

Catch Word #13 – Whistleblower

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp...

Maura: And Maura...

Harp: With the **Catch Word** podcast at Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: And the Catch Word podcast is where we look at one word and we talk about how we use it and also look at similar words with the same meaning.

Harp: Yes, we look at different synonyms for the same word.

Maura: Yes! If you want to learn more about this episode, go to our website and click on Lipservice where you'll have the transcripts and other explanations.

Harp: Exactly. So what is today's word?

Maura: Today's word is ... "**whistleblower**."

Harp: Hmm, what does this mean?

Maura: A **whistleblower** is someone who tells—usually the media or the authorities like the police—that a large corporation or a company is doing something wrong or illegal.

Harp: Exactly. So a **whistleblower blows the whistle** on someone. So the literal definition would be when you **blow a whistle** you call attention to something, in this case obviously something bad.

Maura: Right!

Harp: When you say "**whistleblower**" you are saying calling attention to something negative.

Maura: What's that movie with the **whistleblower**?

Harp: I think **Erin Brockovich**?

Maura: Right, that one came out a few years ago.

- Harp: Exactly, that's a really good one. That one's with Julia Roberts and it's basically that she takes on a big corporation who's doing a lot of environmental damage and they're ruining the health of a small community and they're not taking responsibility. So she **blows the whistle** on what the company is doing. She exposes the company.
- Maura: Right, and usually being a **whistleblower** is not easy because a lot of people are being quiet about it and they don't want to get in trouble or lose their job and there's one or two people who are **blowing the whistle** on the company.
- Harp: Definitely, I say it takes a lot of strength of character to be a **whistleblower**.
- Maura: For sure, and we also have another expression with a similar meaning but this time not so serious.
- Harp: Definitely, definitely not so serious.
- Maura: Right, no companies.
- Harp: More for children. So this expression is "**tattletale**."
- Maura: Right. So, were you a **tattletale** when you were younger?
- Harp: Maybe a little bit.
- Maura: So, a **tattletale** is when you usually always tell your mom or dad or a teacher that someone else is doing something wrong.
- Harp: Exactly! So, an example of this could be "Mom, Serbi pulled my hair," or "Mom, my sister did this wrong."
- Maura: Right, so Harp's sister would probably say that she is a big **tattletale**.
- Harp: Definitely, definitely, and for children it's a negative thing to be called because when you are a **tattletale** you can't have many friends because children are always doing things wrong or bad things.
- Maura: Yeah, getting into trouble. Right! So, when someone is a **tattletale** they **tell on** people.
- Harp: Exactly! But they **tell on** people to someone who has authority. You don't **tell on** someone to your friends, really, more to a boss or to a teacher or to, I don't know, a police officer, but maybe not.

- Maura: Right! So, we say “to **tell on**.” For example, if you cheated on a test and a classmate **tells on** you to the teacher, right?
- Harp: Exactly, definitely, definitely. Now a different way of saying this is “to **rat on** someone.” So, to be “a **rat**.”
- Maura: So a **rat** is not a very popular animal, kind of sneaky, you can’t trust them. Right. So, to **rat on** someone is to **tell on** them. So let’s look at an example.
- Harp: Today I called in sick to work...
- Maura: Oh yeah?
- Harp: But I wasn’t sick.
- Maura: That’s nice, enjoy the day off?
- Harp: I went and played golf but I saw a co-worker there and he **ratted on** me.
- Maura: Oh no!
- Harp: He told my boss. Not very nice.
- Maura: Oh, that’s too bad.
- Harp: This is just a joke, I don’t play golf.
- Maura: But in that case, you’re right, your co-worker **ratted on** you.
- Harp: Exactly, exactly.
- Maura: So, if we also wanted to just be very direct we would say you told your boss or you told the media that they were doing something wrong.
- Harp: Exactly! And that’s about it for this expression, **whistleblower**.
- Maura: So we’ll end it there reminding you that “**whistle-blowing**” was for something more serious like involving a big company doing something illegal.
- Harp: With “**tattletale**” being something less serious, more for children and with **ratting on** someone or **telling on** someone to be kind of in the middle.

Maura: And that's it for today, so, we'll see you next time with the Catch Word podcast at Culips, this has been Maura...

