



American Expression E0037 A bridge too far

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"A bridge too far" is an idiomatic expression used to describe an ambitious or unrealistic goal, plan, or expectation that is unlikely to be achieved or realized. It signifies a situation where someone has overreached or set their sights on something that is beyond their capabilities or resources.

The phrase originated from the military context, specifically the failed Allied operation during World War II known as "Operation Market Garden." The operation aimed to secure several key bridges in the Netherlands to allow for an advance into Germany. However, the attempt to capture the final bridge, named Arnhem Bridge, proved to be excessively challenging and ultimately unsuccessful. The phrase "a bridge too far" emerged as a reflection of the operation's overambitious objective.

When someone or a group is described as attempting "a bridge too far," it implies that they have taken on a task or goal that is beyond their reach or exceeds their abilities. It suggests that they have underestimated the difficulties or obstacles involved and are likely to face disappointment or failure.

The expression is commonly used in both personal and professional contexts. It can refer to individuals who set unrealistic personal goals, such as pursuing an unattainable career path or attempting to achieve an outcome that requires more resources or expertise than they possess.

In a business setting, "a bridge too far" may describe a company's overly ambitious expansion plans or unrealistic revenue targets that are unlikely to be met given the current market conditions or available resources.

It is important to note that while the phrase often implies a sense of caution or warning against taking on unattainable goals, it does not necessarily suggest discouragement from pursuing ambitious endeavors altogether. Instead, it serves as a reminder to carefully assess the feasibility and potential challenges associated with a particular goal or plan.

In summary, "a bridge too far" is an idiomatic expression used to describe an overly ambitious or unrealistic goal, plan, or expectation. It originated from the failed military operation during World War II known as "Operation Market Garden." The phrase indicates that someone or a group has taken on a task that is beyond their capabilities or resources, and it suggests that they are likely to encounter difficulties or failure. The expression serves as a reminder to assess the feasibility and potential obstacles before pursuing ambitious endeavors.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever encountered a situation where you or someone else pursued "a bridge too far"? How did it unfold, and what were the lessons learned from that experience?
 2. What are some indicators or warning signs that can help individuals or organizations recognize when they are setting unrealistic goals or pursuing ventures that may be "a bridge too far"? How can one strike a balance between ambition and practicality?
 3. Are there instances where attempting "a bridge too far" can still yield positive outcomes or unexpected success, despite the initial challenges or setbacks? Can you think of examples where individuals or organizations exceeded expectations despite facing seemingly insurmountable odds?
 4. How can the fear of failure or the desire for rapid progress contribute to the tendency of setting unrealistic goals or pursuing ventures that may be unattainable? How can individuals or teams cultivate a more realistic and sustainable approach to goal-setting and decision-making?
 5. What strategies or approaches can be employed to prevent or address situations where individuals or organizations find themselves pursuing "a bridge too far"? How can the recognition of limitations, effective planning, and risk assessment contribute to more realistic goal-setting and improved outcomes?
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