

Catch Word #62 – On the Ball

Transcript

Maura: Hello everybody, this is Maura.

Jessie: And Jessie.

Maura: And we're here today with your Catch Word podcast at Culips.

Jessie: That's right.

Maura: So you can go to our website, Culips.com.

Jessie: That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: And you can check out our Lipservice, which has the transcript for this episode and every episode, as well as a more detailed explanation and a quiz.

Jessie: And at our website you can also sign up to become a Culips member.

Maura: Yeah. And don't forget to check out the blog. OK, now, today's episode is a Catch Word episode, and in the Catch Word episode, if you don't already know, we take an expression and we give you all kinds of synonyms and explanations and definitions, all kinds of good stuff.

Jessie: Yeah, we give you some ways that you can use the expression in everyday conversation.

Maura: Exactly. So, what kind of expressions are we going to talk about today?

Jessie: Today we're going to talk about expressions that mean that someone is really paying attention, they're really in control of a situation, they're well prepared, well organized.

Maura: Exactly, right. So the expressions we're going to look at describe people who are, like you said, Jessie, attentive, well organized and prepared, and they're really capable of doing the job. OK, so what is the first expression?

Jessie: Our first expression today is **to be on the ball**.

Maura: Yeah, **to be on the ball**. It sounds so funny.

- Jessie: It does sound kind of funny. It makes me imagine somebody balancing on top of a ball or something.
- Maura: Yeah, yeah, me too. But it really has nothing to do with a ball at all. Yeah, **to be on the ball** describes someone who is organized and prepared for some kind of job.
- Jessie: Yeah, a person who's very alert, very efficient, they really know what's going on.
- Maura: Yeah, good. So if you know someone who's very in control of a situation or at work, they're always working hard, you could say that that person is **on the ball**.
- Jessie: So where does this expression come from? Why do we say that?
- Maura: Well, it actually does have an origin in baseball, and there are actually a lot of expressions that are connected to baseball.
- Jessie: Yeah, there are tons.
- Maura: Yeah. So this one, **to be on the ball**, is also connected to baseball. So when a pitcher throws the ball in baseball really well and has good control, they would say that he was **on the ball**.
- Jessie: OK, so originally **to be on the ball** meant to be in control of the ball, but now we use it to mean to be in control of your life, to be in control of the situation.
- Maura: Exactly, yeah, so it started talking about baseball and now it's about, really, anything. So let's give an example with **to be on the ball**.
- Maura: How's the Peterson project coming?
- Jessie: It's going well, I have a meeting with the client tomorrow morning and then I'm going **to touch base** with the project manager in the afternoon and I need to get the **specs** from IT...
- Maura: Oh wow. You really sound like you're **on the ball**.
- Jessie: Yeah, it's **under control**.
- Maura: OK, great. That was a good example of someone who is **on the ball**. And you definitely sounded like you had everything **under control**.

- Jessie: Yeah, I actually used some business jargon there, so if you didn't understand something, go check out our Lipservice and we'll explain it in more detail.
- Maura: Yeah, good. And something else we should also mention is that to tell someone that they're **on the ball** is a nice thing to say, it's a compliment.
- Jessie: Yeah, that's a very nice thing to say to someone. I think you'd rarely say it about yourself.
- Maura: That's true.
- Jessie: You might sound **conceited** or arrogant if you said it about yourself.
- Maura: Yeah, but it's a nice compliment to give someone else, if you see that they're working really hard or doing a good job.
- Jessie: Yeah, absolutely.
- Maura: OK, good. So the first expression was **to be on the ball**, now we have another similar expression. That is **to be on top of it**.
- Jessie: **To be on top of it.**
- Maura: Yes, I'll say it one more time, slowly: **to be on top of it**.
- Jessie: **To be on top of it** can be used in the same way as **to be on the ball**. It means that you have the situation **under control**, you know what you're doing, you're well organized.
- Maura: Yup, exactly. It can be used in pretty much the same way: **to be on the ball** or **to be on top of it**. So **to be on top of it**, you could be responding to a certain situation and you could be very attentive and well organized, all the same kind of explanation.
- Jessie: Yeah, someone who's **on top of it**, if you write them an email, they'll probably respond really quickly, because they're **on top of it**. They've got the situation **under control**.
- Maura: Yeah, exactly, do you want to do another example?
- Jessie: Sure.
- Maura: OK.

