

## Catch Word #266 – Not make a dent in it

AD-FREE

### Episode description

Are you the type of person who gets work done quickly and easily? Sometimes we may work on a task for a long time but still not make a lot of progress on it. In this episode, Kassy and Andrew teach two expressions you can use in situations where you're stuck or not making progress. These expressions are to not make a dent in something and to go round in circles.

Catch Word is the Culips vocabulary series for intermediate and advanced English learners who want to improve their English fluency. You'll learn idioms and useful expressions to help you have more natural-sounding conversations.

### Fun fact

Kassy says that the expression to go round in circles makes her think of a merry-go-round. A merry-go-round is a common ride you can find at circuses and fairs with horse sculptures you can ride on, but the merry-go-round didn't start as a fair ride. Originally, the merry-go-round was used with real horses as a way for medieval knights to practice riding their horses and jousting. Gradually, people other than knights started to ride it for fun, and eventually the real horses were replaced with wooden ones.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To not make a dent in (something)
- To go round in circles
- To be tapped
- To feel (someone's) pain
- To take over a contract
- To come to a consensus



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## Transcript

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Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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**Andrew:** Catch Word #266, Not make a dent in it, featuring Andrew and Kassy.

In this lesson, Kassy and I will teach you two expressions that are great to know and are good ones to add to your vocabulary. They are both about not making progress. So when you're working hard towards achieving a goal, but you're not actually moving forward or getting close to achieving that goal, then you can use these two expressions. They're about that kind of situation. So the two expressions are **to not make a dent in something** and **to go round in circles**. Of course, in this lesson, we'll break them down for you and give you some more usage details and share some examples with you also.

So, let's get started with the lesson. And the first expression that we're going to teach you about is **to not make a dent in something**. OK, it's an expression in the negative form, to not. So **to not make a dent in something**, and dent is spelt D-E-N-T. Kassy, why don't you go ahead and break this one down for us.

**Kassy:** The way I want to break this down is by talking about a car. So if you're driving a car, and if you hit something going at a slow speed, your car isn't, you know, severely damaged, but it gets a dent. It's when the metal bends slightly forward. So when we use the expression **to not make a dent in something**, it means that you're not able to do something in such a way that you can't even scratch the surface, you can't even get started on that project. Something is happening to block you from doing even the most basic thing.

**Andrew:** Yeah, so maybe you have a big job to do, and you feel like you only accomplished 1% of that job, then in that kind of situation, you could say, "I **didn't even**

**make a dent in it.**" It's just another way to say that you didn't make any progress or you didn't make any impact in the work that you're trying to do.

And, Kassy, I think this word is a good one to know, dent. It's one of those like higher level words, it's maybe not a word that we use every day, but I think it's very natural. And of course, in the right situation, it's appropriate.

I was thinking, Kassy, we could play a little game here. And that is let's go back and forth and try and list things that you can dent, things that are dentable.

**Kassy:** I like this. OK.

**Andrew:** So, you already said car bumper. So I'm going to respond with car door, you could dent your car door. You know, if you open the door, and you hit another car, maybe you'll get a little fold in the metal in your car door. So I'm gonna say car door.

**Kassy:** OK, you can dent a can, if you drop a can of soup on the floor, the lid could be dented.

**Andrew:** You could also dent the side of, really, any metal surface. I'm thinking that I was worried the other day that I was going to put a dent in my washing machine because I park my bicycle right beside my washing machine. And if I don't take my bicycle out of that little spot beside my washing machine carefully, then it's possible that I could put a dent in the side of it. So you could dent any kind of metal appliance, as well.

**Kassy:** Yeah, exactly. I'm pretty sure you can dent anything that is made out of a thin sheet of metal, or maybe even a thin sheet of plastic.

**Andrew:** Yeah, so maybe we could summarize it here, because, Kassy, I'm going to forfeit this game because I'm **tapped** on all of the things I can think of that you can dent. Congratulations on the victory. But maybe we could say that you could put a dent, or you could dent, any kind of soft, pliable surface where you can make an indentation, right?

Indentation into it. So anything that doesn't break or rip, but you just get a little indentation instead of a break or hole then, then that is a dent.

So now that we really, really, really understand this word dent and we know that the full expression **to not make a dent in something** means to not make any progress towards finishing your work or achieving your goal, I think now we are ready to listen to a couple of example conversations. So, Kassy, let's do example conversation #1 right now.

**Kassy:** Yes, let's do it.

**Friend 1:** What did you do today?

**Friend 2:** I spent all morning cleaning my house and reorganizing my room. My back is killing me right now.

**Friend 1:** That sucks. But your place must look great now.

**Friend 2:** Not even. I **didn't even make a dent in it**. I'm far from finished.

**Friend 1:** Well, if you need some help tomorrow, just let me know. I could stop by and help you for an hour or two.

**Friend 2:** Nah, I should be fine. But if I do need the help, I'll text you.**Andrew:** Let's break this example down. So we just heard a conversation between two friends and one of the friends is reorganizing her room and cleaning her house. And she was complaining that her back is sore because she's been working so hard all day. But unfortunately, even though she put in a lot of effort and was working really hard towards cleaning her house and reorganizing her room, she's far from finished. She still has a long way to go. She said that she **didn't even make a dent in cleaning her house** and reorganizing her room. So that means, like, maybe she's done 2%, 3%, just a very small percentage of the total amount of work that needs to be done.

**Kassy:** I can **feel her pain**, Andrew. I feel like anytime I clean, I'm **never putting any dent in my work**, it just goes on forever.

**Andrew:** I think a lot of people will sympathize with you here, Kassy, in that it feels like whenever you're doing chores around the house that you **never make a dent in them**. You do the dishes and then like 3 hours later, you eat another meal and you have to do the dishes again. It's just a never-ending cycle.

