

## Catch Word #31 – To Pull Strings

### Transcript

- Maura: Hello everyone, this is Maura ...
- Harp: And Harp ...
- Maura: With your **Catch Word** podcast at Culips.com. How's it going today, Harp?
- Harp: It's good, it's a beautiful day outside.
- Maura: Yeah, it's starting to be summer in Montreal. It's exciting.
- Harp: I love the warm weather.
- Maura: Yeah, for sure. So today's episode is the Catch Word podcast where we look at one expression or word and we give you definitions and explanations and examples.
- Harp: Exactly! And if you want to learn more about today's episode, or any of our episodes, you can go to the website and sign up to be a member. When you're a member you can see the Lipservice and the Lipservice has the Detailed Explanations, the transcripts of every episode, and even a quiz.
- Maura: So go check it out. Let's get to today's episode. What is the expression today?
- Harp: The expression is **"to pull strings"** or **"to pull some strings."**
- Maura: **"To pull strings."** Harp, what are **strings**?
- Harp: They're thin pieces that are rope-like.
- Maura: Yeah, right. Like a long piece of cord.
- Harp: Exactly!
- Maura: **Strings.** So, **"to pull strings,"** or we can also say **"to pull some strings."**
- Harp: Exactly. So, this means to use power to get something.

- Maura: Right. So someone uses the power or the control that they have in a situation to get what they want.
- Harp: Exactly. Or they can use their connections to get something. So you **pull strings** when you use power to get something. It's usually that you get something unfairly; you're not following the regular way to get something.
- Maura: Right. Yeah, other people maybe don't have access, but if someone **pulls strings** they can use the power to get something that maybe other people can't get.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: This expression makes me think of an image of a **puppet**. Do you know what a **puppet** is? A **puppet** is like a marionette or a doll, like a toy, but it's attached by **strings**.
- Harp: So you use the **strings** to make the doll move.
- Maura: Right. So there's a person that controls the doll and makes it move. It's the same idea. You have control over a situation, you pull the **strings** and you make it move as you want it to move. It does what you want.
- Harp: Exactly, but this is an idiomatic expression, so there aren't any real physical **strings**. It's just an expression.
- Maura: Right! The **strings** really represent more the power and the connections to power that you have.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: Good. So, you can **pull strings** for someone if you have power.
- Harp: Exactly! Or someone can **pull strings** for you if they have power.
- Maura: Exactly. So, it can work in all different ways—depending who has the power.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: So what are some examples where people might **pull strings**?
- Harp: Well, there was that concert yesterday that I wanted to go to and it was **sold out**.

- Maura: OK.
- Harp: So I **pulled some strings** and I called my friend and he got me some tickets.
- Maura: OK, perfect. Right. So the concert was **sold out**, most people could not get tickets to that concert, but because you had connections you were able to get the tickets that not many people could have.
- Harp: Exactly! My friend had a connection and he got me tickets.
- Maura: Awesome. So how was the concert?
- Harp: It was fantastic.
- Maura: OK, great. Another really popular way that we use this expression is when we're talking about jobs.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: A lot of people get jobs through connections that they have.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK, so **to pull strings** for a job is really common. Let's give an example dialogue.
- Harp: OK.
- Harp: Maura, I got a job.
- Maura: Wow, congratulations.
- Harp: Yeah, my uncle **pulled some strings** and I got a job at his company.
- Maura: Perfect. That's really lucky because I heard it's really hard to get a job there.
- Harp: Exactly! It's really hard, but my uncle has some power so he **pulled some strings**.
- Maura: OK, so let's give another example of how people **pull strings** to get something that's not easy to have.
- Harp: OK.

