we're all from Canada; we're all working towards the same goal of having a Canadian Olympic champion. Sure, I would love that Canadian Olympic champion to be myself, first and foremost, but you know what, if my friend, training partner, teammate becomes that Olympic champion and I don't, two things: first of all I can be happy for him and I can be happy for the country, because that was our goal, but also, I can take a little bit of ownership of that, because I know that if I didn't come to training every day, he wouldn't have had a training partner to train with and we sort of achieve that together, despite the fact that he will have the medal and all that stuff. So that's a little bit different, but it really is... It's a team/individual sport, if that makes sense.
- Maura: Yeah, it does. It's an interesting and unique dynamic, I think, for sure.
- Michael: Yeah, it's definitely something you don't... I think maybe that's something that people don't realize about individual sports. I think you have that **across the board**; whether it be track and field athletes or swimmers, cross country skiers, all these sports which are considered individual. It's never just one person out training all by themselves every day. They have a team of people, other athletes, coaches, **etc.**, which are all part of that. And without them, you would never make it to the level you need to be at.
- Maura: All right. Well, thanks for coming and letting me interview you, because I think you're a really interesting person, so there was lots of stuff to talk about. Not just the Olympics but Northwest Territories, that's interesting too.
- Michael: Yeah, no. Thanks very much for having me. I hope that you guys found it interesting and that you maybe learned something and take a minute to check out video or a picture, too, of **the aurora borealis**. I think you'll find it to be worthwhile.
- Maura: Yeah, and maybe get inspired to take a trip to **Yellowknife**.
- Michael: Yes. If you are, look me up if I'm there. I'll happily show you around.
- Maura: And good luck on your quest to be in the Olympics.
- Michael: Thank you very much.
- Maura: But remember, it's not about getting there. It's about the process.
- Michael: You're right. It's always the process.

Maura: So, that is it for our interview with Michael, but keep him in mind when the Olympics come around in a few years. You might see him skating. And as always, I'll remind you one more time to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and check out all we have there. You can also chat with us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter: Twitter.com/Culips. We'll talk to you soon. Bye.

Detailed Explanation

To strike up a conversation

To strike up a conversation means to start a talk or chat with somebody that you do not know. The verb *to strike* is related to lighting up a match. When you run a match across the package and it lights on fire, that is called striking the match. Striking a match causes a sudden flame that seems to come out of nowhere, much like a conversation with a stranger sometimes happens—suddenly and out of nowhere.

In this episode, Maura talks about how sometimes when she travels, she ends up **striking up a conversation** with the person she is sitting beside. What Maura is saying is that usually when people travel, they end up talking to the stranger sitting next to them by initiating a chat—this is called **striking up a conversation**.

To compete head to head

To compete head to head means to compete directly with somebody else, usually one person against another person. The phrase comes from how close fighters' or wrestlers' heads are to each other when they fight.

In this episode, Michael talks to Maura about how, in short track speed skating, a group of athletes **competes head to head** around a track. What he means is that there is no team, but each individual skater is competing against each other skater. So even though there is a group of up to eight skaters skating at once, they are all competing as individuals, so you can say they are **competing head to head**.

Etc.

Etc. is the short form of the word **etcetera**, which is a word that can mean a lot of things, but basically means *and so on* or *and more of the same kind*. This is a word that people use at the end of a sentence, and it usually goes after a list to mean that the list can go on in the same way.

In this episode, Michael tells Maura about his training schedule in the summer, when there is no outdoor ice. He starts listing training exercises, and then finishes with the word **etcetera**. Instead of listing all the summer exercises he does, he uses the word **etcetera** to mean that there are more similar summer exercises that he does but he is not going to list them all.

This word is only used when the list is of similar things. For example, you could not use it at the end of a menu. A menu would have all different things, so **etcetera** would not make sense. But if you were listing the types of movies you like to somebody and they were all silent films, you could use **etcetera** after listing just few movies, instead of listing every single silent film you like. By saying **etcetera**, you are basically saying *and other similar silent films*.

