

Lesson 5: Restructuring

Group size: any, also one-to-one
Level: pre-intermediate upwards
Lesson focus: restructuring and changes in the company
Language focus: using set phrases and idioms to talk about difficult (financial) situations and how these can be dealt with
Materials: a set of Business Top Trump cards; a copy of the worksheet for each student; cut-out voting slips for each Business Top Trumps character used

restructure verb [transitive] /ˌriːˈstrʌktʃə(r)/
to organize something such as a company in a different way so that it will operate better

crisis noun [countable/uncountable] /ˈkraɪsɪs/
an urgent, difficult, or dangerous situation

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This lesson plan looks at a few of the least pleasant aspects of working in a company: restructuring, downsizing and possibly even insolvency and bankruptcy. It includes two writing exercises in which employees are informed of company decisions.

Financial crisis

In Task 1, the opening question is about the recent (or current) recession. Ask students to talk about how their company or other companies in their field of business have coped with the financial crisis and economic downturn. Alternatively, if the students are not currently working, they could talk more generally about branches of industry that have managed to survive the recession or even take advantage of it, and companies / industries which have collapsed or suffered heavily.

Explaining the situation

Place the cards for Jolene, Robert and Reginald face upwards on a table, or where all the students can see them. Explain that these three people are having a meeting to discuss the Top Trumps company's situation. Tell the students to read the situation outlined in the text box, then ask them why the meeting is being held and why these three people are involved. Put the students in groups

of three or four to discuss the situation and ask them to make some basic suggestions as to how the company could get through this difficult time. Students should discuss what they think Jolene, Robert and Reginald would say at this meeting, using words and phrases from the 'useful language' box as well as ideas of their own. Alternatively, the students could take on the roles of Jolene, Reginald and Robert (the additional role could be that of Valerie, who would attend the meeting in order to take notes / minutes).

When they have finished, refer students to part *b* of the task and ask them to plan and write an email from Robert to all the employees of the company which informs them of the situation and invites them to a 'crisis' meeting.

Voting

Shuffle the cards and deal them out between the students. If the students have more than two cards each, ask them to decide which two cards they would like to keep and discard the others. If you have a very small group, the students could keep three cards each.

Ask the students to read the two options as suggested in Robert's email and check that they fully understand. Without conferring with the other students, they should decide which option the people on their cards will vote for.

When everyone is ready, hold a secret ballot. Give each student either two or three voting slips, depending on how many character cards they are holding and ask them, for each slip, to secretly put an 'x' in the box that they think their character would mark. Collect in the slips, count up the votes and give the results.

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Advanced version

Prior to the vote, the students hold an information meeting. Two students should take on the roles of Robert and Jolene. The other students should take on the role of one of the people on their cards and take on the role of proxy for the person on their other card (i.e. they can vote and ask questions on their behalf).

In the meeting, Robert and / or Jolene explains the situation to the employees. The employees ask questions to gather more information (which Robert and Jolene may invent as necessary) before holding the vote to decide which option the company will take.

Writing task

Ask the students to write an email communicating the results of the vote to all employees of the company.

Advanced version

Tell the students to write a press release about the decision taken by the company. The public needs to be assured that the company will survive the crisis.

Both of these pieces of writing should have a positive slant and a reassuring tone. The students should look at the idioms in the box and try to naturally include one or two of them if possible.

Extension

- If the students / employees decided on Option 1, ask them to decide who should be made redundant and why.
- If the students / employees decided on Option 2, get the students to talk about how the employee on their card(s) is likely to deal with the situation. Will they work harder? Will they look for other jobs?

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1 Financial crisis

How has the recent financial crisis affected your company and its business partners? How has it affected your particular field of business?

2 Explaining the situation

a. Read about the current situation in the Business Top Trumps company in the box below.

Orders are down, overheads are high and the industry in general is suffering.

Robert and Jolene held an emergency meeting, to which they invited Reginald. At the meeting they concluded that to get the company through the financial crisis, and to avoid insolvency, something must be done very soon to get them through this difficult time.

b. Write an email from Robert asking all the employees to attend an important meeting. Outline the situation and explain that two possible options will be presented at the meeting. Remember to give the time and place of the meeting. Attendance is obligatory.

Useful language:

downsize, make s/b redundant, reduce working hours, cancel overtime, cut an employee's salary / wages, merge with another company, be taken over by another company, fall in profits, reduction in orders, increase in overheads, become insolvent, review a situation

3 Voting

At the meeting, Jolene presents the two options. Which option will the employees vote for?

Option 1

Three employees must be made redundant with immediate effect. If the situation does not improve, another two or three may have to leave in six months' time.

Option 2

Each and every employee's working hours and pay must be cut by 25% for one year. There will be no redundancies in this period but the situation will be reviewed in 12 months.

4 Writing task

Write another email communicating the results of the vote to the employees of the company. Try to use one or two of the idioms in the box below.

Idioms

Here are some water-related idioms that can be used to talk about staying in business:

stay afloat

keep our heads above water

avoid sinking

(not) go under

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

Option 1

Option 2

