

Introduction

Hi, Lori here welcoming you to another episode of *Real English Conversations at BetterAtEnglish.com*. Today my British pal Michael and I compare working in an office with working at home, and talk about how difficult it can be to put up with rude treatment from nasty customers when you work in a job providing service. As usual, we end up touching upon some of the differences between British and American English vocabulary.

If you have a job where you have to look busy all the time, or where you have to tolerate rude customers, I encourage you to post your stories in the comments section on the website! It would be fun to hear what you have to say.

Before moving on to the conversation, I'd like to thank everyone who has donated since the last episode. Michael and I really appreciate your generosity, thanks so much! I also wanted to let you know that because of illness the past few weeks, I've not been able to keep up with my email as well as I'd like to. Fortunately, I'm feeling a bit better now, so if you'd emailed and not received an answer, you will be getting one soon.

Right then, on with the conversation!

Conversation Transcript

Lori: So, you've worked in offices before, haven't you?

Michael: Oh yes, yes, yeah.

L: What's the difference between working in an office and say, working on your own at home?

M: Well, I think if you're working on your own at home, you need to have...The first thing that **springs to mind** is you need to have self-discipline.

L: Mm hmm.

M: Because you have nobody...if you have a boss, they're somebody who isn't there with you, they're maybe on the end of a telephone somewhere, and they're not **looking over** you. I mean, they're never going to know if you want to nip outside for a fag, or do, you know, any of the things that you might want to—I'm going to have another coffee-break, because I feel like it—you can't do things like that when you're working in an office, there's umm...And there are more distractions I think, because there are other people to speak to, ummm...You know, so in an office, the **atmosphere** tends to be very much, everything revolves around the work – it's work, work, work, all the time. It's more **regimented**.

L: Do you have to look busy all the time?

M: That depends on your boss. I can...speaking from experience, in the last office that I worked in, yes! I had to look busy, it was really quite silly, even if you didn't have any work to do and you'd done all your work, you had to look busy, umm...Otherwise, you know, you'd get in trouble for it.

L: Yeah, you know, I worked in a **drugstore** in the States when I was a teenager; it was my very first full-time job.

M: A drug...A drugstore? We would say a **chemist** in British English.

L: Yeah, it was...I don't even know if...

M: Is that a **pharmacy**?

L: Well they had a pharmacy in the back.

M: Ok, ok.

L: It was called *Save-On Drugs*

M: Right, no I'm sorry to interrupt, I just wanted...wondered...

L: No, it's ok

M: The difference with the British and American English.

L: Yeah well, this was the kind of place, they had the pharmacy in the back

M: Yeah

L: They had a liquor department where they sold the wine and **booze** and...

M: Yeah

L: All of that and then they sold clothes, cosmetics...

M: Ok, so it's almost...it's almost like a...a supermarket really, I mean...

L: Yeah they had some food, but it was more snacks, like **chips** and..

M: Ok, all right, I get the picture

L: You know, you would call **crisps**, I guess

M: We would, yes that's right, yeah!

L: And all types of things for the house and garden and pet food and...and things

M: Right, ok

L: But yeah, I worked there as a **cashier**

M: Mmm hmm...

L: For about a year, full-time. And I can remember how horrible it was to just have to look busy all the time, even when there was really just nothing to do.

M: Ok, so you'd be sitting at your...the **cash desk**

L: Well we had to stand.

M: Oh no!

L: So you would be standing up for eight hours a day it was, uh, 4 hours...

M: There was no little seat that you could sit back on, or?

L: No, no, you just, you were standing the whole day.

M: Oh, I **feel really sorry for you** now

L: It was horrible

M: I'm amazed you managed to **last** for a year.

L: Oh it was, it was such a horrible job, I hated that job so much; you can't even begin...I can't begin to tell you how horrible it was.

M: Ok.

L: Just from...In fact, I'm not the kind of person who gets bored...

M: No

L: I never get bored. But if I really think back, that was probably the most boring time of my life, I think that I ever had, was having to stand there in that **check-stand** doing this mindless job...

M: Oh yeah

L: **Running people through** as fast as you can while being polite and courteous and smiling, and they would be so rude sometimes, the people who would come through.

M: Ahh...But do you know?

L: Just really rude.

M: That's something that I've often thought about, is that when you're working...um, in service industry or **retail**

L: Uh huh

M: They seem to have this **mantra** that *the customer is always right* and even if the customer misbehaves and is rude and unpleasant...

L: Yeah

M: Then you, as a cashier or...or...someone, whoever, whatever your role is

L: Mm hmm

M: That you must always be polite, always be courteous, always smile and accept that the customer is always right, even if they're not.

L: Right, right.

M: And...and I think that's tough for anybody to **take**, if...if that's your job, you know, you have to **bite your tongue**, as we would say. Umm...