- Maura: Harp, I went to my cousin's wedding last weekend.
- Harp: Really? Was it good?
- Maura: It was so good, but guess who was there to perform?
- Harp: Who?
- Maura: Britney Spears!
- Harp: No way.
- Maura: Yeah, she came and she sang a song. Pretty crazy, eh?
- Harp: That's so crazy. How did that happen?
- Maura: Well, **turns out** my cousin's friend somehow was able to **pull some strings**, she knew some people, had some connections and so Britney Spears was able to come to her wedding.
- Harp: Wow, that's amazing!
- Maura: Yeah, it's good to have friends who can **pull strings** for you.
- Harp: Exactly. It's good to have people who have power in your life. So now that was just an example, that didn't really happen, did it Maura?
- Maura: No. I don't know anyone with that much power.
- Harp: Me neither. OK, should we do one more example?
- Maura: All right.
- Harp: Yesterday, I went to the new **hot** restaurant in Montreal and I got a table.
- Maura: How did you ever get a table? I heard that you have to reserve like two months **in advance**.
- Harp: It's actually six months **in advance**.
- Maura: Wow, so how did you do it?
- Harp: I have a friend who works at the restaurant so he **pulled some strings** and I got to go yesterday.

- Maura: Wow, impressive. OK, great. So we gave you tons of examples with **“to pull strings”** or **“to pull some strings.”**
- Harp: Exactly. So, I hope that’s clear for everyone, and if not, go to the website and check out the Lipservice where you can find more Detailed Explanations and you can see the transcript of this episode.
- Maura: Right. There’s even a quiz to check to make sure that you did understand everything well.
- Harp: That’s about it for today.
- Maura: Yeah, thanks for listening to us.
- Harp: Bye everyone!
- Maura: Bye!

## Detailed Explanation

### To pull (some) strings

“**To pull strings**” or “**to pull some strings**” is an expression that means to use power to get something. People usually **pull strings**, or use power, to get something that they cannot easily have. We use the example of concert tickets or a job, which are not always easy to get.

This expression is about a connection to power, or using a powerful contact to get what you want.

If someone pulls a **string** to make something move then that person has control or power over the thing. This is where the literal meaning of this expression comes from.

We can say “**to pull strings**” or “**to pull some strings**” because they both have exactly the same meaning. Harp and Maura usually say “**to pull some strings**” in this episode.

If we know the context, we can simply say “**to pull strings**.” For example, “He got me tickets to the concert. He **pulled strings**.” But we can also be more specific and say who the **strings** were pulled for, like “She **pulled some strings** for me.” We use “for” to show which person benefited.

Here are some examples of both:

Hilary: I wanted to go see the new Keanu Reeves movie, but there were no tickets left. Luckily, my friend works at the theatre so he **pulled some strings**.

Doris: I was trying to interview the mayor for this week’s newspaper but I couldn’t get through to him. Then I found out my friend Bob is the mayor’s cousin. He **pulled some strings** for me and now I have the interview!

Harry: Guess what? I had a parking ticket, but because my uncle is a police officer, he **pulled some strings** for me and now I don’t have to pay the fine.

### Strings

Did everyone understand the explanation for “**string**” this episode? It is a piece of cord, a long twisted piece of material that is used to attach things or restrain things. It is usually thin and not heavy. A piece of wool, which is used for knitting, may be called a **string**. Some shoes are tied on feet with a **string** (or lace).

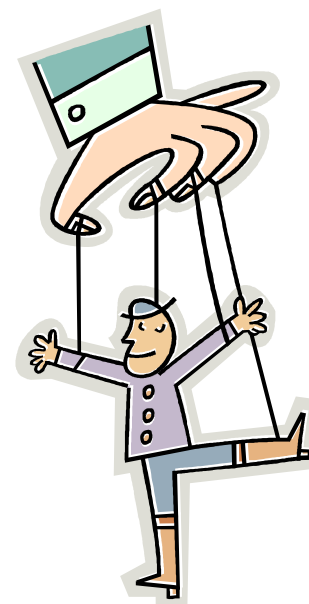
In this expression, the **string** represents the power.

Puppet

The image of a **puppet** is used to describe the expression “**to pull some strings**.” A **puppet** (also called a marionette) is connected to **strings** and someone then holds the **strings** and controls the **puppet**. The person pulls the **strings** to control the **puppet**.

A **puppet** is a doll attached to **strings**. Sometimes the person using the **puppet** can also put their hand in the doll’s back to make it speak.

**Puppets** are most often for kids and are used in many children’s television programs. A professional person who uses **puppets** is called a puppeteer.

