

Catch Word #74 – Out of the blue

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Jessie: And Jessie.

Harp: And we're here at Culips!

Jessie: And here at Culips we focus on everyday natural English conversation.

Harp: Yes, to help you improve your listening comprehension.

Jessie: And today you're listening to a Catch Word podcast, and our Catch Word podcast is where we take a close look at some expressions or a theme and we break it down, we talk about how those expressions are used every day, and we give you lots of examples.

Harp: Exactly. And if you'd like to listen to our other episodes or learn more about the expression, you can visit our website at Culips.com. That's CULIPS.com.

Jessie: And at our website, you can sign up and become a member, and then you can receive the written support materials called the Lipservice.

Harp: Yeah. The Lipservice is a great learning guide because it has a complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz.

Jessie: And besides our website you can also find our podcasts at iTunes, and if you like what you hear, please rate Culips on iTunes or you can leave a review.

Harp: All right Jessie, let's get started. What's today's theme?

Jessie: Well Harp, today's theme is different ways to say that something is surprising or unexpected. So, today we'll give you a couple of great phrases that you might hear people use when something happens that they weren't anticipating.

Harp: So what's the first expression?

Jessie: So, today's first expression is **out of the blue**.

Harp: **Out of the blue**.

- Jessie: Right. So, one way to say that something was unexpected is to say that it came from **out of the blue**.
- Harp: OK, so when something is unexpected or it's surprising, you could say that it's **out of the blue**.
- Jessie: Right. So, if you can imagine that you're looking up at a clear blue sky and then suddenly a big lightning bolt crashes down right in front of you. So, that's very surprising, maybe if the sky had been cloudy or the weather had been really stormy, lightning wouldn't have been so surprising, but this lightening bolt—it came from nowhere, it came from **out of the blue**.
- Harp: Yeah, the blue sky.
- Jessie: Exactly. And this expression can be used whether it's something good that surprises you or something bad. So for instance, my sister just called me and told me that she's engaged and that news really came completely from **out of the blue** because I didn't even know she was dating someone.
- Harp: You didn't know your sister was dating someone and now she's **engaged**?
- Jessie: Right, it just came **out of the blue**.
- Harp: Wow, that is surprising!
- Jessie: I don't actually have a sister.
- Harp: I know. It was just an example. OK, so an engagement is good news, everyone's happy, but you can also use **out of the blue** when it's something bad that's unexpected.
- Jessie: Right.
- Harp: Yeah. For example, my friend lost his job last week. It came completely **out of the blue**. His company seemed to be doing really well, but it turns out they're actually **going bankrupt**.
- Jessie: Right. So he thought everything was going well, he thought his job was safe, but then, **out of the blue**, he **got laid off**.
- Harp: Yeah, it was a surprising and unexpected thing in his life. It was **out of the blue**.
- Jessie: So, there are also a couple of synonyms for the term **out of the blue**. One is

out of nowhere, and that's pretty obvious. If you see something coming from a long ways away, then you expect it, but if it comes **out of nowhere** and surprises you, then you **didn't see it coming**, it just suddenly appeared.

Harp: Yeah, and the other synonym for **out of the blue** is **out of left field**. **Out of left field** is another expression that comes from baseball.

Jessie: Yeah, there seem to be a lot of expressions based on baseball in English.

Harp: I know. I feel like we're always talking about baseball.

Jessie: Yeah, I don't even play baseball, but it seems like I talk about it all the time.

Harp: I know.

Jessie: And an interesting thing with that expression is that we always say it came **out of left field**, we never say *right field* or *centre field*, and for a better explanation for why that is, check out the Lipservice.

Harp: Yeah. So we have a lot of expressions that come from baseball, but for now, all you need to know is that **out of left field** is used the same way as **out of the blue**. If you want more information on this expression, check out the Lipservice.

Jessie: Yeah, we'll explain the baseball connection in the written learning guide.

Harp: Now, let's give some examples with **out of nowhere** and **out of left field**.

Jessie: Well, I have an example with **out of nowhere**. Last night my friend got so mad at her boyfriend. It was really awkward. The three of us were having a nice dinner together at a restaurant and then **out of nowhere** she starts yelling at him about never **doing the dishes** at home.

Harp: That's really awkward.

Jessie: It was really unexpected and it seemed like it came **out of nowhere**. We weren't talking about dishes, we were just having a nice meal, and then **out of the blue** she starts yelling.

