

## Catch Word # 22 – The Tip of the Iceberg

### Transcript

Jessie: Hi everybody, this is Jessie...

Harp: And Harp...

Jessie: And this is our **Catch Word** podcast where we take a close look at one word or an expression.

Harp: Yeah, and then we break it down, we talk about how it's used in everyday life, and find some ways to say the same thing.

Jessie: And, as always, if you want to know more about this episode, or listen to any other episodes, just visit our website.

Harp: Exactly! That's Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Jessie: And once you're at our website, you can become a member and then you'll have access to the Lipservice for all of our episodes. And there you can find stuff like transcripts, Detailed Explanations, and more.

Harp: Yeah, signing up is easy. Just click the big green button, "become a member."

Jessie: So, on to today's expression, which is "**the tip of the iceberg.**"

Harp: "**The tip of the iceberg.**"

Jessie: I like this expression a lot.

Harp: Yeah, "**the tip of the iceberg,**" it's a good expression.

Jessie: So "**the tip of the iceberg**" generally means that something is just a small part of a larger situation or problem.

Harp: Exactly.

Jessie: So, we almost always use this to talk about something negative, like a problem, but sometimes people use it as positive or neutral. An example of a way we might use "**tip of the iceberg**" as a negative would be to say

something like: “The **layoffs** at the company were just **the tip of the iceberg**, but soon the entire business went **bankrupt**.”

Harp: So, when we look at this example, “the **layoffs** are **the tip of the iceberg**,” they’re just the small part of the problem.

Jessie: Right, maybe only one or two people lost their jobs.

Harp: Exactly! But when the business goes **bankrupt**, that’s the “**whole iceberg**,” the whole problem is that the whole company – everyone – **loses their jobs**.

Jessie: Exactly! Maybe if you were talking about a couple who weren’t getting along well, you could say the fight they had last night was just **the tip of the iceberg**, but really they don’t love each other anymore.

Harp: Exactly! The reason why this expression is used is because an **iceberg** is almost ninety percent below the water, the tip is only ten percent of the whole **iceberg**.

Jessie: Yeah, that’s right. So, if you were in a boat on the ocean you might think, “Uh oh, there’s some ice floating over there, but it’s not a big problem, it’s just a small piece of ice.” But really, there’s a lot more ice under the water and if you hit an **iceberg** in a boat that’s going to be a very big problem.

Harp: Exactly!

Jessie: So, of course, we use the word “**iceberg**” a lot in English, and part of that is “ice,” very common, but the other part, “berg,” we don’t use that very much in English.

Harp: No.

Jessie: And so the word “**iceberg**” actually probably came from a Dutch word or a German word that means “ice mountain.”

Harp: Oh, OK, so “**iceberg**” probably came from “ice mountain,” that is kind of interesting.

Jessie: So, how else could we say “**tip of the iceberg**,” what are some synonyms?

Harp: You could say that it’s **the least of your problems**. For example, my car breaking down is **the least of my problems** because I lost my job and there are many other problems in my life.

- Jessie: You didn't really **lose your job**, did you?
- Harp: Nope, just an example.
- Jessie: I think we might say something similar, "**the least of my worries.**"
- Harp: Exactly, problems, worries.
- Jessie: So, I could say that if I'm late for work, missing the important meeting would only be **the least of my worries** because I'll probably get **fired**, too.
- Harp: Exactly! And you're not going to get **fired**.
- Jessie: Oh, thanks. Even if I'm late for work?
- Harp: Nope, I hope not.
- Harp: So that's about it for this episode.
- Jessie: Yup, I think we have covered "**tip of the iceberg**" pretty well.
- Harp: Exactly! So check out our website, Culips.com, and click on the Lipservice where you can find the transcripts and the quizzes and that is about all.
- Jessie: And we will see you next time.
- Harp: Bye everyone!

## Detailed Explanation

### The tip of the iceberg

The expression this episode is **“the tip of the iceberg.”** This means that something is only a small part of the actual thing, which is much bigger. The **tip** that you see is only a small part of the actual **iceberg**!

A **“tip”** is the small top part of something. Like, the **tip** of your finger (fingertip), the **tip** of a mountain or the **tip** of your tongue.

An **“iceberg”** is a huge (very large) piece of ice that has broken off from a glacier and floats in the water. A **“glacier”** is an even bigger mass of ice that has formed over many years.



The *Titanic* is a famous ocean liner (huge boat) that crossed the Atlantic in April 1912. This huge boat sank to the bottom of the ocean after it hit an **iceberg**. The **iceberg** caused a big hole in the boat. Then the boat sank (went to the bottom) of the ocean. On this voyage, 1,517 passengers died.

Here are some important points to remember about the expression, **“the tip of the iceberg”**:

We must say **“the iceberg”**, it cannot be **“an iceberg.”**

This expression is also usually said with the words “just” or “only.” For example, “this was **just the tip of the iceberg**” or “it is **only the tip of the iceberg.**”

And remember, this expression is most often used in a negative way.

