
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Give the cold shoulder



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hi Feifei. What a beautiful woollen shawl you're wearing! But it looks far too elegant to use for just another day in the office...

Feifei

I know, Rob. I wanted to give it to Lisa, now that she's got that promotion...

Rob

Really? But she's hardly even said hello to you since her promotion and you used to be friends...

Feifei

I know. She's been giving me the cold shoulder. That's why I brought this woollen shawl for her.

Rob

Feifei, you do know there's a difference between Lisa's shoulders being cold because it's winter and her 'giving you the cold shoulder', don't you? You can't just warm her shoulders and be friends again.

Feifei

Yes, I do. In English, someone giving you the cold shoulder means they're behaving in a way that is not friendly at all and they're doing it for no obvious reason.

Rob

Yes. It means they are rejecting you or ignoring you. And 'give the cold shoulder' is today's expression in The English We Speak.

Feifei

Let's hear some examples.

Examples

After Mary divorced her rich husband all their friends gave her the cold shoulder. She was not invited to their lavish parties anymore.

My brother told our parents I haven't been studying at all and my marks are low. I'm not happy and I've been giving him the cold shoulder. Let's see if he's got the message.

Feifei

Rob, I know what giving someone the cold shoulder means, but even so I think this shawl might help me get Lisa to change how she's acting.

Rob

How come?

Feifei

Well, Lisa loves fashion and designer clothes. As soon as she sees me with this lovely shawl, she'll be impressed and stop ignoring me. She won't think she's better than me anymore!

Rob

Well, and if you lend it to her, she might not feel cold anymore... it's been rather cold in the last few weeks...

Feifei

Yes. This woollen shawl will stop her having cold shoulders and might even stop her giving me the cold shoulder. How about that?

Rob

Now that is a clever use of the English language!

Feifei

Bye.

Rob

Bye bye.