



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

'Clean As a Whistle'

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

On this program we explore words and expressions in the English language. We give examples, notes on usage, and sometimes we use them in short **conversations**.

What do you say when something is so spotless, so perfect, so new and so clean?

In American English, we can say it is as clean as a whistle.

We often use this expression to talk about our physical spaces. After we clean our office, we can say it is clean as a whistle. Our home can also be as clean as a whistle.

If you have a car, the inside of it can be ... you guessed it! Clean as a whistle. But, it is harder to keep the outside of a vehicle clean as a whistle.

As you might have noticed, sometimes we add “as” to the beginning, and sometimes we don’t.

We can use this expression to describe other things, too.

For example, if you have never been in a car accident, you can say that your driving record is as clean as a whistle. If your school record is clear of any problems or issues, you can say it is as clean as a whistle. And if your elected leader is not involved in **corruption** or any other wrongdoings, you can say she is as clean as a whistle!

Like many of our English expressions and **idioms**, the **origin** of clean as a whistle is unclear.

Some word experts say it comes from the sound of a whistle, which is clear and sharp. Other experts suggest that clean as a whistle comes from drinking alcohol. When you finished your drink and your glass was empty, it was said to be clean as a whistle and needed to be refilled.

Now let's hear the expression used between two friends.

*A: Did you hear about Wanda? She's been **fired**!*

B: Wanda? Are you sure? Her work record is as clean as a whistle. To my knowledge, she has never missed a deadline. And all her projects come in under budget.

A: That's true. But she got caught working for another company.

B: So. Many people have a second or even a third job.

A: Yeah, but not at the same time. She was working her other job while getting paid by our company.

B: Oh. That's different. How do people have the time and energy to even think about doing that?

A: I don't know. I barely have the energy to finish my work for this job.

And that's the end of this *Words and Their Stories*. Practice using this expression in your next English conversation.

Until next time, I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

conversation – *n.* oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas

corruption – *n.* dishonest or illegal behavior especially by powerful people

idiom – *n.* an expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but must be learned as a whole

origin – *n.* rise, beginning, or derivation from a source

fired – *v.* dismissed or let go from a job

We want to hear from you. Do you have 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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