

# Workplace Idioms for International Students

Most American workplace idioms are fixated on two things: time and money.

1. **Green light:** To approve a project for development. “The director wants to green light your scented wallpaper idea.”
2. **Brownie points:** To curry favor with someone (especially a boss). “He earned brownie points by getting the boss’s coffee.”
3. **Climb the ladder:** To advance in one’s career through promotions. “Earning brownie points is one way to climb the ladder.”
4. **Team player:** A committed employee who works well with colleagues. “A team player often sees his proposals green lighted.”
5. **Yes man:** An employee who always agrees with the boss. “He was a yes man, a team player and a chaser of brownie points.”
6. **Touch base:** To confer about the progress of a project. “Let’s touch base tomorrow about the flea spray account.”
7. **Crunch time:** When a project needs completed quickly. “It’s crunch time – we need to touch base as soon as possible.”
8. **Plug (a product):** To promote or market a product. “I was on TV this morning to plug our new flea spray.”
9. **Cash cow:** The product that generates the most revenue for a company. “This scented wallpaper will be the company’s cash cow.”
10. **On the ball/keep the ball rolling:** To ensure that a project is progressing efficiently and on time. “Keep the ball rolling on our green lighted projects.”
11. **Down to the wire:** Said of something whose outcome or completion takes you to deadline. “We’ve stayed on the ball with this flea spray, but now we’re down to the wire and have to deliver.”
12. **Glass ceiling:** The perceived struggle of women and minorities to achieve promotions. “She knew it would be hard to break through the glass ceiling and climb the corporate ladder.”
13. **Pull the plug:** To terminate a project or account. “He pulled the plug on the flea spray before we even got to plug it.”
14. **Belt-tightening:** To reduce expenses. “After we lost our cash cow, the HR department tightened its belt.”
15. **Work out kinks:** To revise, edit or otherwise improve a flawed product or service. “If you don’t work out the kinks, they’re going to pull the plug.”
16. **Pull your weight:** To share in the workload. “Since we’ve tightened our belts, everybody has to pull his weight.”
17. **Axed:** To be terminated; synonymous with fired. “The yes man was axed when he came down with lockjaw.”
18. **Jump the gun:** To do something prematurely. “They jumped the gun axing the yes man like that – he just had laryngitis.”
19. **Hard sell:** Using direct, aggressive methods to market a product (in contrast to soft sell). “We implemented a hard sell campaign to plug this scented wallpaper.”
20. **In the red:** When a company is in debt or failing to show a profit. “Despite our belt tightening and hard sell campaigns, we’re in the red with this flea spray account.”

## *Common Workplace Phrases and Acronyms*

You can't argue with success = Be a success.

Live and let live = Be tolerant.

Time flies when you're having fun. = Have lots of fun.

No pain, no gain. = Work hard. Don't complain.

Enough is enough. = Stand up for your rights.

Time is money. = Don't waste time.

4 P's of Marketing= product, placement, promotion,  
and price

"Step up to the plate"= help out, take initiative

"slam dunk" = term for accomplishment

Brain storm= think of ideas for something

Fiscal year= 12-month period used for financial  
planning and reporting purposes

COB= close of business

EOD= end of day

CEO= Chief Executive Officer

TBD= to be determined

ASAP= as soon as possible

AKA= also known as

GDP= gross domestic product

PA= performance appraisal