Etcetera is rarely spelled in the long form **etcetera**. It is most often shortened to **etc.**, the first three letters of the word followed by a period, to mean that the word has been shortened. An easy way to remember this is that **etcetera** is a word used to shorten lists, so it makes sense that the word itself is shortened too!

To never turn back

To never turn back is an expression usually used after a person has just described a change they made in their past. It means that they made the change without ever reconsidering their choice or wishing they hadn't made it. It means that they made a decision or change and decided to stick to it, no matter what.

In this episode, Michael talks about how when he was four years old he went speed skating with a friend and liked it, and then **never turned back**. What Michael is saying is that when he went skating with his friend and decided he liked it, he started skating himself and decided to keep skating, no matter what. He never regretted his choice or thought about doing something else.

Here's another example:

Martha: Remember Jane, who we went to high school with? I heard she's a doctor now!

Suzie: Good for her! She always wanted to be a doctor.

Martha: I know. I remember her telling the teacher when we were in grade six that she wanted to get a medical degree. I guess she **never turned back**.

Suzie: Yes, she really stuck with her decision. Good for her!

A lick of

A lick of is an expression that means *a bit of*, or *a little of*. It comes from the fact that a lick is like a little taste of something. Imagine a kitten drinking milk. They lap the milk up with their tongues in tiny little licks. One lick of milk is a tiny bit of milk.

Usually, **a lick of** is an expression people use before they state something that is lacking or missing. For example, in this episode, Michael says he **doesn't know a lick of Japanese** to mean that he doesn't know any Japanese, not even a little bit.

Sometimes you might hear someone use this expression when they find something confusing or difficult—they might say **this doesn't make a lick of sense**.

You never hear this expression used except before something that is missing or absent. For example, if Michael did know a little bit of Japanese, he wouldn't say that he knows *a lick of Japanese*. *A lick of* can only come after the words *don't*, *doesn't*, *can't*, *won't* or other such negative words.

A perk

Although many, or even most, native English speakers probably don't know the origin of the word **perk**, it's actually short for a more formal word, *perquisite*, which in business means an extra benefit or payment in addition to someone's regular pay.

The word **perk**, and its plural, **perks**, are used casually to mean bonuses or extras that someone gets on top of what they already receive. In this episode, Michael tells Maura about how he gets to travel as part of his job, skating in World Cup competitions. He says that being able to visit so many different places is one of the major **perks** of his job. What he means is that even though he is competing in different countries and so he has to travel, being able to actually visit and enjoy the countries he travels to is a **perk**. It is a bonus or advantage of the job.

Choices

When people write lists (like a grocery lists) or options (like multiple choice questions), they often list each item or choice with numbers or letters. For example, on a grocery list you might see something like this:

1. apples
2. milk
3. bread

On a multiple choice test, you may see something like this:

What is the largest country in the world?

- a) China
- b) Russia
- C) Italy

Sometimes, when people are talking, and they want to emphasize that they are either listing things or providing options, they will actually say *number 1*, *number 2*, or **a)** and **b)**. For example, in this episode, Michael talks about Canadian stereotypes. He lists a couple of them, and before each one he says **a)** and **b)** to emphasize that he is presenting two different stereotypes that people use about Canadians.

Here's another example:

Bob: I don't understand where Tom has been. He's missed two shifts at work in a row!
Stanley: I'm guessing that he's either **a)** on vacation or **b)** is sick. He wouldn't miss work without a good reason.

Canadian stereotypes

In this episode, Michael tells Maura that when he tells people that he is from Yellowknife, people who aren't familiar with Yellowknife sometimes ask him if he lives in an igloo or drives a dogsled. People ask him this because these are common ideas about northern Canada, but Yellowknife is actually a very modern city

Similarly, people who aren't familiar with Canada sometimes assume that all Canadians must live in a very cold and snowy climate all the time because it is in the north, and that everyone must live in igloos and drive dogsleds.

Assumptions like this are called **stereotypes**. **Stereotypes** are generally not seen as very nice, and you should try not to use them in conversation.

