



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

Learn How to 'Read the Room'

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

As humans, we have emotional states, also called moods. Sometimes we feel happy and sometimes sad. Other times we may feel angry or **anxious** or excited.

Well, moods are not just for individuals. Groups of people can also share a collective mood. On today's show we talk about an expression that describes ways we understand the general mood of a group of people.

That expression is “to read the room.”

When you read the room, you use your powers of observation to learn the general **mood** or emotional state of people in a particular setting. You may then act in a way that is similar to that mood. You match it.

Let's say you are in a **silly** mood – laughing a lot and making jokes. Then you enter a serious work meeting. You may need to read the room and change your behavior.

Here's another example.

If I need to bring up a serious issue with a group of friends, I will read the room first. If everyone is having a good time and the issue is not urgent, I will wait.

You can tell someone else to “read the room” if they seem clueless about the mood of a group of people. It is a way of expressing to that person that they are behaving incorrectly or inappropriately.

Used this way, it can either be funny or **insulting** – depending on the situation and how we say the phrase.

Let's say you are at a dinner party. People are seated around a table enjoying good food and **conversation**. Then, your friend Betsy brings up a very serious topic – like a historic battle where many people died. Suddenly the **tone** changes. The atmosphere goes from happy to serious. You could say, “Betsy, read the room! No one wants to talk about that now.”

Or I could say to someone later, “Betsy needs to learn how to read the room. She brought down the mood of the party with her talk of war and death.”

The expression “read the room” is all about being observant. Reading the room is a skill. People who can read the room know the right atmosphere, tone, and mood and are able to fit in.

And that's all the time we have for this Words and Their Stories. Until next time... I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

anxious – *adj.* afraid or nervous about what may happen

mood – *n.* a person's emotional state

silly – *adj.* not serious or important : playful and lighthearted

insulting – *adj.* giving or intended to give offense

conversation – *n.* a talk between two or more people : the act of talking

tone – *n.* an individual way of speaking or writing especially when used to express an emotion

We want to hear from you. Are you good at reading the room? Do you have a similar expressions in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.

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