



American Expression E2054 Call a spade a spade

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"Call a spade a spade" is an idiomatic expression that encourages straightforward and honest communication. This phrase dates back to ancient Greece, where it was first coined by the philosopher Plutarch. In his essay "Of the Training of Children," Plutarch wrote, "To call a fig a fig, a trough a trough, and a spade a spade, is the act of a true, plain-speaking man." Over time, this expression has been adopted and adapted across different cultures and languages, emphasizing the importance of candor and clarity in our interactions.

The essence of "Call a spade a spade" lies in its call for unvarnished truthfulness and directness in communication. It serves as a reminder that we should not sugarcoat or obfuscate reality, but instead, we should use plain and precise language to describe things as they are, even if it means addressing uncomfortable or sensitive topics. By doing so, we promote transparency, honesty, and authenticity in our conversations.

In a world filled with euphemisms, political correctness, and circumlocution, this phrase encourages us to cut through the verbal clutter and get to the heart of the matter. It discourages the use of vague or misleading language that can obscure the truth and lead to misunderstandings. When we call a spade a spade, we help ensure that our messages are clear, unequivocal, and easily understood by others.

Embracing this principle in our personal lives can foster stronger relationships built on trust and open communication. It enables us to express our thoughts and feelings honestly, which can lead to more meaningful connections with friends, family, and colleagues. By addressing issues directly and candidly, we can resolve conflicts, offer constructive criticism, and provide valuable feedback without the need for subterfuge or passive-aggressive behavior.

In the realm of business and leadership, "Call a spade a spade" is a valuable mantra. Leaders who practice this approach are more likely to gain the trust of their teams and make informed decisions based on accurate information. It also promotes a culture of accountability, as employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and provide forthright assessments of their work.

Furthermore, this expression is particularly relevant in journalism and media, where the dissemination of accurate and unbiased information is essential for an informed society. Journalists who adhere to this principle strive to report the facts objectively, free from bias or sensationalism, ensuring that the public receives a clear and unvarnished view of events.

In conclusion, "Call a spade a spade" is a timeless reminder of the importance of honesty and clarity in our communication. It encourages us to eschew obfuscation and embrace the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. By doing so, we can foster better relationships, make informed decisions, and contribute to a more transparent and open society. Ultimately, this idiom serves as a valuable guide for living a life characterized by integrity and directness in our words and actions.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the expression "Call a spade a spade" promote clear and honest communication in various aspects of life, such as personal relationships and business?
 2. Can you share an example from your own experience when adhering to the principle of calling a spade a spade led to a positive outcome or improved understanding in a situation?
 3. In what ways might euphemisms and vague language hinder effective communication, and how can embracing this idiom help overcome those challenges?
 4. Do you think there are situations where using straightforward language might be considered impolite or insensitive? How can individuals strike a balance between honesty and tactfulness?
 5. How does the concept of "calling a spade a spade" apply to the realms of journalism and media, and why is it crucial for the dissemination of accurate information and maintaining public trust?
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