Harp: Wow, that's really **out of nowhere**. I have a good example as well. We were having a great discussion at the office today about our new marketing strategy, when suddenly, **out of left field**, Bill started talking about how he thinks we should get better coffee in the cafeteria.

Jessie: Oh, that's pretty **out of left field**. That doesn't have anything to do with marketing.

- Harp: No. Exactly. It was a really surprising change of topic.
- Jessie: Hmm. Now, when something surprising like that happens, when something comes **out of the blue**, **out of nowhere**, or **out of left field**, a person might say in response, "**Where did that come from?**" And that's because they **didn't see it coming**; it was a surprise. So maybe when my friend started yelling at her boyfriend in the restaurant, he might have said, "Whoa, **where did that come from?**"
- Harp: I actually used that expression today in the meeting. I said to Bill, "**Where did that come from?** We're not talking about coffee. We're talking about marketing."
- Jessie: Hmm. Should we do a dialogue example?
- Harp: I think we should. Hey Stephanie. Have you seen the file with the information about the Preston account?
- Jessie: Come on, Beth. Can't you just find it yourself and leave me out of it? It's your account not mine.
- Harp: Whoa. **Where did that come from?** I just asked you a question.
- Jessie: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be so **snippy**. I'm just really stressed out right now. I'll help you find the file.
- Harp: OK.
- Jessie: So, in that example, Harp and I, or our characters, Stephanie and Beth, got in a bit of a fight or a disagreement. My character was mad at Harp because she asked me a question about something that I thought was her job.
- Harp: Yeah. I wasn't expecting that kind of a response. That's why I asked, "**Where did that come from?**"
- Jessie: Yeah. OK, so we have one more expression for today's episode and that is **to throw someone for a loop**.
- Harp: **To throw someone for a loop**. If something surprises you and confuses you, you can say that it **threw you for a loop**. Imagine a roller coaster, when you go through a loop on a roller coaster, you get turned completely upside down, and you might feel disoriented. When something **throws you for a loop**, you get surprised and it disturbs your **train of thought**.

- Jessie: Right. So, I remember when I was in university, there was a day that I was supposed to give my big presentation in class and I was really nervous, but I was ready, and just when it was my turn, **the fire alarm went off** and we all had to go outside the building. And that just really **threw me for a loop**. After we came back in, I couldn't remember what I was supposed to say, my notes were all disorganized. I thought I was ready but that fire alarm **threw me for a loop**.
- Harp: Yeah, that was so surprising and unexpected, the fire alarm.
- Jessie: Exactly. And then, it's like, everything was in order in my brain but then it got flipped upside down when something unexpected happened.
- Harp: So Jessie, are **to throw someone for a loop** and **to come out of the blue** synonyms?
- Jessie: Not quite. **To come out of the blue** means to be surprising or unexpected and **to throw someone for a loop** means to surprise someone and confuse them or disorient them.
- Harp: OK. You know, in addition to working at Culips, I'm a recruiter, and something that sometimes **throws candidates for a loop** is when I ask them their salary expectations in an interview. So to me, this is a basic question. If they're coming for an interview for a new job, they should have an idea of how much money they want to make, but sometimes they get so flustered, it **throws them for a loop**.
- Jessie: Right. So they haven't thought about the answer **beforehand**, so when someone asks them, it **throws them for a loop** and they don't know what to say.
- Harp: Exactly. So be prepared for that question if you're in an interview.
- Jessie: Yeah. It's a common interview question. OK, so let's do a recap of the expressions we've talked about today. So, we started with **out of the blue**. And when we say that something **came out of the blue**, that means that it surprised us and we weren't expecting it.
- Harp: Exactly. And two synonyms for **out of the blue** are **out of nowhere** or **out of left field**.
- Jessie: Right. And then we talked about **where did that come from?** as a response to something that comes **out of the blue** and surprises you.
- Harp: Exactly. And then we ended with **to throw someone for a loop**, and this is

when something surprises you and confuses you, you can say that it **threw you for a loop**.

Jessie: Exactly.

Harp: So, that's it for today.

Jessie: Thanks for listening and hello everybody!

Harp: Hello everybody? **Where did that come from?** This is the end of the episode, not the beginning.

Jessie: Oh, whoops. I mean, goodbye everyone.

Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

Out of the blue

When something is **out of the blue** it means that it was unexpected or surprising. Something that happens can be **out of the blue** or something that someone says can be **out of the blue**.

Jessie gives a good image to help remember this expression: Imagine a lightning bolt breaking through a clear blue sky. That would be quite unexpected!