L: Right, 'cause customers can be, you know, uninformed, or

M: Yeah

L: Ignorant or in a hurry or, or whatever, but some of them were just so rude, horrible, like taking out all of their frustration on the world, I mean I had customers throw money at me!

M: Huh!

L: Because of, for whatever reason, they were upset about something that had nothing to do with me and they would come through, actually throw their money at me.

M: That's awful

L: That happened a few times.

M: I would...I would...I would **squash** their shopping. I had a friend of mine, umm, used to work as a cashier in a supermarket and she told me that whenever a customer was rude to her, she couldn't be rude **back**, but what she would do is when she would pack the shopping...so she would have the plastic bag that she would put the things in and instead of...they were taught how you should pack shopping, that you put the heavy, solid stuff in the bottom first, so she would do things like, she would take the bread and the eggs and all the stuff that would squash, put them in the bottom and put the heavy stuff on the top of it!

L: Oh, funny!

M: You know, and that made her feel a bit better, to get a bit of revenge, you know and...

L: Yeah, yeah, but in a way, I mean having been a cashier myself, that...I would not dare to do that because that gives that customer just more reason to complain, because that's such an obvious sign of incompetence.

M: Of course I mean...

L: Putting the eggs on the bottom.

M: It's very unprofessional, but it's umm, you know, uhh

L: I would probably try to look...look at their car and then go out and **slash their tires** or something later on

M: Hahahahaha

L: It's like I'm mean, **vindictive**

M: I know that you're joking, I know you're joking!

L: You think I'm joking?

M: I hope you're joking!

L: Just kidding!

Final words

I hope you've enjoyed this episode of Real English Conversations. Before I sign off, here are this week's announcements.

First, because I really want to post more frequent episodes for you, I've been looking for ways to streamline my work process. So from now on, I am not going to put the transcript on the web page itself. I'll just provide pdf and Microsoft Word documents for you to download from the website. Not having to format the html for each episode will save me between one and two hours per podcast. I'm curious to know how you react to this, so if you have strong feelings one way or another, please let me know. I've put a new poll up in the sidebar of the website to make it easy for you to have your say.

Second, thanks to everyone who has voted in other poll on the website. It appears that close to 80% of you are learners of English, 9% are teachers, and another 9% are both. About 2% of you are neither teachers nor learners of English.

That's it for this time! As always, the transcription and vocabulary notes for this podcast are available at our website, www.betteratenglish.com. And remember, if you enjoy our show, please consider leaving a donation. We really appreciate your support. Bye for now!

Vocabulary List

springs to mind

If something *springs to mind*, it means that it occurs to you, or that you think of it.

looking over

If someone is looking over you, they are watching you to make sure you are doing what you are supposed to do.

atmosphere

The *atmosphere* or *climate* of a workplace is the general character or mood of the workplace.

regimented

If something is *regimented*, it means that it is rigidly structured, usually with many rules (as in a military organization).

chemist

In British English, a chemist is a person whose job it is to prepare prescription medicines. The shops that sell medicines are called *chemist's*.

pharmacy

American English word for shops that sell prescription medicines. Also called *drugstores* or *druggist's*. The people who prepare the medicines are called *pharmacists* or *druggists*.

booze

Booze is an informal word for alcohol (usually strong types, such as vodka and other spirits).

chips and crisps

In American English, chips are paper-thin crispy fried snacks, such as potato chips or corn chips. In British English, these are called *crisps*. In British English, *chips* are thicker slices of raw potatoes that are deep fried in oil and usually served as a side dish (such as fish'n'chips).

cash desk

The cash desk (British English) is the place in a shop where you pay for your items.

feel (really) sorry for

If you feel sorry for someone, you sympathize with them and feel sad because they are unhappy.

last

In this context, *to last* (verb) means *to continue*.

check-stand

The check-stand (American English) is where you go to pay for your items in a shop or supermarket. The person who takes your money is the *cashier* or *checker*.

running people through

In this context, *to run people through* means to move them through the line/queue quickly.

retail

Retail shops and businesses sell goods to the public, usually in small quantities.

mantra

A *mantra* (in this context) is a word or phrase that captures an important idea for a company or business. A company's mantra is supposed to guide their business practices.

take

In this case, to take something means to *accept* it, *tolerate* it, or *put up with* it.

bite your tongue

To *bite your tongue* is an idiom that means you stop yourself from saying something that you really want to say, usually because you would cause trouble if you said it.

squash

To *squash* something means to crush it with force until it loses its shape or becomes flat.

back

In this context, back means, *in return*. For example, "If customers are rude to you, you can't be rude *back* or you will lose your job."

slash their tires

To *slash* something means to rip or tear it violently with a sharp object, such as a knife. Lori would NEVER really slash someone's tires (unless they were selfish jerks who totally deserved it).

vindictive

If you are *vindictive*, you want to harm someone because you think they have harmed you. You don't want to forgive them.