Harp: And Harp...

Maura: See you next time!

Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

Pronunciation tip for “whistle”

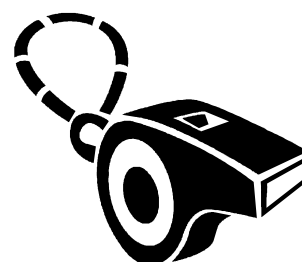
Sometimes in English we have letters that we do not pronounce. For “**whistle**” we do not pronounce the T. It is like saying “whisle.” If you listen to this episode you will notice that you never hear the T sound.

To whistle

This is a musical sound that is made by pushing your lips together and blowing air out your mouth. People **whistle** songs. People can also **whistle** loudly to get someone’s attention.

A whistle

You can also use a musical instrument to make sounds, called a **whistle**. The action of making noise with the **whistle** by forcing air through it with your mouth is called “to **blow** a **whistle**.” In this case, you blow air through the whistle and a musical sound comes out. Here is a picture of one type of **whistle**.



A whistleblower

Like we described in this episode, a **whistleblower** is a person who exposes a company or a person of authority doing something wrong, usually illegal or immoral. A person can be a **whistleblower** or they can **blow the whistle**.

Erin Brockovich

This is the name of a movie and a real person. The movie is based on the true story of the woman named Erin Brockovich. She was a single mother who worked as a legal aide and helped bring down a big power company. This company was polluting the water supply and making people in the community sick. She was definitely a **whistleblower**.

Whistle while you work

A **whistleblower** is associated with something negative, as a person **blows** the **whistle** on something they feel is not right.

But **whistling**, like the musical action described above, is generally a happy sound. When someone **whistles** it can make things more enjoyable. Or they **whistle** because they already feel happy.

The phrase “**whistle while you work**” is the name of a song from the fairy tale *Snow White*. This song is about **whistling** to make work seem more enjoyable and to make the time pass more quickly.

Tattletale

“**Tattletale**” is usually something a kid would say. In this case, the **tattletale** is a child who tells someone of authority that someone else has done something wrong. It is similar to “**whistleblower**,” but “**tattletale**” is not so serious and it’s really only for children.

Serbi

This is Harp’s sister’s name. Harp likes to give real examples! What a **tattletale** Harp used to be!

It is also true that no one, as a child, wants to be a **tattletale**. When one kid always **tells on** other kids, those kids start to dislike the kid who is a **tattletale**.

To tell on

You can use “to **tell on**” someone when you tell another person a bad thing that someone did.

Examples:

Brother: I will **tell on** you if you don’t stop doing that.

Sister: You always **tell on** me. You are such a **tattletale**.

Jon: I can’t believe he **told on** me. I can’t believe he told the boss about it.

(“told” is that past form of “tell”)

Or we can also use “to **tattle**” as a verb. Here’s an example:

Sister: I am going to tell mom what you did.

Brother: Hey, don’t **tattle** on me.

“To **rat on**” a person is another, meaner (not nice), to say “to **tell on**.”

Example:

“He **ratted on** me to the teachers. I am in so much trouble now.”

Someone who “**rats**” on people can also be called “a **rat**.”

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. What is a “whistleblower”?

- a) Someone who blows hot air.
- b) Someone who tells authorities when another person has done something wrong.
- c) Someone who calls the police when they hear a noise
- d) Someone who tells on children.

2. Which person is a whistleblower?

- a) Someone who talked to the media about illegal practices in a company.
- b) Someone who talked to his boss about another colleague calling in sick.
- c) Someone who told her teacher about another child’s bad behaviour.
- d) Someone who talks a lot.

3. What is Erin Brockovich?

- a) A film starring Julia Roberts.
- b) A film about a whistleblower.
- c) A film about a company polluting the water of a small community.
- d) All of the above.

4. What is the name for a child who tells on other children’s bad behaviour?

- a) A tale
- b) A tailor
- c) A tattletale
- d) A whistleblower

5. Fill in the blank: “Whenever I do something bad, Paul always _____ me.”

- a) tailors
- b) takes
- c) tells
- d) tells on

6. What is another way to say “to tell on” someone?

- a) To mouse on someone.
- b) To rat on someone.
- c) To dog on someone.
- d) To tail on someone.

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