



American Expression E1356 The blind leading the blind

IOTS Publishing Team  
International Online Teachers Society  
Since 2011

"The blind leading the blind" is a vivid and thought-provoking idiom that is often used to describe a situation in which uninformed or inexperienced individuals are attempting to guide or provide leadership to others who are equally uninformed or inexperienced. This expression paints a metaphorical picture of individuals who lack the necessary knowledge, insight, or competence attempting to lead or offer guidance to others who are equally ill-equipped, resulting in a situation where no one truly knows what they are doing.

The origin of this idiom can be traced back to biblical and ancient texts. It appears in the Bible in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 15:14), where Jesus uses the phrase to admonish the Pharisees, religious leaders of the time, for their hypocrisy and lack of spiritual understanding. The full verse states, "Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

In its contemporary usage, "the blind leading the blind" extends beyond religious contexts and serves as a cautionary metaphor applicable to various situations. It is often invoked to highlight the dangers or absurdities of allowing individuals who lack expertise, knowledge, or qualifications to assume positions of authority or leadership.

This expression underscores the potential consequences of ignorance or incompetence in leadership roles. When those who are ill-informed or inexperienced attempt to guide or instruct others, it can lead to confusion, misdirection, and even disaster. It implies a lack of clarity, direction, or understanding in the collective group, and it suggests that progress or success is unlikely under such circumstances.

Moreover, "the blind leading the blind" can also be used to critique systems, organizations, or institutions that are characterized by ineffectual or misguided leadership. In such cases, the phrase serves as a commentary on the dysfunctionality or ineptitude within the group or system.

In everyday life, this idiom is employed to caution against following advice or guidance from individuals who lack credibility, expertise, or a track record of success in a particular area. It encourages people to be discerning and critical thinkers, especially when it comes to seeking guidance or leadership.

While "the blind leading the blind" has a humorous or satirical undertone, it also carries a serious message about the importance of competent leadership and the value of knowledge and expertise. It prompts individuals to consider the qualifications and abilities of those they choose to follow or trust.

In summary, "the blind leading the blind" is a metaphorical expression that portrays a situation in which uninformed or inexperienced individuals attempt to provide guidance or leadership to others who are equally uninformed or inexperienced. It serves as a cautionary reminder of the potential consequences of inept leadership, emphasizes the importance of knowledge and expertise, and encourages individuals to exercise discernment when seeking guidance or direction in various aspects of life.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. Can you think of real-life examples where the expression "the blind leading the blind" accurately describes a situation or leadership dynamic? What were the outcomes or consequences of such scenarios?
2. How does this idiom highlight the importance of qualifications, expertise, and competence in leadership roles? In what ways can organizations or institutions ensure that individuals in leadership positions are adequately equipped to lead effectively?
3. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you followed advice or guidance from someone who was ill-informed or inexperienced in a particular area? What lessons did you learn from that experience, and how did it affect your decision-making in the future?
4. How does "the blind leading the blind" relate to the concept of mentorship and guidance? What qualities should individuals look for in mentors or guides to ensure they are receiving valuable and informed support?
5. In your opinion, what are the potential risks or pitfalls of allowing unqualified or inexperienced individuals to assume leadership positions, whether in organizations, communities, or society as a whole? How can these risks be mitigated or minimized?