

## Chatterbox #74 – At the workplace

### Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Maura: And.

Harp: And we're here with your Culips English Learning Podcast.

Maura: That's right. And don't forget to go to our website if you're not already there, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Harp: Yes. Because there you can find all of our older episodes. We have over 200 episodes. And you can also become a member, because when you're a member, you have access to our Learning Materials, which include a complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz.

Maura: That's right. And if you're on Facebook, come over to our page and say hi. And if you have a question, feel free to post it on our page.

Harp: Definitely. So today we're going to do a Chatterbox episode, and that's where we chat. We talk about things going on in Canada and North America and sometimes we interview people. We basically just chat.

Maura: Yeah. And we like to chat, so we don't mind.

Harp: We love it.

Maura: So today we are going to talk about the workplace in North America.

Harp: Yes. We're gonna start with talking about the work-life balance, then we're going to talk about some **perks** that companies are offering, and we're going to end with talking about how people change jobs.

Maura: Right. So we're gonna focus on different trends that are happening in Canada and the US in the workplace.

Harp: Let's get started.

Maura: All right. So first we're going to talk about the work-life balance. And I think this is so important.

Harp: Definitely. I think it's so important to keep a good balance between working and living and enjoying life.

- Maura: Right. And that's pretty much exactly what it is. It is knowing that you have to go to work and work is important, but it's also important to spend time doing the things that you like, and relaxing and enjoying yourself. So you have to have a balance between these two things.
- Harp: Yeah, definitely. It's important not to be a **workaholic** and spend 60, 70, 80 hours in the office or doing work. It's important to have a good balance.
- Maura: Right. We do have a lot of **workaholics** though, especially with technology and having a smartphone with you all the time. But more and more, people are realizing that it's not healthy for you to work that much. You have to have a little bit of play time.
- Harp: Exactly. You have to have **downtime**, time to relax and just enjoy life and not think about work.
- Maura: Now, I know that there are some things that the workplace, or someone's particular place of employment, is doing to make it easier for people to have a better balance between their work and their personal life.
- Harp: Well, companies are doing a great job of encouraging work-life balance. One of the big things they're doing is allowing for **flexible time**, or **flex time**. And basically what this means is that there are core business hours. So depending on the company, it can vary between 10 o'clock in the morning to 4 o'clock in the afternoon or a little bit of a variation, but those are the core business hours; everyone has to be there for that time. But employees are allowed to choose what time they start and if they start really early, they can finish early. If they start later, they can finish later. So that helps people avoid traffic. That helps people if there's something that comes up in their life with maybe their kids and a babysitter or daycare. They're able to manage it better.
- Maura: Really, it makes so much sense, because when you have employees that get to choose something like that, it just makes them feel more appreciated at work and more responsible for the work they're going to do when they're there.
- Harp: For sure. My company has **flex time** and I love it. If I have something, maybe a dentist appointment, to go to in the morning, I don't need to tell anyone. I get there by 10 o'clock and I do my work and I finish later and it allows for more flexibility. No one's watching what time I get there, what time I leave. I'm responsible for myself. It gives me a feeling of independence.
- Maura: For sure. Now, another trend that's happening is that sometimes people are able to work from home on occasion.

- Harp: Yes. **Telecommuting** has become a big advantage that companies are offering to their employees. Like you were saying before, with smartphones, such as a Blackberry or an iPhone, even with laptops and computers being at home, people are able to work from almost anywhere. So, a lot of companies are offering the option to do some **telecommuting** or even almost all **telecommuting**.
- Maura: Right. And this way you can save money, because you don't have to pay for your transportation costs to get to work and you can also save time because you don't have to spend time traveling to and from work anymore.
- Harp: Yeah. And a lot of companies offer it whenever it's necessary for the employee. So let's say if they're kid is sick and they just work from home and they take care of their kid a little bit as well, it's a really nice option for employers to give to their employees.
- Maura: You know what I really like about working from home?
- Harp: What?
- Maura: Wearing pyjamas all day.
- Harp: I knew you were going to say that.
- Maura: I used to do some work from home and I really liked that I could wear whatever I wanted. And if I was hungry, I didn't have to go buy something. I had a whole fridge and cupboard full of food.
- Harp: I agree. And I did some **telecommuting** as well, but I missed being in the office, cause I was doing it 100% of the time working from home and I really missed that group environment, that team environment, where you talked with people and even that **water cooler talk** and just getting to be able to chat a little bit.
- Maura: It's true that when you work from home all the time, you might feel isolated. I guess it depends on your personality.
- Harp: Definitely. But **telecommuting** is a really nice option for employees.
- Maura: OK. Let's now talk about some of the **perks** that companies are offering to their employees at work.
- Harp: Yes. So if you don't know the word **perks**, it's basically **benefits** that a company gives to their employees.
- Maura: Right. **A perk** is something extra and is also something that people enjoy.
- Harp: Yes. And companies are starting to do a lot more **perks**, and they're

becoming really creative.

