



THE PETER PRINCIPLE



Scan to review worksheet

Expemo code:
1C4R-F1BA-H61M

1

Warm up

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. What training did you have when you first started your career?
2. What do you need to do to advance in your company?
3. What training do managers receive in your company to do their jobs?





2

Focus on vocabulary

Match the following words with their correct definition.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. hier <u>ar</u> chical (adj.) | a. the food and drug administration, the American government department that is responsible for the safety of food and medicines |
| 2. in <u>co</u> mpetence (n) | b. say something that shows you don't think highly of someone |
| 3. ad <u>di</u> ctive (adj.) | c. someone who is quickly having a lot of success in a particular situation |
| 4. dis <u>re</u> spect (v) | d. referring to a system where people are organised from least to most important |
| 5. <u>ri</u> sing star (n) | e. lacking the skills and abilities needed to do a job or a task effectively |
| 6. FDA (n) | f. a situation where there is no challenge or difficulty and you feel safe, rather than trying new things or working harder |
| 7. <u>pa</u> tent (n) | g. the state of being difficult to understand |
| 8. <u>co</u> mfort zone (n) | h. a document which makes it official that someone invented a product, or has the sole right to sell it |
| 9. ob <u>sc</u> urity (n) | i. referring to something that is difficult to stop using |

Now, answer the questions below.

1. Which of these words could be used about someone who put their bare feet on a table in a cafe in Thailand?
2. Which of these could be applied to sitting on the sofa and watching Netflix?
3. Which one of these is something The Coca Cola Company will have?
4. Which one of these words could be applied to both heroin and chocolate?
5. Which of these words means that something is difficult to understand?
6. Which of these would you need to deal with if you were importing cakes into the United States?
7. Which of these could be used to describe a company, country or a gang?
8. Which of these are often used to describe actors, musicians and artists at the beginning of their careers?
9. Which of these might be used to describe anyone from a delivery person who brought the wrong pizza, to a President who you didn't think was good?



3

Watching for gist

Watch the video about The Peter Principle (00:00 - 06:30) and choose the best answer for the following questions.

1. The Peter Principle is the idea that ...
 - a. ... people are essentially quite incompetent in a corporate structure.
 - b. ... people have success early on, but less as they get older.
 - c. ... people are promoted until they are in a job they're not able to do well.

2. In the example story,
 - a. Diana ends up happier as she doesn't have the same levels of stress.
 - b. Both Diana and David end up feeling unhappy, despite initial success.
 - c. David ends up feeling more successful as he reaches greater heights.

3. The book about The Peter Principle was first published in ...
 - a. 1969.
 - b. 2018.
 - c. 2022.

4

Understanding the video

Part A: Complete the answers to the questions with one, two, or three words from the video.

1. **Where did Diana and David meet?** They met during a _____.
2. **What did they both hope to do with their careers?** They hoped that they would be able to _____.
3. **Why did they get promoted?** They were successful with their jobs and both got _____.
4. **What kind of manager was Diana?** While she was a skilled sales representative, she was a _____ manager.
5. **What happens to David due to his managerial performance?** He is promoted to the position of _____.
6. **Why does Diana now avoid David?** She doesn't want him to see _____.
7. **Why doesn't David sleep the night before his first board meeting?** He feels like a _____ at his job.

**Part B: Decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F).**

1. In the board meeting, the science team confirms that the drug is non-addictive. _____
2. The FDA has said that their product is safe to sell. _____
3. David feels happy and confident with the new research. _____

Part C: Which of the following are mentioned as being possible results of The Peter Principle? Tick all of the points mentioned.

1. The skills that get people promoted are not needed in their new job.
2. People get promoted because they accept a lower salary.
3. Managers lose motivation to work hard.
4. Managers become less knowledgeable about changes in the industry.
5. People feel less successful and unhappier.
6. Managers are often less accepting of change.
7. Managers create policies that other people don't understand because it makes them feel superior.
8. People work harder because they want to get promoted.
9. Companies don't function as well and become less competitive.