- Jessie: Oh my gosh, Maura, I'm so **stressed out**. We're throwing the party on Friday and we're not even close to being ready. We still need a cake, we need to make the invitations, we need to do everything!
- Maura: **Whoa, whoa, whoa**. Don't worry. I'm **on top of it**. I've already taken care of all the planning.
- Jessie: I'm glad you're **on the ball** 'cause I'm sure not.
- Maura: OK, great. So in that case I was **on top of it** because I had already planned and prepared for the party.
- Jessie: Yeah, you were very efficient. You had already done the things that I was worried about.
- Maura: Exactly, good. And we have one more expression today. We have: **to have it together**.
- Jessie: **To have it together**.
- Maura: So **to have it together** is a fixed expression that describes someone who is able to do the job, they're knowledgeable, they're confident, no problems.
- Jessie: Yeah, they're probably really well organized, they know where to find everything, their desk is clean.
- Maura: Yeah, exactly. So, should we give another example with **to have it together**?
- Jessie: Yeah.
- Maura: OK. So, do you think that Sarah and Jim are going to get along on their date?
- Jessie: Yeah, I think she's really going to like him.
- Maura: Yeah, you know, he's got a really great job, he's got his own apartment, and he likes to do a lot of activities on the weekends...
- Jessie: Yeah, he's really **got it together**. I think **he'll be good for her**.
- Maura: Yeah, yeah, me too. OK, good. So in that description we talked about Jim.
- Jessie: Yeah, and Jim sounds like a really great guy. He's interesting. He's got his life **in order**.

- Maura: Yeah, so we could say that Jim **has it together**.
- Jessie: Yeah, and that's a really positive thing to say about a person.
- Maura: Yup, all of these expressions today are definitely compliments.
- Jessie: So, let's recap and go over the expressions.
- Maura: OK, the first expression was **to be on the ball** and the second expression was...
- Jessie: **To be on top of it.**
- Maura: And the last expression we looked at was...
- Jessie: **To have it together.**
- Maura: Good. And Jessie, let me take this moment to tell you: I think you were really **on the ball** today.
- Jessie: Thanks, Maura. It's so easy when I'm working with you. You've really **got it together**.
- Maura: Aw, thanks. OK, so remember to go to our website and check out the Lipservice and everything else that our website has to offer.
- Jessie: And we'll talk to you next time.
- Maura: This has been Maura.
- Jessie: And Jessie.
- Maura: Bye!
- Jessie: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

To be on the ball

To describe someone by saying they are **on the ball** means that the person is doing all the work necessary in a given situation. Someone who is **on the ball** is organized and well prepared. We could also use the expression **to be on the ball** to talk about someone who is alert and attentive.

Most of the examples we used in this episode were about a person who was organized and prepared. Here is an example with the expression **on the ball** meaning alert and attentive:

Andrew: OK, let's send out the report to the clients. It looks done.
Cynthia: Wait! The numbers on page 6 and page 23 don't add up.
Andrew: Wow. You're right! You're really **on the ball** today.

Under control

We use the expression **under control** to talk about someone who is **on the ball**. To have something under control means that a person or some people are controlling or directing the outcome of a situation. Really, to have something **under control** means that you are controlling it. But to simply use the verb *control* can sometimes sound too extreme.

Here are some examples with **under control**:

Fred: What happened with the Robertson Report?
Julie: Everything is **under control**. We haven't sent it out yet.

Ken: Peter always gets so angry.
Oscar: I know. He really needs to keep his anger **under control**.

To touch base

This is a very common expression, especially in business. **To touch base** means to get in contact with someone and to update them. In this case, Jessie says that she is going to **touch base** with the project manager, so she is going to talk to the project manager and tell him the most recent news about the Peterson project.

People also use this expression to end a conversation. It is much more professional than *I'll talk to you later*. At the end of a business conversation or email, you could write, for example, "I'll **touch base** again with you soon" or "Let's **touch base** again next week."

Specs

The word **specs** is a short form of the word *specifications*, which is often used in business when discussing the details of a certain project. The **specs** could be the elements of design that are necessary for a project or they could be the directions for how a building should be constructed.

Specs also has a more traditional meaning of slang for eyeglasses. Eyeglasses used to be called spectacles, so the short form was specs. Nowadays, people do NOT use the word **specs** to talk about their glasses, but you might hear it once in a while in an old movie or song.

IT

This is a relatively new term that has been created along with the growth of computers. **IT** stands for **Information Technology**. In most offices there is a person who is responsible for **IT** and in larger corporations there are often whole **IT** departments. Someone in **IT** is responsible for making sure that the computers and computer networks are working well. If there is a problem with your computer, someone from **IT** will come to fix it.

Conceited

Jessie says that if you say you are on the ball about yourself then you might sound **conceited**. If someone is **conceited** it means that they are speaking about themselves in a very positive way. To speak of yourself in a very positive way, in a very proud way, is generally not liked by others.

Here is an obvious example of someone who is **conceited**:

Shelley: I'm so great! I'm really smart and beautiful too!

To use the expression **to be on the ball** to talk about yourself is generally a conceited thing to do.

To be on top of it

To be on top of it is another expression similar to **to be on the ball**. If you are **on top of it**, it means that you are responsible for doing something and you are doing a good job. It is often a fixed expression that uses *it* to represent whatever the situation is. You might be working on a project, or finishing your homework, but the expression is **on top of it**. Sometimes *it* is replaced with a more specific word.