This expression can be used with a few different verbs. We can simply say **to be out of the blue**, but we can also say **to come out of the blue** or **to happen out of the blue**. Throughout this episode, there are examples of this expression with all three verbs.

It can also be used all by itself offset by commas. Here is an example like that:

Jon: So what happened?

Mika: I was watching TV and then, **out of the blue**, my front door opened.

To be engaged

To be engaged is to promise to marry someone. When a man and woman are engaged, the woman usually wears an engagement ring to show that she is planning to be married. The promise to be married is called an engagement.

In the example in this episode, Jessie's sister was planning to marry someone that Jessie did not even know, that is why it was **out of the blue**.

Here's another example with **to be engaged**:

Fiona: Guess what? **I'm engaged!** We're planning to have the wedding next summer!

Irene: Congratulations!

To be engaged can also be used to mean to be busy or occupied with something. For example, someone could be **engaged** in his work. *To engage* is also a verb.

To go bankrupt

When a company or a person must repay a lot of money and they don't have the ability to repay it, we can say that they **go bankrupt**. **To go bankrupt**, a person or a company makes an official statement that they are unable to repay the money. Then the person or company receives assistance in order to become financially stable again.

Brian: How's everything going with the new company?

Gordon: Not very well. After months of struggling, the company finally **went bankrupt**.

After a person (or a company) **goes bankrupt** we then say that they **are bankrupt**.

To get laid off

To get laid off is when a person loses their job because the company they work for doesn't have enough money to pay all of their employees. When someone **gets laid off** it can be temporary, as in just a few weeks, or it can be permanent. We can also say **to be laid off**.

Here are a couple of examples:

Shauna: He just **got laid off** last week.

Oliver: That's too bad. Is he going to start to look for work soon?

Peter: Did you hear about the plant losing money?

Luke: Yeah, they might go bankrupt. For now they're just **laying people off**.

To lay off is a verb, but we use it more often in the passive voice, **to get laid off**. The reason we use it more often is because we more often speak about the person who lost their job. We don't speak as often about the person who laid the employees off.

Out of nowhere

Just like **to be out of the blue**, when something is **out of nowhere** it means that someone says or does something suddenly or unexpectedly. If something comes from nowhere, it is like it arrives and you are confused as to how it got there. Just like that example, when something happens **out of nowhere** you might be surprised or confused.

We can say **to be out of nowhere**, or **to come out of nowhere**, or **to happen out of nowhere**. It can also be used on its own.

Here's another example with **out of nowhere**:

Julian: I was just walking down the street and then, **out of nowhere**, this guy ran past me.

Tyson: And then what happened?

Julian: He tried to grab my bag, but I held on tight.

Out of left field

Out of left field is another expression with a similar meaning to **out of the blue** and **out of nowhere**. And just like the other expressions, **out of left field** can be used as **to be out of left field**, **to come out of left field**, or **to happen out of left field**, and on its own.

Here's an example with this expression:

Kiley: I was talking about my trip to China and then Kim suddenly started talking about a television show he saw last night.

Hank: That's totally **out of left field**.

Kiley: I know, right?

Something different about this expression is that it's related to baseball. There are many theories about the exact origin of this expression. Some say it's related to the famous baseball player Babe Ruth and people who mistakenly buy seats on the left side of the field to see. It was a mistake because Babe Ruth was left-handed and so the balls he hit always went towards the right. Another claim is that the left field seats were very far away from Babe Ruth. Another theory is that the left part of the field is farther away from the batter than the right field or centre field, so a player in left field is far from everyone else on his team. Some also suggest that the expression comes from a psychological institute being built on the left field of Chicago's West Side Park.

In other contexts, **to be out in left field** can also mean that something or someone is strange or unusual.

Here's an example of that:

Lauren: That guy is really **out in left field**.

Becky: I know! What a weirdo!

To not see something coming

This is an expression that people might use in reaction to something that happens unexpectedly. **To not see something coming** comes from the literal meaning of not seeing that something was about to happen. Now it can also mean that you did not expect something to happen or someone to say something.

Here is a more literal example:

Ben: I got into a car accident when I changed lanes on the highway. I hit another car. I **didn't see him coming**.

Dina: Yeah, it's important to always check behind you.

And here's another example of the expression:

Doug: And he just broke up with you suddenly like that?

Shannon: Yeah. I totally **did not see that coming**.

Doing the dishes

This is one of those expressions where we have to choose between saying *to do* or *to make*. **To do the dishes** is the expression meaning to wash the plates and cups you used after you finished eating.

