



American Expression E1507 When push comes to shove

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

"When push comes to shove" is a common idiomatic expression used in the English language to describe a situation where things have become difficult, challenging, or critical, and decisive action or resolution is required. This phrase implies that the situation has escalated to a point where one can no longer delay making a decision or taking action. It signifies a moment of truth or a turning point.

The origin of this phrase is somewhat unclear, but it likely has roots in physical confrontations or conflicts where a literal push or shove might have been the last resort. Over time, it has evolved into a metaphorical expression applicable to a wide range of situations.

In everyday life, "when push comes to shove" can be applied to various scenarios. For example, it can refer to a person's response to a challenging task or problem. When faced with a difficult project or a looming deadline, individuals often procrastinate or avoid the issue until they can no longer delay, and they must take action. At that point, they are said to be in a "push comes to shove" moment, where they have to tackle the problem head-on.

In relationships, this expression can describe a situation where a couple is facing a significant challenge or disagreement that cannot be ignored any longer. It signifies the need for open communication and resolution to maintain the relationship's health.

In the business world, "when push comes to shove" often relates to financial matters or critical decisions. Companies may use this phrase to describe the moment when they must make tough choices to address financial difficulties, restructure their operations, or adapt to changing market conditions.

In politics and diplomacy, this expression can be applied when negotiations reach a critical point, and parties involved must make key decisions to resolve a dispute or crisis. It signifies that diplomatic efforts have been exhausted, and it's time for decisive action.

"When push comes to shove" underscores the importance of taking action in the face of adversity or difficult circumstances. It implies that delaying or avoiding the problem is no longer an option and that one must confront the issue directly. This phrase encourages individuals, groups, or entities to be proactive and make tough decisions when necessary, even if those decisions are uncomfortable or challenging.

In summary, "when push comes to shove" is a metaphorical expression used to describe a critical moment or turning point in various aspects of life, including personal challenges, relationships, business, and diplomacy. It emphasizes the need to confront difficult situations head-on and make decisive choices when avoidance or delay is no longer feasible. This phrase reflects the idea that action and resolution become imperative when faced with adversity or pressing issues.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you share a personal experience when you found yourself in a "when push comes to shove" situation, and how did you handle it?
2. In what ways does the phrase "when push comes to shove" apply to decision-making processes in business and how can it impact the outcomes of those decisions?
3. How does effective communication play a role in resolving conflicts and reaching resolutions when "push comes to shove" in personal relationships?
4. Can you provide an example from history or current events where political leaders faced a critical "when push comes to shove" moment, and what were the consequences of their actions?
5. When dealing with difficult challenges, how do individuals and organizations differentiate between situations that require immediate action and those that can be postponed, even when it seems like "push comes to shove"?