The aurora borealis (northern lights)

The aurora borealis is the scientific name for a nighttime occurrence that happens in the northern parts of Canada. It's commonly called **the northern lights**. This is a very famous phenomenon that looks like colourful bands of light dancing across the night sky.

People travel from far away just to view **the northern lights**. They are caused by charged particles bouncing around the magnetic pull of the North Pole. Because the North Pole is in Canada, **the northern lights** are a very popular attraction for tourists to Canada.

In this episode, Michael tries to explain to Maura what looking at **the northern lights** is like, but he says that it's very difficult to explain without seeing them with your own eyes. He recommends going to Google and searching for pictures or videos of **the northern lights**. If you haven't done this already, you should do it now! They really are fantastic.

Yellowknife

Yellowknife is the capital city of the Northwest Territories, which is one of the three territories in Canada. **Yellowknife** is also the largest city in the Northwest Territories, and it is where the special guest of this episode, Michael Gilday, was born. **Yellowknife** is south of the Arctic Circle and north of Canada's provinces. It was first inhabited by First Nations peoples, but when gold was found there in 1935, the population started to grow.

To not be all it's cracked up to be

If someone says that something is **not all it's cracked up to be**, they mean that it is not as good as people say it is. This can mean that something is disappointing, or that it does not live up to its reputation.

In this episode, Maura and Michael discuss stereotypes, specifically the stereotype about Canada being so cold all the time. Michael says that the stereotypes are **not all they're cracked up to be**. What he means is that the stereotypes do not live up to their reputation.

Here's another example:

Jimmy: Did you go to that new restaurant on the weekend?

Doug: Yeah. I was expecting a lot more, because all the reviews were so good. But they didn't really have much on the menu and the service was not that great.

Jimmy: Oh no. So you were disappointed?

Doug: Well, yeah. It just **wasn't all it was cracked up to be**.

To screw up

To screw up is a very casual way of saying to mess up or to confuse. It's a phrase that people only use very casually when speaking with friends. You should never use it in formal conversation.

In this episode, Michael tells Maura about how in Yellowknife there is either almost 24 hours of daylight or almost 24 hours of nighttime, depending on the season. This is because of how the earth tilts as it circles around the sun.

Michael explains that this can **screw up** your body's understanding of when it's bedtime and when it's time to wake up. What he means by **screw up** here is that the almost 24 hours of light or darkness confuses your body.

Here's another example:

Billy: How did you do on that exam?

John: Not good. I slept in and got there 30 minutes late.

Billy: Oh, wow. That's bad.

John: Yeah. It really **screwed me up**. I was so upset about being late that I just couldn't concentrate.

To broaden your horizons

In this episode, Michael tells Maura how great it is to learn another language. He tells Maura how awesome he thinks Culips is because it's a way **to broaden your horizons** and meet new people.

To broaden your horizons means to learn new things and expand your experience and knowledge. Imagine looking at a landscape or horizon through binoculars. If we take a step back and widen our view of the landscape, we see and experience more. That is what this expression means: to widen your viewpoint and perspective on things.

To happen overnight

When someone says that something **happened overnight**, they mean that it happened very suddenly. But this only applies to things that would normally be expected to take much longer. For instance, you could say that an actress became famous **overnight**, but you wouldn't say that you got sick **overnight**, since that is actually something that could happen overnight quite easily.

Similarly, if someone says that something **doesn't happen overnight**, they are casually saying that it takes a lot of time. This expression is usually used when someone is refuting a belief that something happens quickly, or when they want to emphasize how long something takes. It can also be used to emphasize how much work it takes to get something done. We see an example of this use in this episode when Michael says that becoming a member of an Olympic team is not **an overnight thing**. What he's saying is that it takes a lot of hard work over a long period of time to become an Olympian.

Here's another example:

Sam: Wow, Jenny. It took you four weeks to finish that essay? I think it would have only taken me a day, at the most.