It is also possible to say, *I'm on top of it*. This is usually said to tell another person that you are responsible and are working on the situation. In this episode when Jessie was worried about the party, Maura says, "I'm **on top of it**."

Here are some examples with **to be on top of it**:

Amber: How's the research coming? We need it to be done by Monday.

Patrick: I'm **on top of it**. It'll be ready on Monday.

Jasmin: Wow, you really seem **on top of** your schoolwork.

Billy: Yeah, I'm trying to get it done before the weekend.

Justine: Lindsay is always **on top of it**.

Bob: I know. I'm really glad we hired her.

Stress out

As an adjective (**stressed out**) or as a verb (**to stress out**) this term describes a person who feels pressure and anxiety. A stressed out person often has many things to do and not enough time to do them. In this episode, Jessie was **stressed out** because she didn't think the party had been planned. **Stress** and **stress out** are synonyms. Someone can be stressed out about work, family, or one specific person.

Here are some examples with **stress out** as a verb and an adjective:

Greg: I've been so **stressed out** lately.

Donna: Oh no! Is it because of work?

Jack: I heard that the boss is coming around later to talk to our department.

Megan: He **stresses** me **out**. I hope he doesn't stay for long.

Whoa

When Maura tries to calm Jessie's stress, she says, "**Whoa, whoa, whoa.**" **Whoa** has the meaning of stop. It could be to stop what you are doing or to stop what you are saying.

Whoa was actually first used to tell horses to stop when you are riding them.

Whoa can also be used like wow, to show that you are excited about something or surprised. It can also be used to show that you are very impressed by something. It is a sudden stop or interjection in a conversation, no matter what it means.

Here are some examples with **whoa**:

Lucy: I'm so happy! I just won the lottery!

Nathan: **Whoa!** What did you just say? You won the lottery?

Amanda: **Whoa!** You scared me.

Cristy: Sorry, I didn't know you didn't see me.

Olivia: **Whoa**, look at this shirt!

Nicole: It's nice. Are you going to get it?

To have it together

To have it together describes someone who has a good life and is confident and seems happy. This expression could be used to talk about a specific situation or describe someone in general. In this way, **it** in **to have it together** could represent life or it could represent a certain project.

Here are some examples with **to have it together**:

George: Have you seen Karen's work on the Jones report? She really **has it together**.

Nick: Yeah, she certainly knows what she's doing.

Aaron: Jon seems really successful.

Ivana: Yeah, he really **has it together**.

Dawn: You've really **got your life together** now.

Andy: It took some time and a lot of hard work.

Did you notice anything different about this last example? We can also say **to have got it together**. If you listen closely or read the transcripts to this episode you will see that use the expression **to have got it together**. **To have got** and **to have** have the same meaning.

To be good for someone

In one of the examples Jessie and Maura talk about setting up two friends, Jim and Sarah, on a date. Jessie says, "**He'll be good for her.**" **To be good for someone** means that something or someone will benefit or have a positive influence on someone. It also means that it is a good match or fit. In this episode, both explanations could work: Jim could have a positive influence on Sarah or Jim is a good match for Sarah.

Here are a couple of examples with **to be good for someone**:

Becky: I just signed up for a Spanish course.

Jen: That's a great idea. It'll be **good for you**.

Mike: It would **be good for you** to get outside more often.

Vince: Yeah, I know. I should try to get outside.

To have something in order

In this episode, Jessie says, “Jim **has got his life in order**”. This expression is not to be taken literally most of the time. ***To have something in order*** means that it is organized and happening without any problems.

Here are a couple of examples with ***to have something in order***:

Myron: I can't believe Cate finished all that work in one day.

Irene: Yeah, she really has it **in order**.

Kyla: Do you have everything **in order**?

Chris: Not yet. I need to organize a couple more things first.

Quiz

1. Which of the following expressions means to be attentive, organized, and prepared?

- a) to be about the ball
- b) to be in the ball
- c) to be off the ball
- d) to be on the ball

2. What does the expression *to touch base* mean?

- a) to contact with updated information
- b) to touch a base
- c) to go home at the end of the work day
- d) to return to the office after a business trip

3. In business jargon, *specs* is short for which word?

- a) speculations
- b) specifications
- c) specialities
- d) spectre

4. Demi: She always knows what's going on at work.
Chris: I know. She's always _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) on top of it
- b) at the bottom of it
- c) topping it off
- d) top dog

5. Which word is used to mean *stop* and to show surprise?

- a) wack
- b) ho
- c) whoa
- d) wish

6. ***Stressed out*** has the same meaning as which word?

- a) pulled
- b) stressed
- c) bleached
- d) tired

7. Which expression is a variation of *to have it together*?

- a) to take it together
- b) to roll it together
- c) to put it together
- d) to have got it together

8. Kim: How are the plans for the vacation?

Charles: Everything is in order.

What does Charlie mean?

- a) The order of activities is set.
- b) All the plans for the trip are organized.
- c) Everything is chaotic.
- d) The hotels are booked.

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