ANSWER KEY WITH EXPLANATIONS

Business English Idioms Test: Speak Business English Like an American

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Explanations

1. The advertising campaign won two design prizes, but the ___ line is that it brought in fewer than fifty new customers.
✔ **B) bottom**
The bottom line is the most important fact once everything has been considered. In accounts it is also the last line, which shows the profit or loss.

2. With rents so high, the café in Lisbon has to sell two hundred coffees a day just to break ___.
✔ **D) even**
A business breaks even when the money coming in matches the money going out: no profit, but no loss either.

3. The old accounting software is the firm's cash ___: it needs almost no investment and pays for all the new projects.
✔ **A) cow**
A cash cow is a product or part of a business that keeps earning money steadily with little effort. Think of a cow that gives milk every day.

4. We only have ten minutes left in this meeting, so let me cut to the ___: the client wants a 15% discount.
✔ **C) chase**
Cut to the chase means leave out the details and say the important thing straight away. It is informal and started in American English, but British speakers use it too.

5. The supplier dropped the ___ again: the parts for the Warsaw factory turned up a week late.
✔ **A) ball**
If you drop the ball, you let people down by forgetting a job that was yours or doing it badly. It is informal. It began in American English and is now common in British workplaces too.

6. Our receptionist in Nairobi always goes the extra ___ for guests, even booking their taxis after her shift has ended.
✔ **D) mile**
Someone who goes the extra mile makes more effort than people expect of them. It is a good thing to say about a colleague or a company.

7. Could someone else train the new intern? I have a lot on my ___ this month with the audit and two product launches.
✔ **B) plate**
If you have a lot on your plate, you have many jobs or problems to deal with at the moment. People often say it to explain why they cannot take on more work.

8. The new sales director hit the ground ___, signing three contracts in her first fortnight.
✔ **C) running**
Hit the ground running means start a new job or project with energy and get results at once, without needing time to settle in.

9. After two years of falling sales, the bookshop chain was half a million pounds in the ___.
✔ **D) red**
A company or bank account that is in the red owes money or is making a loss. Accountants used to write losses in red ink.

10. Please keep me in the ___ while I'm at the trade fair: copy me in on every email to the client.
✔ **A) loop**
If you keep a person in the loop, you make sure they get all the latest news about a plan or project.

11. "Before we present the budget to the board, let's have a quick call to make sure we are all on the same page." What does "on the same page" mean here?
✔ **C) in agreement about it**
People who are on the same page understand a situation in the same way and agree about what to do. Nobody is reading anything.

12. "When the customer complained about the wrong invoice, the accounts team tried to pass the buck to the sales department." What does "pass the buck" mean here?
✔ **A) push the responsibility onto others**
Pass the buck means make another person deal with a problem that is really yours, or take the blame for it. It is informal and shows disapproval.

13. "The app had cost twice its budget and still had very few users, so the investors decided to pull the plug on it." What does "pull the plug" mean here?
✔ **B) bring it to an end**
Pull the plug on a project means end it, usually by stopping the money. A machine stops when you take its plug out of the wall.

14. "All our rivals sell through shops, so if we want to stand out we'll have to think outside the box." What does "think outside the box" mean here?
✔ **D) find fresh, unusual ideas**
Think outside the box means think in a new and creative way instead of following the usual methods. Doing what the rivals do would be the opposite.

15. "I'll touch base with the supplier in Osaka tomorrow to check that the shipment is still on schedule." What does "touch base with" mean here?
✔ B) make brief contact with
Touch base with someone means speak or write to them for a short time to find out how things are going. It comes from American English (from baseball) and is now common in British offices too. A plainer way to say it is get in touch with.

16. "We chose the Brazilian agency because of its track record: every campaign it has run for us has been a success." What does "track record" mean here?
✔ C) past performance
A track record is everything a person or company has achieved, or failed to achieve, up to now. People judge it when they hire someone or choose a supplier.

17. "Nobody wanted to raise prices, but with costs climbing every month the owner finally bit the bullet and did it." What does "bit the bullet" mean here?
✔ A) accepted something unpleasant but necessary
Bite the bullet means finally do a hard or painful thing after delaying it. Note the past form: bit.

18. "Give the finance team a day to crunch the numbers before we decide whether a second warehouse makes sense." What does "crunch the numbers" mean here?
✔ D) do the calculations
Crunch the numbers means work through a lot of figures to find out what they show. It is informal.

19. "Engineers can get lost in small technical details, so the project manager keeps reminding them of the big picture." What does "the big picture" mean here?
✔ C) the whole situation
The big picture is a situation seen as a whole, not its separate small parts. It is the opposite of the details.

20. "She joined the bank as a trainee at twenty-two and climbed the corporate ladder to become regional director by thirty-five." What does "climbed the corporate ladder" mean here?
✔ B) rose to higher positions
Climb the corporate ladder means move up step by step to more senior jobs in a company. Each promotion is one step of the ladder.

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