



## American Expression E2683 Pass the buck

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The phrase “pass the buck” is an English idiom that means to avoid responsibility by shifting the blame or duty to someone else. When a person passes the buck, they try to make another individual responsible for a problem, decision, or mistake instead of accepting accountability themselves. The expression is commonly used in discussions about leadership, workplace behavior, and decision-making.

The origin of the phrase is believed to come from card games played in the United States during the nineteenth century, particularly poker. In these games, a marker known as a “buck” was placed in front of the player whose turn it was to deal the cards. If the player did not want to deal, they could pass the marker to the next player. Over time, this action of passing the marker became associated with avoiding a task or responsibility.

As the expression spread beyond gambling tables, it developed a broader meaning in everyday language. People began using “pass the buck” to describe situations where individuals shift blame or responsibility to others. For example, in a workplace, an employee might pass the buck by saying that a mistake was someone else’s fault instead of admitting their own role in the problem.

The phrase is often used when discussing leadership and accountability. Good leaders are expected to accept responsibility for the actions and outcomes of their teams. When leaders refuse to take responsibility and instead blame others, people may criticize them for passing the buck. The idiom therefore highlights the importance of honesty and integrity in positions of authority.

Interestingly, the opposite idea is captured in a famous statement by American President Harry S. Truman, who kept a sign on his desk that read “The buck stops here.” This phrase meant that he accepted final responsibility for decisions made under his leadership. The expression became widely known and is often quoted as an example of strong leadership and accountability.

In modern conversations, “pass the buck” can appear in discussions about politics, organizations, and personal relationships. It is usually used in a negative sense because avoiding responsibility can create frustration and weaken trust among people. When individuals refuse to accept accountability, problems often remain unresolved or become worse.

In conclusion, the idiom “pass the buck” refers to the act of shifting responsibility or blame onto someone else rather than accepting it oneself. Originating from a poker tradition involving a marker passed between players, the phrase evolved into a common expression describing avoidance of accountability. By understanding the meaning of this idiom, people can better recognize the importance of taking responsibility and acting with honesty in both personal and professional situations.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What does the idiom “pass the buck” mean, and in what situations is it commonly used?
2. How did the phrase “pass the buck” originate from card games like poker?
3. Why can passing the buck create problems in workplaces or organizations?
4. How does the idea of “The buck stops here” contrast with the concept of passing the buck?
5. What are some ways leaders or individuals can avoid passing the buck and instead take responsibility?