

BEP 39 INT – Reporting: Project Update

Welcome back to *www.businessenglishpod.com*! In today's episode you'll practice reporting on progress. That means informing your boss or colleagues about your current work. This is also called updating someone on the status of a project.

Reporting on progress happens in formal settings, such as at meetings, but often also in informal settings, such as around the water cooler or maybe even over a drink after work.

Today's listening provides an example of this very common kind of informal product update. It takes place in the offices of AirMech Services, a company that specializes in the maintenance, repair and modification of Passenger Loading Bridges, which are commonly called "jetways." These are the bridges that connect an airplane to the flight arrival gate so that passengers can exit. Recently AirMech Services has been helping airports modify their jetways to fit the new Airbus A380 super-size passenger planes. You'll hear Rudi, a project manager, update his boss, Wolfgang, on the status of one such project. They meet each other during a break in the coffee room.

As you listen, pay attention to both the vocabulary and the verb tenses Rudi and Wolfgang use to discuss the progress of the project.

Before we start, here are today's Listening Comprehension Questions, remember to check the website for the answers:

1) What is Joe, the site engineer, worried about?

2) Does Rudi think he's right?

3) How do they plan to respond to the problem?

4) How does Wolfgang, the boss, feel about the solution?

Vocabulary:

non-performing rate – Refers to the rate of bad loans—the amount of loans that people stop paying. Bad loans are called non-performers because they fail to perform.

to leverage sth. – A lever is a bar or a stick that is used to gain mechanical advantage in lifting or moving something. To leverage something is to use it as a lever—that is use it to your advantage to get a job done.

due diligence procedures – Due diligence procedures just means your methods for satisfactorily investigating the background or risk of something. Notice that

Dialog:

Wolfgang: How's it going, Rudi.

Rudi: Not bad. Just got back from terminal A.

Wolfgang: Really? Speaking of terminal A, can you give me a quick update on Gate 53?

Rudi: Sure. Well, no major issues.

Wolfgang: That's good.

Rudi: But Joe, the site engineer, has run the new numbers in autocad, and he's worried that the A380 aft passenger door might damage the mountings on the jetway extension.

Wolfgang: Hmm. Are you sure he's right? I don't want us to be doing any one offs unless it's really necessary.

Rudi: Actually, I think he's really on the ball with this one. I'm quite impressed with his work.

Wolfgang: So, what are we going to do?

Rudi: Well, Joe has already designed a modification. The new build shouldn't be much more expensive.

Wolfgang: That's fine, just check with Ella in Contracts to make sure we're covered for the costs. Then shoot me an email.

Rudi: No problem. Of course. But I still think we're coming in way under budget.

Wolfgang: What about making the deadline? Any problems there?

Rudi: I don't think so. Joe is carrying out tests over the next couple days. We'll be able to make up for lost time over the weekend.

Wolfgang: Good. I want you to prepare a brief report on this for Tuesday's key accounts meeting. I think we have a good story to tell here about how we bend over backwards to meet customer requirements...

Debrief:

It sounds like Joe, the project engineer, deserves a promotion – for once everything has gone well.

Let's go through the dialogue together.

When the listening begins, Joe and Rudi have met each other in the break room, where they are having a cup of coffee. Rudi says that he has just gotten back from Terminal A. A terminal is the place where transport vehicles—in this case airplanes—unload passengers and goods. That is where Rudi is working on one of his projects, the extension of a jetway at gate 53. Extension means to make longer.

When Wolfgang hears that Rudi has just returned from terminal A, he uses this opportunity to ask Rudi about his project. How does he do this? Let's listen again.

Wolfgang: **Really? Speaking of terminal A, can you give me a quick update on Gate 53?**

This is a great informal way to ask a colleague or a subordinate about the status of a project. First Rudi links to what was just said – “Speaking of terminal A” – then he asks about the project – “Can you give me a quick update on Gate 53?” Let's practice some more examples of this technique.

- **Talking of Paris, would you mind giving me a brief report on the marketing activities there.**
- **While we're on the topic of pharmaceuticals, can you bring me up to speed on the new factory.**
- **So, fill me in on the Hannover project. What's going on there?**
- **Speaking of the release date, how about promotion activities? What's the latest?**

How does Rudi respond to Wolfgang's request for an update? Remember, he says “No major issues.” Here “issues” is a nice way of saying “problems.” This use of “issue” to mean problem is common in business English; it makes you sound more optimistic or positive. Basically, Rudi is telling Wolfgang that everything is fine. What else could he have said to communicate this idea?

- **No worries, everything is looking good.**
- **Everything's on track.**
- **Good news! It's all smooth sailing over here.**
- **We're looking good.**

There is, however, one minor issue with Rudi's project, isn't there? What is it? Let's listen to Rudi explain again.

Rudi: **But Joe, the site engineer, has run the new numbers in autocad, and he's worried that the A380 aft passenger door might damage the mountings on the jetway extension.**

Rudi says that Joe, the site engineer, has found a possible problem. A site engineer is an engineer who works on site—at the place where the construction is being done. Joe is worried that the aft—that is the rear—passenger door will damage the jetway when it opens.

Joe has run the new numbers in autocad. Autocad is software that engineers and architects use for design. “To run numbers in autocad” means to analyze a building or structure in the autocad software, looking for problems or faults.

Pay attention to the verb tense that Rudi uses here—"has run." This is the present perfect. Rudi doesn't use the simple past tense, that is "Joe ran the numbers," because the activity—running the numbers in autocad—is important now. This aspect of the present perfect tense—that it's used to describe something that has present relevance—makes it suitable for giving news to someone. That makes it a very common tense in reporting on progress.

