



American Expression E1325 Move the goal posts

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The expression "move the goal posts" is a commonly used idiom that originates from the world of sports, particularly football (both American and association football, known as soccer). In its literal sense, moving the goal posts means physically shifting the upright posts or markers at either end of the playing field to change the location of the goals. This action would typically be considered unfair and disrupt the integrity of the game. However, in its figurative sense, "move the goal posts" has a broader and more metaphorical meaning.

In everyday language, "move the goal posts" refers to changing the criteria, standards, or expectations of a particular situation or endeavor after a process has already begun or progress has been made. This adjustment is often made to make a task or achievement more challenging or to place additional demands on those involved. Essentially, it's a way of making it harder for someone to reach a previously defined goal or objective.

The phrase is often used to highlight situations where individuals or entities, such as employers, authorities, or decision-makers, alter the rules or conditions of a situation to their advantage or to the detriment of others. This change can be perceived as unfair, as it undermines the efforts and progress of those who were working toward the initial goal.

In a workplace context, "moving the goal posts" can take various forms. For instance, an employer might change performance metrics or job expectations without prior notice, making it more challenging for employees to meet their targets or earn incentives. Similarly, in education, teachers or administrators might modify grading criteria or assignments, leaving students feeling frustrated and disadvantaged.

In politics and public discourse, the expression is often used to criticize shifting policy positions or campaign promises. When politicians "move the goal posts," they may change their stances on key issues, making it difficult for voters to hold them accountable for their original positions.

In personal relationships, "moving the goal posts" can refer to someone changing their expectations or demands within a relationship, potentially causing confusion or frustration for the other party. This can apply to romantic relationships, friendships, or family dynamics.

The concept of "moving the goal posts" emphasizes the importance of consistency, fairness, and transparency in various aspects of life. It implies that when rules or expectations are set, they should be adhered to unless there are compelling reasons for changes, and these changes should be communicated clearly and fairly to all parties involved.

In summary, "move the goal posts" is a figurative expression that draws from the world of sports and refers to the act of changing criteria or expectations in a way that makes it more difficult for individuals to achieve previously established goals. This idiom underscores the importance of fairness, consistency, and transparent communication in various contexts, from the workplace to politics and personal relationships.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you provide an example from your personal or professional life where you felt someone was "moving the goal posts"? How did this affect your ability to reach your goals or meet expectations?
 2. In what contexts, such as education, work, or politics, is it more common for individuals or organizations to "move the goal posts"? Are there specific consequences or implications when this occurs in different areas?
 3. How can individuals and organizations maintain transparency and fairness when adjusting criteria or expectations without being accused of "moving the goal posts"? Are there best practices for effectively communicating such changes?
 4. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to navigate changing expectations or criteria? What strategies did you employ to adapt and continue working toward your goals despite these changes?
 5. Can you think of instances in which "moving the goal posts" might be justifiable or necessary? What criteria or considerations should be taken into account when making such changes to avoid unfairness or perceived manipulation?
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