Maura: So, what are some of the **perks** that you know about, Harp?

Harp: Well, a big one right now, I think for a lot of people of a younger generation is casual dress. So they don't have to dress up in a business suit, they don't have to wear a suit and tie; they can come to work in just jeans and a T-shirt. There's no need to dress up unless maybe there's a business meeting.

Maura: I think that's happening more and more. Even in a big city like Montreal, downtown, you don't see quite as many people dressed up in serious looking suits and business attire anymore.

Harp: Yeah. And when you do see them, almost all of the time, they're bankers.

Maura: Right. You think "That person has a serious job."

Harp: Yup, definitely.

Maura: So that's pretty cool that people can be trusted to work hard but look casual doing it.

Harp: Definitely. We have this option at my work, but sometimes I still dress up because I like dressing up.

Maura: Yeah, you're fancy.

Harp: Yeah.

Maura: Another **perk** that some workplaces are offering is a gym at work or some kind of discount to have a membership at a gym in another location.

Harp: Yeah. And this is actually related to the work-life balance, because you want healthy employees so the employers are offering this. Some of the companies, when they're building a new office, build a gym for their employees there or, like you said, offer them a discount on gym membership.

Maura: And this makes sense, because you hear so often about how important it is to be physically active in order to stay mentally active. So what I mean is physical activity also has positive mental effects, so you can focus more or you can think for a longer time, a lot of benefits.

Harp: Yeah. I've heard of some companies doing yoga classes during the work day and people feel really refreshed and ready to work after.

Maura: Now, are there any other **perks** you've heard of?

Harp: Well, there are some companies that offer a lot more. The one that I'm

thinking about is Google.

Maura: I know. I always think of that company. They treat their employees so well.

Harp: I know. They're the example that every HR teacher talks about. Google treats their employees so well. They offer amazing **perks**. They have babysitting services **on site**, they have doctors **on site**, they have a gym for sure. They just have so much stuff for their employees.

Maura: Didn't I hear that they had a ping pong table or something?

Harp: For sure they have a ping pong table.

Maura: So, it's a good place for people to go **to unwind**.

Harp: Definitely. Another thing companies are doing is offering free food in a cafeteria that's usually very healthy and tasty.

Maura: That is awesome.

Harp: Mmhmm.

Maura: So it seems like companies are really starting to care for their employees more. Instead of just wanting them to come in and work hard, the employers nowadays want to show the employees that they care about them and they want to treat them well.

Harp: Yeah, exactly. And a lot of these trends for **perks** and the work-life balance are coming from the Silicon Valley, where there's a high demand for employees and they have to keep people happy. So they're giving things like massages at work, offering yoga classes, all of these **perks** that we've talked about.

Maura: I wouldn't mind massages at work.

Harp: Me neither. We should have massages here at Culips.

Maura: Let's do it.

Harp: And I think this relates to our next topic, of people changing jobs.

Maura: Yes. That's definitely a trend that's been happening for a while. People used to get hired at a company and stay with the same company for many years, sometimes even in the same job. But nowadays, people change jobs and even careers more than once sometimes.

- Harp: Frequently. It seems nowadays, if someone tells me they've worked eight or nine years at the same company or in the same position, I'm always amazed, because now it seems like people change maybe every two or three years, maybe every five years. There aren't very many **lifers** left.
- Maura: Yeah. We rarely hear of people staying 10 years or longer at the same company.
- Harp: Yeah, but before, people would stay 20, 30 years in the same company. I can't imagine.
- Maura: I think one of the reasons might be is that people get bored or they're just not feeling stimulated anymore in a certain job that they've been doing for so long. So they want something new and different. They want to feel challenged.
- Harp: Definitely. I think that's a huge reason why people are changing jobs, is to get more of a challenge, to learn new technologies or learn new skills.
- Maura: And some people need to do it for career growth, because if they stay at their current place of employment, they might not be able to get a promotion as easily as moving to a new company.
- Harp: Yes, definitely.
- Maura: In the past, people might look at a resume where someone has changed jobs a few times and think that that person wasn't loyal or wasn't a good worker. But now that has changed and it's totally acceptable to have a few different places of employment.
- Harp: Definitely. There's **a thin line** here. I think someone who changes jobs too frequently **raises a red flag**. If you're changing your job every year, that's a problem, because why are you getting bored so fast? Why are you changing your job so fast? But if you stay for ten years in the same position, do you want change? Do you want growth? It seems bizarre and it **raises another type of red flag**. So it's a delicate balance.
- Maura: Some people even leave a certain position that they're in and then they go back to school or take some courses and change their direction or get more focused on what they want to do.
- Harp: Yeah. That seems to be happening more often now, people going back to school and completely changing careers or working to enhance their skills on the career that they were doing before.
- Maura: Yeah. It's definitely more socially acceptable for older people to go back to school.

- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: So, it seems like these are all pretty positive changes and that people should be feeling better and better about their work life.
- Harp: I hope that's true.
- Maura: Yeah, I think so. I hope so, too.
- Harp: It's true for me.
- Maura: Me too. Another reason why people change jobs more frequently than they did in the past is, unfortunately, because of companies going bankrupt or they could just be **downsizing** and trying to be more efficient by getting rid of some employees.
- Harp: Yeah, definitely. Putting in some more automation, so computers doing things that before people did. So sometimes people get laid off and that's why they're looking for another job.
- Maura: So in some cases, people change jobs not out of choice but because that's what their situation has forced them to do.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly. They don't have a choice. They have to find another job.
- Maura: In this case, though, some people are forced to leave, but then in the end they're actually happier when they find their new job.
- Harp: Yup, exactly. Sometimes it's the push they needed. Maybe they had a dream to do something else or they wanted to change and they just never did.
- Maura: Right. So it can have a happy ending, too.
- Harp: Definitely.
- Maura: All right. So, today we talked about trends in Canada and the US in the workplace. And really, there are so many trends that are happening in the workplace and they're always changing.
- Harp: Mmhmm. Definitely. So we started by talking about work-life balance and how companies and employees are valuing this more and want this.
- Maura: And the second thing we talked about was **perks**. And those are the extras that companies provide their employees, so extra things that the employee is going to enjoy.

- Harp: I would actually be very curious to know what people in other countries are having as **perks**. Do you have some special **perks** at your job? Tell us about it.
- Maura: Are there any good ideas out there that we don't know about over here in Canada?
- Harp: And then the last thing we talked about was changing jobs and how it's more frequent now.
- Maura: Yeah. I think it's good that people are allowed to move around a little bit. It's nice.
- Harp: Yeah. It's more interesting for the person, I would say.
- Maura: All right. Now, again, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and check out what becoming a member is all about.
- Harp: Definitely. And come to Facebook. Check us out there. Leave us a comment and let us know what's an exciting **perk** that your company offers.
- Maura: And Harp and I are still getting better acquainted with Twitter. So if you're on Twitter, say hi.
- Harp: Definitely. That's it for us today.
- Maura: See you later.

## Detailed Explanation

### A workaholic

It's important to have a good work-life balance, but some people work all the time. People who work all the time can be called **workaholics**. The second part of this word, *-aholic*, comes from the word *alcoholic*, which is a person who is addicted to alcohol. In the same way, **a workaholic** is someone that seems to be addicted to work.

A person might be **a workaholic** because they love working. Maybe this person really enjoys their job and is single, so has a lot of time to devote to it. Another type of **workaholic** might be someone who wants to make a lot of money, and the more they work the more money they will have.

Here's an example with the word **workaholic**:

Michelle: Is James going to come out with us tonight?

Rebecca: No, he's working at his second job. He's such **a workaholic**. I barely get to see him anymore.

The ending *-aholic* can also be used with other words. For example, a shopaholic is someone who loves shopping and does it all the time.

### Downtime

**Downtime** is the time when a person can relax and do whatever they want. Often, a person has to work and take care of their family and their home. People are busy! The time that a busy person can take to relax and do whatever they like is called **downtime**.

Here's an example with the word **downtime**:

Nathan: Do you want to meet up for a drink after dinner?

Leslie: Yeah, but not till later. I've gotta have some **downtime** first. I just got home from work.

### Flex time

**Flex time**, or **flexible time**, is a relatively new idea in the workplace. **Flex time** means that an employee can start and end the day when they like. Something that is flexible is something that can move and bend, and can change shape in different situations. This is just like **flex time** at work. The exact hours that someone spends at work can be different, so it's flexible from one day to another.

