



American Expression E2525 Make no bones about

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

The expression “make no bones about” is an idiom used to describe speaking plainly and directly about something without hesitation, evasion, or apology. When someone makes no bones about a subject, they are upfront about their thoughts, opinions, or intentions. The phrase often suggests a kind of blunt honesty that avoids sugarcoating or hiding behind politeness. It is a way of saying that someone is not afraid to state things as they are, regardless of whether the message might be uncomfortable for others to hear.

The origins of the phrase are somewhat debated, but many linguistic historians trace it back to the fifteenth century. At that time, it was connected with eating broth or soup. If a dish contained no bones, it was easy to swallow and presented no difficulty. By contrast, a soup with bones made eating troublesome. Over time, this idea of “no bones” came to symbolize something that was straightforward and without obstacles, eventually evolving into the figurative meaning we recognize today.

In modern usage, the phrase often emphasizes the confidence and clarity with which someone presents their perspective. For example, a manager might say, “I’ll make no bones about it, we need to cut expenses immediately.” The phrase here indicates that the manager is not going to soften the reality of the situation. Similarly, a politician might declare, “I make no bones about supporting this policy,” showing that they are willing to openly stand by their position without fear of controversy.

While the expression can be admirable, showing courage and honesty, it can also carry a sharper edge depending on delivery. Making no bones about a subject might come across as blunt or even harsh if the speaker ignores tact or sensitivity. Therefore, much depends on the tone, relationship, and circumstances under which the phrase is used. Directness is valuable, but it must be balanced with consideration for how others will receive the message.

Culturally, the phrase reflects a broader appreciation for honesty and authenticity. People often admire those who are willing to be transparent rather than evasive. In workplaces, relationships, and even public discourse, making no bones about one’s views can build trust by showing consistency between words and actions. The idiom highlights the human preference for clarity over ambiguity, especially in situations where uncertainty can be unsettling.

The phrase also underscores the power of language to transform simple physical imagery into complex ideas. What began as a metaphor about soup bones now conveys ideas about honesty, transparency, and courage in communication. This shows how idioms carry historical layers of meaning while continuing to adapt to contemporary settings. It is one of many examples where figurative language enriches our ability to express attitudes and emotions.

In conclusion, “make no bones about” is an idiomatic expression that signifies plain, unhesitant honesty. Rooted in historical imagery of uncomplicated eating, it now serves as a way to highlight directness in speech or action. While it can sometimes feel blunt, it often communicates courage and conviction, making it a valuable expression of authenticity. Ultimately, it reflects the enduring human need for clear, straightforward communication in a world where words carry both meaning and power.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think people admire honesty when someone makes no bones about their opinion, even if it sounds blunt?
2. How can making no bones about a situation be both helpful and potentially harmful in communication?
3. In what types of situations is it most important to make no bones about your thoughts or decisions?
4. Do you believe cultural differences affect how people perceive blunt honesty expressed through this phrase?
5. How does the historical origin of “make no bones about” help explain its modern meaning?