5**Skimming for gist**

You are going to read an article about The Peter Principle. Match the following sentences (A-H) to the correct gaps in the article on page five. There are more sentences than gaps.

- A. After all, not all industries are affected by it.
- B. However, no hard data was offered to support the principle.
- C. Lastly, if you find yourself about to work for a manager who has just been promoted for their brilliant sales results, you may want to think about moving on.
- D. There are several takeaways from this study.
- E. The costs of these kinds of decisions can be considerable.
- F. They noted that the decision to promote a sales rep was invariably linked to how good their sales were rather than whether or not they would excel as a manager.
- G. There's often an increase in micromanagement and bullying and a large increase in the lack of job satisfaction.
- H. Secondly, managers need training in the job of managing.



The Peter Principle

And what to do about it

- I. There was always the possibility when *The Peter Principle* was published in 1969, that for Laurence J. Peter, the book was essentially a satire. The idea that people are promoted in their careers until they reach a level of incompetence sounds like a sincere observation when taken at face value, particularly for anyone who has suffered at the hands of an inept manager. _____¹ While the idea gained enormous popularity that has continued to this day, it was always more of a theory than a rule.
- II. That was until Professors Alan Benson (University of Minnesota), Danielle Li (MIT) and Kelly Shue (Yale) combined forces to conduct an analysis of 214 American companies looking at the performance of 53, 035 sales representatives between 2005 and 2011. During this time, 1,531 of these employees were promoted to a managerial position. The study concluded firstly, that promotion was far more likely amongst top sales people, and secondly, the performance of those people was poor once they had been promoted. _____² The effect of this for the companies concerned was a double whammy. Not only do they lose a good sales rep which puts the accounts that they have cultivated at risk; they also have a team that the newly-promoted manager will struggle to lead making subpar performance probable.
- III. _____³ The first is that promotion shouldn't be the only way to be rewarded for excellent performance. Individuals who surpass expectations in a particular role should be able to receive higher pay, increased benefits and greater prestige within a company without having to follow the management route. If the structure of a company doesn't allow for this, then it should be reexamined. _____⁴ Medicine, film-making and publishing are examples of this. An actor who receives acclaim for their work isn't just given the role of director by default.
- IV. _____⁵ All too often, there's little to no support for someone thrust into a supervisory role. Given the training that is expected for a new sales rep, or a new engineer or a new editor, it makes no sense that a new manager wouldn't receive the same. It could well be that rather than being promoted to their level of incompetence, some are just being promoted to a level outside of their experience. Had these bad managers been given the training they needed, they may have aced it.
- V. _____⁶ Equally, if you're led by a savvy manager, who in turn reports to an inspirational leader, you may want to stay put. The evidence shows that these situations are certainly few and far between.

Source: *Forbes*





6

Reading comprehension

Part 1: Decide which of the following statements is true (T), false (F) or not given (NG).

1. The Peter Principle was published to make fun of corporate hierarchies. _____
2. The study analysed companies around the world. _____
3. The study found that sales reps who were good at their jobs were more frequently promoted to management. _____



Part 2: Decide which four of the following are given as things to learn from the Peter Principle.

1. There should be alternative ways to reward good performance other than promotion.
2. People who are good managers are not always successful in other areas.
3. Companies should not neglect manager training, particularly after a recent promotion.
4. Managers should be paid according to their results rather than their position.
5. A person who is promoted to a management position after getting good results in a non-managerial position may be likely to fail.
6. A good management structure is not common.



7

Scanning for vocabulary

Part 1: Find vocabulary in the article on page five which means the same as the following definitions.

1. _____ (n, para.A): the use of humour to criticise an organisation or person by emphasising weaknesses
2. _____ (adj., para. B): being of a low quality
3. _____ (n, para. C): a high level of respect that someone has because of their position or what they have achieved
4. _____ (n, para. C): praise from people because of doing something really well
5. _____ (adj., para. D): in a position where you are responsible for the quality of work and production
6. _____ (v, para. D): successfully complete something
7. _____ (adj., para. E): having a lot of knowledge of how something works

Part 2: Answer the following questions.