Some days a person can begin work at 8 a.m. and another day it could be 10 a.m. Some days a person might finish their day at 6 p.m. and another day they might finish at 4 p.m.

There are often guidelines, as Harp and Maura discuss in this episode. Usually there are core working hours when all employees must be at work. If an employee starts later, they probably have to finish later. And if they start early, they can finish early, too. Another way **flex time** can work is that employees are expected to work a certain amount of hours per week and how they make their schedule is up to them.

### Telecommuting

**Telecommuting** can also be called working at home, and that's just what you do! This has become more and more popular because of advancements in technology. Even though a person is working from home, they can still send and receive email, or other important work-related files. They can also talk on the phone with clients or colleagues just as they would at the office.

*To commute* means to travel a long distance to get to work. *Tele* refers to the telephone, which was really the first advancement in technology that allowed people to work from home. The verb *to telecommute* comes from combining *to commute* and *telephone*.

### Water cooler talk

People who work together chat; often about light, simple subjects like the weather, a new television show, or an interesting story in the news. This often happens at lunchtime or on breaks when many employees go to the break room or kitchen. Many offices have water coolers from which the employees can drink water, and so many conversations happen near the water cooler. This is where the expression **water cooler talk** comes from.

Now, **water cooler talk** does not actually have to happen around a water cooler. The expression **water cooler talk** just means the light and simple subjects that people talk about at work. Harp says that people may miss **water cooler talk** when they telecommute because they are working alone and don't have anyone to just chat with.

Here's an example with the expression **water cooler talk**:

Hannah: Where did you hear that crazy story?

Darlene: Oh, it was just **water cooler talk**. A couple of the guys at work were talking about it at lunch yesterday.

You might also hear *water cooler conversation* or the expression *around the water cooler*.

### Perks vs. benefits

**Perks** and **benefits** are both great things. The words **perks** and **benefits** can be used in the same way, but when we're talking about work, they're sometimes used a bit differently from each other.

A **benefit** at work is traditionally medical insurance or putting money towards your retirement, which will be helpful in the future or if you or someone in your family becomes ill. When a person is talking about **perks**, they often use the word to talk about fun extras, like a gym or working from home. A **perk** is usually something that employees can enjoy immediately.

### On site

When something is said to happen **on site**, it means that it happens at the place you are talking about. The reason that someone might use the expression **on site** is to emphasize that a certain place has or does something at that location. This is often used when it is unexpected that a location would have or do a certain thing.

In this episode, Harp talks about the perks that certain companies offer their employees. She says that some companies offer free babysitting or a gym. These are not usual services that you would think would be provided at a workplace. Even if your company pays for your babysitting, one might think that the babysitter would be at another location. Similarly, if your employer pays for your gym membership, you might not think that the gym would actually be in the same building as your office. This is why Harp uses the expression **on site**, to emphasize that these perks are at the same location as the workplace.

Here are a couple more examples with **on site**:

Jackie: I can't wait to go to the hotel this weekend. I really need to relax.

Irene: I've got a surprise for you. The hotel has a spa **on site** and I booked a massage appointment for both of us!

Shayne: I'm going to get my computer fixed tonight at the store where I bought it. Luckily, they have people **on site** who can fix it.

Kyle: That's really convenient!

### To unwind

**To unwind** means to relax. The opposite is *to get wound up* which means to get excited or bothered. Then **to unwind** is to relax from being excited or bothered.

**To unwind** and *to wind up* are also used to talk about string or rope. When a person winds up rope, this means that they wrap the rope around all tightly together. When rope is unwound, it is loose and not bound together. The rope is compared to a person because *tight* is associated with stress, and being loose is associated with relaxing.

People often need **to unwind** after a stressful or tiring situation. Harp and Maura talk about **unwinding** by playing ping pong. After working a lot, playing a game can help a person disconnect from stress and focus on something simple.

Here's an example with **to unwind**:

Scott: How was your meeting?

Carla: It was OK, but I just need **to unwind** now. It was really stressful having so many people there listening to my ideas.

#### A lifer

**A lifer** is someone who does something for the majority of their lives. This is most often specifically used to talk about work. People who work most or all of their careers at the same company are called **lifers**.

This expression is related to prison. People who are sent to live the rest of their lives in prison are called **lifers**. Of course, people who are **lifers** at their jobs are not forced to stay at one company, but they may choose to for a variety of reasons. To be called **a lifer** can be negative, as a person may have to stay at their job because they do not have the education or experience to get a better job.