So how does Wolfgang respond to the problem?

Wolfgang: *Hmm. Are you sure he's right? I don't want us to be doing any one offs unless it's really necessary.*

A "one off" is a special solution that takes time and resources but can't be repeated for other companies. Rudi responds by saying that "Joe is on the ball with this one." "To be on the ball" is an idiom that means to have ability and be alert.

Wolfgang's next question is "What are we going to do?" "Going to" is used to ask about plans or things that have already been decided. Then Rudi says

Rudi: *Well, Joe has already designed a modification. The new build shouldn't be much more expensive.*

Notice Rudi uses the present perfect tense again here ("has done")—"Joe has already designed a modification." Again, he doesn't use the simple past tense—Joe designed a modification—because Joe's modification is relevant now. It's important to their current work.

The expression "the new build" refers to Joe's modification. In construction or engineering, a "build" refers to a design. The "new build" is a new design.

What does Wolfgang say next?

Wolfgang: *That's fine, just check with Ella in Contracts to make sure we're covered for the costs. Then shoot me an email.*

What does Wolfgang mean by "make sure we're covered for the costs." When you buy insurance, it's called insurance coverage. So if you buy fire insurance, you're covered for fire. In the dialogue, Wolfgang is concerned about whether their contract says the customer will pay for this modification. Another way to say this is that the contract covers AirMech for the cost of such modifications.

"Shoot me an email" is another idiomatic expression. It means "send me an email." You can also say "fire me off an email."

Getting back to our dialogue, how does Rudi respond to Wolfgang's request to send an email to the contracts department to ask whether or not the contract covers them for the modification? He says, "No problem. Of course. But I still think we're coming in way under budget." That means Rudi doesn't think they will go over budget.

All right, back to our dialogue. What's Wolfgang's next concern?

Wolfgang: What about making the deadline? Any problems there?

Rudi: I don't think so. Joe is carrying out tests over the next couple days. We'll be able to make up for lost time over the weekend.

There are three great collocations (or word partnerships) here that are useful for reporting on progress. Remember, study words in groups and phrases to improve your fluency. "To make a deadline," to "make up for lost time" and "to carry out tests." "To make a deadline" is the same as "to meet a deadline." "To make up for" means to compensate for, so "to make up for lost time" means to catch up by when you have fallen behind.

What if Rudi thought that they would not make the deadline? What could he say then?

- It looks as though we might be going a little over deadline.
- I'm not totally sure we are going to be able to meet that deadline.
- We've run into a few unexpected issues that might affect our ability to make the deadline.

Finally, before we finish up today, let's listen to how Wolfgang finishes up their short informal progress meeting.

Wolfgang: Good. I want you to prepare a brief report on this for Tuesday's key accounts meeting. I think we have a good story to tell here about how we bend over backwards to meet customer requirements...

Wolfgang uses an interesting idiom here: To bend over backwards to meet customer requirements. Obviously, bending over backwards is awkward and difficult, "to so bend over backwards to do something" means to spend an unusually large amount of energy to get a job done. You can also say, "bend over backwards for someone." For example, AirMech is always bending over backwards for its customers. Note also that Wolfgang uses another good collocation here—"to meet customer requirements," which means the same as "satisfy customer requirements."

Well, that just about covers our topic today. You've reviewed the present perfect tense in reporting and you've learned several useful idioms and collocations for talking about projects. You've also studied phrases for asking for a status update as well as diplomatic ways for talking about deadlines and budgets.

In the meanwhile, Be sure to visit our website at www.businessenglishpod.com to have a look at the study notes for this and other episodes and you can also check your answers to the listening questions.

Take care and we'll see you next time!

Language Review Questions:

Exercise A

Match the idiom with its meaning.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) to one off something/ to do a one off | a. to have ability and be alert. |
| 2) to bend over backwards | b. to come up with a special solution that takes time and resources but can't be repeated for other customers |
| 3) to be on the ball | c. to spend an unusually large amount of time or energy and work extraordinarily hard to get a job done |

Exercise B

Match up each verb with a corresponding noun to form a collocation.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1) make up for | a. a few unexpected issues |
| 2) make | b. lost time |
| 3) carry out | c. customer requirements |
| 4) run into | d. tests |
| 5) meet | e. a deadline |

Useful Language:

Let's start with some phrases to informally ask a colleague or a subordinate about the status of a project.

- Talking of Paris, would you mind giving me a brief report on the marketing activities there.
- While we're on the topic of pharmaceuticals, can you bring me up to speed on the new factory.
- So, fill me in on the Hannover project. What's going on there?
- Speaking of the release date, how about promotion activities? What's the latest?

To let the other person know that the project is going well, you can say:

- No worries, everything is looking good.
- Everything's on track.
- Good news! It's all smooth sailing over here.
- We're looking good.

If you are concerned about the deadline, you can say:

- It looks as though we might be going a little over deadline.
- I'm not totally sure we are going to be able to meet that deadline.
- We've run into a few unexpected issues that might affect our ability to make the deadline.

Answers

Listening Comprehension

- 1) Joe's worried that the A380 aft (rear) door will cause damage to the new jetway extension.
- 2) Yes. Rudi agrees with Joe and says that Joe is "on the ball," which means to have ability and be alert.
- 3) Modify the jetway extension.
- 4) Wolfgang is cautious about committing the company to "one offs," special solutions that take time and resources but can't be repeated for other companies. But he also thinks that the solution proposed by Joe and Rudi demonstrates AirMech's good service attitude, and could be used as a marketing tool.

Language Review

Exercise A

- 1) b. 2) c. 3) a.

Exercise B

- 1) b. 2) e. 3) d. 4) a. 5) c. or e.