In North America this is generally not considered a fun thing to do. Children often have to do it at home because their parents ask them to. These same children might also complain because they don't want to do this job.

Roommates might also have problems with this chore. Some people like to do the dishes right away and other people prefer to leave dishes unwashed for days. How often people do the dishes can cause a lot of problems in a living space.

Where did that come from?

This is another expression that people might use in reaction to something that happens unexpectedly. Imagine that something **comes out of the nowhere**, you might then ask **Where did that come from?** In this case, as this expression is a question, someone might actually want an answer while others may not.

Here are two examples, one where the question is answered directly and another when it is not answered:

Fred: Hey—**where'd that loud noise come from?**

Dorothy: I don't know, but I heard it too.

Nicole: I don't think you should you come to the party on Friday.

Kevin: What? **Where did that come from?**

Nicole: I just don't think it is a good idea for you to come because there are already too many people coming.

Snippy

In one of the examples in this episode, Jessie says that she was **snippy**. If you listen to the example, it is a perfect demonstration of what **snippy** is!

When someone is described as **snippy**, it means that they are not friendly, speak quickly and don't say very much. Because the person does not say much, a good synonym for **snippy** would be *short* or *brief*.

Here is one more example:

Sirena: I don't understand why he was so **snippy** with me.

Patrick: I think he was just in a bad mood. Don't take it personally.

To throw someone for a loop

If someone surprises you by saying or doing something you don't expect and it confuses you a little, then you could say that **they threw you for a loop**. A loop is a circle, and if you imagine getting thrown around one, you can see how it would be very confusing and difficult to know what is happening.

We can say that anything that surprises or confuses someone **throws them for a loop**.

Here is one more example:

Domenic: Shelly really **threw me for a loop** when she said she didn't want to see me anymore.

Vince: Yeah, I was surprised to hear it.

A train of thought

A train of thought is the different thoughts in your mind that are connected. You might be focused on thinking of something and it make you think of something else related—this is a **train of thought**. **The train of thought** is the sequence of ideas or thoughts that one has.

This expression is most often used in a negative sense, like, *I lost **my train of thought***, or I couldn't follow *his **train of thought***, or, as Jessie says, "...it disturbs *your **train of thought***." It is also possible to talk about **a train of thought** in a positive sense too.

Here are a couple of examples in a positive sense and negative sense:

Carmen: Let's keep brainstorming. I think we're getting there.

Oscar: Yeah, I think I'm following **your train of thought**.

Zack: Hey Sue—what are you doing?

Sue: Hold on! Don't talk to me right now! I don't want to lose **my train of thought**.

The fire alarm went off

When Jessie shares her personal experience of being thrown for a loop, she says that **the fire alarm went off**. When we say that **a fire alarm went off** it means that it turned on. If something **goes off**, it means that something suddenly happened, and in the case of an alarm, it means that it turns on and makes its loud noise. In this sense, **to go off** is used for all alarms, like your alarm clock, or a timer that suddenly beeps when the time is up.

This can be quite confusing because *on* and *off* are opposites. The important thing to remember is that if **an alarm goes off** it means that it turns on suddenly.

Quiz

1. Teresa: We got _____! We're going to get married next summer.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) enraged
- b) engaged
- c) egged
- d) erased

2. Which two words complete all of the following expressions?

_____ the blue
_____ nowhere
_____ left field

- a) in to
- b) out of
- c) on to
- d) up to

3. What word can we use to describe a person or company that has no money to repay a large amount of money?

- a) imdebted
- b) debt-free
- c) bank machine
- d) bankrupt

4. Which expression might be said in reaction to something surprising or unexpected?

- a) Where did that come from?
- b) I saw where that came from.
- c) I didn't see where that came from.
- d) I knew that.

5. Which household chore do some roommates or couples sometimes argue about?

- a) making the dishes
- b) taking the dishes
- c) doing the dishes
- d) dusting the dishes

6. Jackie: Do you know where the files are?

Bill: No.

Jackie: Could you help me find them?

Bill: No! Not now.

How could Bill's responses be described?

- a) snippy
- b) slippery
- c) sloppy
- d) skinny

7. What is the expression for the connection between different ideas one makes while thinking?

- a) a chain of command
- b) a train of thought
- c) a think tank
- d) a think train

8. The alarm went _____. Everyone get out of the building!

Please fill in the blank.

- a) in
- b) out
- c) off
- d) up

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