Here's an example with the expression **a lifer**:

Tim: I was just talking to Paul at the water cooled and I found out he's been working here for 30 years!

Heather: Yep. He's **a lifer**. He really loves his job though.

#### A thin line

Harp uses the expression **a thin line** to talk about people who have changed careers a few times. New employers can see this as wither good or bad. In some ways, it could be good, because it could show that you want to enhance your skills. In other ways, it could be bad, because it could show that you get bored easily and don't stay with one company. There is **a thin line** in this situation because it could be seen either as good or bad. One employer could see it as positive and another could see it as negative.

When someone uses the expression **a thin line**, it means that the line or separation between two things is thin and that they are similar. One thing can easily become like the other.

Here's one more example with **a thin line**:

Farah: Yesterday I read online that scientists have discovered that there's **a thin line** between love and hate. The brain activity in both emotions looks really similar.

Nick: Oh really? I guess that explains how couples who start off so in love can end up hating each other!

### To raise a red flag

The expression **to raise a red flag** means to get your attention and warn you about something negative, which causes you to be worried or cautious. An actual red flag is obvious and clear to see, so when something **raises a red flag**, it means that something happens that you must pay attention to.

Real red flags were traditionally used to warn people that there might be trouble ahead. This is a possible origin for this expression. When something **raises a red flag**, it's just like a warning.

In this episode, Harp first uses this expression to talk about a person who changes jobs too often. A person who changes jobs too much might **raise a red flag** because it's a little strange to change jobs too often. If a person changes jobs too often, a new employer may think that person is not reliable. Harp also says that **another kind of red flag is raised** when a person does not change jobs at all. That could mean that the person does not like change or does not like to be challenged at work. A new employer might be cautious about hiring these kinds of people.

Here are another couple of examples with **to raise a red flag**:

Arthur: How did you know he was cheating on you?

Tina: When I saw a strange text message from another girl, it **raised a red flag**. Then I asked him about it and he admitted everything.

Cynthia: It **raised a red flag** that Nate wasn't going to be a good group member when he didn't show up for the first meeting!

Justin: That's too bad.

### To downsize

**To downsize** means to make the size of something go down, to make something smaller. This is most often used to talk about companies. When a company **downsizes**, it often means that they are going to work with fewer employees than they presently have. To say that a company is **downsizing** is like a "nice" way of saying that many people will lose their jobs.

A family or individual can also **downsize**, by moving into a smaller home (not by firing some family members!).

Here's an example with **to downsize**:

Greg: My company's **downsizing**. I'm so nervous that I'm going to lose my job!

Amanda: Don't worry. Your job is really important to the company. You should be all right.

## **Quiz**

- 1. Sheena works all the time. She never has time to hang out with her friends. She's becoming \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Please fill in the blank.**

- a) an alcoholic
  - b) a worker
  - c) a workaholic
  - d) a shopaholic
- 2. What is it called when your place of employment allows you to choose the time you start and end your workday?**
- a) downtime
  - b) flex time
  - c) benefits
  - d) work-life balance
- 3. What is another word for working from home?**
- a) commuting
  - b) teleporting
  - c) telecommuting
  - d) telephoning
- 4. What kinds of topics are typically water cooler talk?**
- a) the weather and television shows
  - b) future projects and career objectives
  - c) politics and religion
  - d) personal tragedies
- 5. Which activity is a common example of a person unwinding?**
- a) continuing to work on an important project
  - b) doing home renovations
  - c) cleaning the house
  - d) going out for a drink with friends

6. **Matthew has worked at one company for 10 years and plans to work there for the rest of his life.**

**What kind of employee is Matthew?**

- a) a life worker
- b) a lifer
- c) a lifetimer
- d) an old-timer

7. **There's \_\_\_\_\_ between being good friends and falling in love.**

**Please fill in the blank.**

- a) a thick line
- b) a thin line
- c) a black line
- d) a small line

8. **Pete: How did you know that there was a problem with your income tax return?  
Nancy: \_\_\_\_\_ when the numbers didn't seem to add up.**

**Please fill in the blank.**

- a) I red flagged
- b) A red was flagged
- c) A red flag was raised
- d) A flag was red

9. **The company Smith & Jones is downsizing.**

**What does that mean?**

- a) The number of employees will be smaller and they will have to fire people.
- b) The number of employees will be larger and they will have to hire people.
- c) They are going to work fewer hours.
- d) They are going to get more work done in less time.

**Answers:**

1.c    2.b    3.c    4.a    5.d    6.b    7.b    8.c    9.a