Jenny: Well, you have to do a couple of days of research, and then conduct some interviews, and then analyze your findings before you can even start writing. It doesn't just happen overnight. It's a long and tough process.

So-and-so

So-and-so is an informal phrase that people use to replace an unknown or variable subject. It's like a placeholder when you either can't remember the name of someone, or when you mean to be very general and non-specific in who you are talking about.

For example, in this episode Michael tells Maura about how great it is to travel with the Olympic team and to meet new people and experience new things. He says to Maura, "It just makes that experience so much more rich when you can look back and realize, you now, wow, I met **so-and-so** people and they were interesting and I never would have met these people if I wasn't involved with sport."

Michael uses the term **so-and-so** in front of the word *people* to mean all sorts of different people. He wasn't talking about a specific person or type of people, so he replaced something specific with the phrase **so-and-so**.

Here is another example:

Julie: Do you do a lot of travelling, Andrew?

Andrew: Not really. I like meeting new people, but I don't need to travel to many places to meet all kinds of new people. I could travel to **so-and-so** country and meet the same sorts of people I meet when I just go over to the grocery store.

To not take any prisoners

In this episode, Michael talks about how close he has become with his teammates because he trains with them every day. But he says that when it comes to the Olympics and other competitions, they are his enemies when they are on the ice.

He says to his teammates: "You're going down. And I will **not take any prisoners.**" These are expressions that are used in very competitive circumstances where you cannot or do not care about the emotions of the other players or competitors. The expression **to not take any prisoners** comes from war or battle language, and is referring to when people kill each other in battle instead of taking them as prisoners, which means they kill everyone instead of letting them live. This is obviously not a very nice phrase, but it's usually not as serious as it sounds. Michael is not saying that he is cruel or that he doesn't care about his teammates. He's just saying that they are competitors when they are on the ice, so he can't be concerned about their feelings or else he may lose the competition.

Across the board

The phrase **across the board** is another way to say *equally*, *evenly*, or *for all*. It is used when someone is talking about something applies to everyone or for everything in a certain group. It can also mean including or applying to all categories.

In this episode, Michael tells Maura about how much individual sports are actually like team sports, because of all the support from fellow competitors as well as coaches and others who encourage them. He tells Maura that he thinks this is true **across the board**, of all individual sports, like skating or swimming. What Michael is saying is that what he is saying about speed skating is also true of every other individual sport there is.

Quiz

1. What does competing head to head mean?

- a) playing a sport with a lot of strategy
- b) playing a sport where you have to wear a helmet
- c) playing a sport where you have one competitor against another competitor
- d) playing a sport where you can use your head to play, like soccer

2. When someone says they did something and never turned back, what do they mean?

- a) They didn't look both ways before crossing the street.
- b) They didn't regret or reconsider a decision they made in the past.
- c) They wished they had won a competition that they lost.
- d) They learned a new language within their own country.

3. What is a common Canadian stereotype?

- a) all Canadians live in igloos
- b) all Canadians like Italian food
- c) all Canadians are afraid of snakes
- d) all Canadians whistle

4. Name one of the characteristics of the aurora borealis?

- a) It's only visible if you're wearing sunglasses.
- b) It is made up of coloured lights.
- c) It makes you feel sleepy.
- d) It is only seen at the South Pole.

5. What does it mean to broaden your horizons?

- a) to change your camera settings
- b) to travel toward the sunset
- c) to learn and experience new things
- d) to sleep during the day and be awake at night

6. What does the phrase *across the board* mean?

- a) playing a game using a board, like chess or checkers
- b) including or applying to everything in a certain category
- c) shooting a hockey puck from one end of the rink to the other
- d) being part of a team

7. What does it mean to strike up a conversation with someone?

- a) to hang up on somebody over the telephone
- b) to begin talking to a stranger
- c) to discuss politics with a friend
- d) to speak using mostly slang words

8. What is the short form, and most common way of spelling, *etcetera*?

- a) etet.
- b) anon
- c) tera.
- d) etc.

Answers:

1.c 2.b 3.a 4.b 5.c 6.b 7.b 8.d