1. In paragraph A, what is the meaning of '**taken at face value**'?
2. In paragraph B, what is the meaning of '**double whammy**'?
3. In paragraph C, what is the meaning of '**by default**'?
4. In paragraph E, what is the meaning of '**few and far between**'?

8

Talking point

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. Had you heard of the real story at the end of the video involving Oxycontin? What do you think David should have done in that situation? Do you know of any other companies which have put profits before the safety of people's lives? What do you think should have happened to that company?
2. Do you think the Peter Principle applies to your place of work? Why/Why not?
3. Do you think the Peter Principle applies in most corporate structures, or do you think there are companies that avoid it? What do you think companies who avoid it do?
4. How is good performance rewarded in your company?
5. If you had your own company, what would you do to avoid the Peter Principle being a problem for you?



9

Extended activity/homework

Read the information about inversion and complete the following exercise.

In the video, the following sentence was used:

'Little did they know that they had joined one of the most dangerous organisations in modern America.'

What does this mean?

- They didn't know anything about the organisation.
- They didn't know they had joined a dangerous organisation.
- They didn't know about organisations in modern America.

Little can be used in a negative way with verbs of expressing learning, such as *understand*, *realise*, *comprehend*, to show that something was not understood completely.

For example:

- Little did I comprehend the enormity of the mistake I was about to make.
- Little did I understand that this was to be the last time I saw her.
- Little did I realise that he was not being honest about the amount of money involved.

This sentence starts with a structure known as '**inversion**'. This is when the normal word order is reversed. It can make a sentence more interesting or dramatic by creating an introduction to the important information.

There are some other useful structures for doing this. For example:

- only when / only then / only after** → This brings added focus to the important information.

**Compare the following:**

1)

A. Only when I saw her walk into the room, did I realise that we had met before.

B. When she walked into the room, I realised I'd met her before.

2)

A. Only after finishing my meal, did I realise the chicken wasn't fully cooked.

B. After I finished my meal, I realised the chicken wasn't fully cooked.

3)

A. Only then, did I realise I'd left my wallet at home.

B. Then I realised I'd left my wallet at home.



- **never / seldom / rarely** → These can be used to show how unusual something is.

Compare the following:

1)

A. Never had she seen a man with such good looks and sophistication.

B. She hadn't seen a man with such good looks and sophistication before.

2)

A. Seldom had they witnessed such unpleasant behaviour.

B. They hadn't often seen such unpleasant behaviour before.

3)

A. Rarely had someone with so little talent achieved so much.

B. Someone with so little talent didn't normally achieve very much.



- **conditional forms** → You can make a conditional form sound more formal by inverting the 'if' clause and leaving out the 'if'.

Compare the following:

1)

A. Had I known he was going to act so badly, I'd never have invited him.

B. If I had known he was going to act so badly, I'd never have invited him.

2)

A. Had she told you what she was planning, would you have gone with her?

B. If she had told you what she was planning, would you have gone with her?

3)

A. Should you decide to come, let me know.

B. If you should decide to come, let me know.

Now rewrite the following sentences using the word in brackets.

1. After I'd finished all my work, I was able to sit down and enjoy reading my new book. (Only)

2. I didn't know that she was lying to me. (Little)

3. They didn't usually eat as much as they did that night. (Rarely)

4. If he hadn't gone to the restaurant that night, he would never have witnessed the murder. (Had)

5. When I got to the job interview, I realised that the interviewer was my previous and much hated boss. (Only)

6. I didn't realise how difficult computer science was going to be until I started my course. (Little)

7. If you hadn't spoken to him in that way, he wouldn't have reacted the way he did. (Had)

8. I have never seen such a display of complete incompetence. (Never)