Sold out

When a show or some kind of performance is “**sold out**” it means that it is full and there are no other tickets available. If there is a concert with 500 seats and 500 seats are sold, then the concert is **sold out**.

There is a bit of logic here as “**sold**” is the past of “to sell” and “**out**” can sometimes mean there is none left. We can use it for shows or we can also use it for items. “**Sold-out**” is most often used as an adjective (describing word) and sometimes as a verb.

Here are some examples:

Julia: Yesterday I went to a **sold-out** concert at the Bell Centre. (adjective)

Anna: My friend’s band is so popular that they **sold out** their show on Friday. (verb)

Bart: I went to the store to get some of my favourite cookies on sale this week, but they were **sold out**. (adjective)

Connie: We **sold out** of their CD two days ago. It was really popular. (verb)

Nepotism

No, we do not mention the word “**nepotism**” in this episode. But we do give examples of this term. **Nepotism** is when someone is favoured because of their connections to other people, most often unfairly. This word is usually used when talking about how people get jobs.

It is still very common for people to get jobs because of **nepotism**. Generally speaking, many people do not agree with this kind of favouritism. In government organizations in Canada the job application process tries to make **nepotism** impossible, and so being more fair by judging people on their abilities. When someone **pulls strings** for you and gets you a job, this is **nepotism**.

**Nepotism** also occurs in politics, as political positions are sometimes given to family members of other politicians. Politicians are also able to **pull strings** for many things.

### (It) turns out

Maura says “**Turns out** my cousin’s friend was somehow able to **pull some strings**.” The full phrase is “**It turns out**” but the “it” was cut, which happens in casual speech.

So, “**it turns out**” in this case has the meaning that something came to be known. To keep with the example from this episode, Britney Spears came to the wedding and no one knew why or how she was there. Then everyone knew that she was there because the friend **pulled some strings**, and used her connections.

At first there is a secret, or some information that is not known, and then people come to know this information. Here are some other examples with “**turn out**”:

Harry: I got an F in my German language course and I didn’t understand why. I talked to my professor and it **turns out** that they lost my exam!

Cassie: I had a crush on Jim all last year. I liked him so much. Then his friend Paul told me that he liked me too. It **turned out** we liked each other at the same time.

(Check out the Catch Word – Crush episode for an explanation of this expression).

### Hot

This word is probably familiar to you. “**Hot**” is the opposite of cold. But it is also a slang word that can have many meanings. In this episode, Harp says “a **hot** restaurant.” In this case, “**hot**” means popular and in demand.

And here are some examples for you:

Yoshi: That new song that I hear all the time is really **hot** right now.

Tania: I tried to buy those new pants, but they are so **hot** they were all **sold out**.



“Hot” has many other slang meanings. If you want to know what they are, send us an email and ask us!

### In advance

To do something “**in advance**” means that we do something before the other main event. There are two actions, and one action happens first or **in advance**, before the other one.

When you make an appointment, you call **in advance** to arrange the time. Then some time later you have your appointment.

If a restaurant is popular, you may need to make dinner reservations months **in advance**.

Some people prepare for the funerals **in advance** (before they die).

And we can also say, “Thanks, **in advance**.” You thank someone before they do the action that you appreciate.

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

1. We can say “to pull strings” or “\_\_\_\_\_”?

Please fill in the blank.

- a) to push strings
- b) to pull a string
- c) to pull some strings
- d) to pull many strings

2. We used an image to explain the expression “to pull strings.” What image was it?

- a) a puppet
- b) a puppy
- c) a game
- d) a dog

3. Henry:        So did you get tickets to the concert tonight?  
Dylan:        No, I couldn't. It was \_\_\_\_\_.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) sell out
- b) sold out
- c) sold off
- d) sold

4. What is an example of nepotism?

- a) seeing Britney Spears
- b) getting concert tickets to a show
- c) getting a job through family connections
- d) having an uncle

5. Karen: I thought Jonah never responded to my email, but \_\_\_\_\_ that he did, it was just in my junk box.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) it turns out
  - b) it turns on
  - c) it turns in
  - d) it turns off
6. "Their new CD is really hot right now." What does "hot" mean in this sentence?
- a) not good
  - b) good looking
  - c) warm
  - d) popular

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