And here is just one more example.

Back in early 2008, the problems in the U.S. economy were **just the tip of the iceberg** of what was to come later in the year and in 2009. Now we have more even more serious economic problems all over the world.

### Iceberg

We use **“iceberg”** in another way too. We have a lettuce, called **iceberg** lettuce. It is one of the most famous lettuces in North America. We use it for salads and on hamburgers too.

We don't know why it is called **iceberg** lettuce. Maybe because it is cold and crispy like an **iceberg**!

#### The least of my problems / The least of my worries

We said that “**the tip of the iceberg**” is *almost* always used in a negative way. “**The least of my problems**” and “**the least of my worries**” are *definitely* always used in a negative way. “**Problems**” and “**worries**” are always negative things, right?

Here is one example using all three expressions.

- Jon: Did you hear about the document that needs to be redone?  
Sally: Yes, but that is **the least of my problems**. I also need to meet with them again.
- Jon: Did you hear about the document that needs to be redone?  
Sally: Yes, but that is **the least of my worries**. I also need to meet with them again.
- Jon: Did you hear about the document that needs to be redone?  
Sally: Yes, but that is **just the tip of the iceberg**. I also need to meet with them again.

#### Layoffs

Jessie and Harp used an example with “**layoffs**” in this episode. To be **laid off** from your job means that you no longer work there, usually temporarily. This often happens because there is not enough money in the company to pay you or it could also be because the company was reorganized and your position is no longer available to you. Many people are getting **laid off** during the international economic crisis.

Here is how we use the different forms of this word with nouns and verbs:

Jon was **laid off** last week. This week he is looking for work.  
(VERB in the passive form)

The boss needs to **lay off** about 50 people this week. (VERB)

There have been a lot of **layoffs** in the automotive industry. (NOUN)

In the UK and Australia, they do not use this expression; they use “to be made redundant.”

North America: Sally was **laid off** last week.

UK and Australia: Sally was **made redundant** last week.

#### To lose your job / to be fired

When you are **laid off**, you **lose your job**. It is another way to say that you do not have a job anymore.

Sally **lost her job** last week.

Sally was **fired** last week.

We also mentioned “**to be fired**.” This also means that someone **lost their job**.

“**To be fired**” is a common way to talk about **losing your job** but it sounds a bit aggressive. When someone is **fired**, it is usually because they did not perform well at their job. When someone is **fired** it is often their own fault.

“**To lose your job**” is the best expression to use when talking to someone who has actually recently been dismissed from their work. It is a nice neutral way to say it.

#### Bankruptcy

“**Bankruptcy**” is when a person or a business legally declares that they do not have enough money to pay their bills or accumulated debt.

We can also say, “to go **bankrupt**.” For example, “I thought his business was doing well at the beginning, but then last month he went **bankrupt**.” This means he had no money.

Again, during the economic crisis many companies and individuals have had to declare **bankruptcy**.

So you can see from the example Harp and Jessie gave that the **layoffs** are **just the tip of the iceberg**. **Bankruptcy** is a much bigger problem.

#### How else could we ... ?

Does everyone know the word “**else**”? When we use it we are talking about something “other” or something different.

“How **else** could we say ‘**the tip of the iceberg**’”? This is what Jessie asks. She wants to know other expressions for “**the tip of the iceberg**.” She could say, “What is another way to say ‘the **tip of the iceberg**’?”

Here are some other examples with “**else**”:

Hannah: So, who is coming to the party?  
Billy: Jake, Paul, Mary and Andy.  
Hannah: Anyone **else**?  
Billy: Yes, I think Shaun will come too.  
Hannah: OK, good! What do we need to bring?  
Billy: Some snacks and drinks.  
Hannah: Do you think we need to bring anything **else**?  
Billy: We could also bring some decorations.  
Hannah: OK, sounds good.  
Billy: Oh, I just thought of someone **else**. I think Lisa is coming to the party too.

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

1. The money missing from the register was only \_\_\_\_\_ when we found that he had also been stealing from the warehouse.

**Please fill in the blank above.**

- a) the tips
- b) an iceberg
- c) the tip of the iceberg
- d) a tip of the iceberg

2. You have been laid off. What does that mean?

- a) you have been promoted
- b) your boss dismissed you from your job temporarily
- c) you are lazy
- d) you are working full time

3. She has no money to pay her bills so she will have to declare \_\_\_\_\_.

**Please fill in the blank above.**

- a) banks
- b) bankruptcy
- c) rupture
- d) banker

4. Being late for work is \_\_\_\_\_, the boss is more upset over the false documents.

**Please fill in the blank above.**

- a) a problem
- b) less problems
- c) the least of your problems
- d) more money, more problems



**5. What is another way to say, “to lose your job”?**

- a) to be fired
- b) to be on fire
- c) to set yourself on fire
- d) to get fired up

**6. The problematic information is the least of my \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Please fill in the blank above.**

- a) fires
- b) icebergs
- c) worries
- d) layoffs

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