**Kassy:** Exactly. Well, shall we listen to example 2?

**Andrew:** Yup, let's do it.

**Friend 1:** I feel so ripped off.

**Friend 2:** Why is that?

**Friend 1:** Well, last week, I spilled a glass of red wine on my sofa, and I made this huge stain. So, I bought this stain remover cleaning product that I saw advertised on TV that promised it can remove any stain from any surface.

**Friend 2:** Let me guess, it didn't work very well?

**Friend 1:** Yeah, it **didn't even make a dent in the stain**. There's still this huge red spot on my sofa.

**Friend 2:** Take it back for a refund.

**Friend 1:** Yeah, I'm going to.

**Kassy:** All right, in this example conversation, two friends are talking. And one, she's not really talking, she's complaining. She got a big stain on her sofa, spilling a glass of red wine. And she buys this cleaning product to remove it and it is not effective at all. It **doesn't even make a dent in the stain**. The stain is very much still visible.

**Andrew:** So, we can visualize a red wine stain. I think most people can visualize that, it's really, really obvious and very, very prominent, right? If you spill that on your sofa, you're like, "Oh my god, I messed up, right?" It's a big, big problem. So she bought this stain remover, but it **didn't make a dent**. It maybe only removed like 1% of the stain and the other 99% remains. So that sounds like false advertising to me, Kassy.

**Kassy:** Yes. Those are the worst.

**Andrew:** The worst. All right. So, guys, why don't we move on to the second key expression for today's episode. And it's another one about when you're putting in effort and you're working towards achieving a goal but you're just getting nowhere, you're getting no results and you're not getting any closer towards finishing or achieving your goal. And this expression is **to go round in circles, to go round in circles**.

Kassy, I think we could say also **to go around in circles**. But to me it feels more comfortable or normal to say **to go round in circles**. So, guys, it's your option, you could say to go around or you could say to go round. But both of them have essentially the same meaning. And, yeah, that is just to work hard, but make no progress.

Kassy, when you hear this expression, what image pops into your mind? I wonder if we have the same visualization for this one.

**Kassy:** It reminds me of a merry-go-round that you can't get off of. You just go round and round and round.

**Andrew:** OK, that's interesting. For me, I think of a hamster in a running wheel. And they're putting in a lot of effort. They're running really fast, but they're not moving anywhere, right? They're just staying in the same spot.

**Kassy:** I like that better.

**Andrew:** So actually, I think that is the perfect image, because the hamster is putting in effort and trying to go forward, right? But they just don't realize that they're stuck in a wheel that's just spinning round and round, and they're not going forward at all.

**Kassy:** Exactly.

**Andrew:** All right, guys, well, I think we should listen to some example conversations and through the conversations, you'll get a better feeling for the meaning of this expression and how we can use it in a real-life situation. So, let's take a listen to the first example conversation right now.

**Kassy:** Let's do it.

**Friend 1:** How's the apartment hunt going?

**Friend 2:** Not so well. I feel like I'm just **going around in circles**. First, I find a place that sounds good, then I make an appointment to check it out. And then there's always something wrong with it. It smells weird, the walls are a weird colour, the rent is too high, the faucet leaks, or something like that.

**Friend 1:** Well, I just heard today that Jeff is planning to move out of his place. His apartment is amazing. You've been there, right?

**Friend 2:** Yeah, his place is gorgeous. I'm going to give him a call right now and see if I can possibly **take over his contract**. This is gonna be great.

**Andrew:** Let's break this example conversation down. So in that conversation, we heard about a woman who feels like she's just **going round in circles** trying to find an apartment. So that means that she's working really hard towards trying to find a new apartment to live in, but is making no progress. So she keeps on repeating this kind of cycle where she locates and finds an apartment to check out, then she takes a look at it, and there's a problem with that place. So then she has to go back to the start and begin

again, find another place to check out, make an appointment to see it, and then there's a problem with it. And it's just **going around in a circle**. She's not getting any closer, even though she's putting in the effort and time to try and find an apartment.

**Kassy:** Exactly. This actually just happened to me recently when I was looking for apartments in Thailand.

**Andrew:** I think it is pretty common, actually, in this kind of situation **to go around in circles**. Looking for an apartment, apartment hunting as we call it, is no fun usually.

**Kassy:** Well, let's take a listen to example #2.

**Andrew:** Yeah, let's do it.

**Coworker 1:** Did you make a decision about next quarter's advertising strategy during the meeting today?

**Coworker 2:** Unfortunately, no. We debated about it for hours, but we just **kept going around in circles**.

**Coworker 1:** Doesn't management want you to present your idea by next week?

**Coworker 2:** Yeah, so that's the problem. Everyone on the team is getting pretty stressed out. And we're going to meet again tomorrow and hopefully we'll be able to come up with a plan then that everybody's happy with.

**Kassy:** In this example conversation, two coworkers are talking about the last meeting. This meeting, they're trying to plan some sort of advertising strategy, but it is just not going well. Everybody in the meeting is just debating back and forth, over and over, **going around in circles**, and they can't make a good decision.

**Andrew:** Yeah, and this is a really, really common situation to use this expression in is when you're in a meeting that's very unproductive, right? Maybe many people have opinions or different thoughts or different feelings. And you can't **come to a consensus**, you can't agree on one final resolution or one final outcome. And then everybody feels frustrated, like, "Oh, we just wasted all this time. We spent all this time debating, and we got no result or no conclusion." So, yeah, that kind of situation, you could say you're **going round in circles**. And it's really, really common in this kind of meeting or debate or any situation like that.

**Kassy:** To summarize what we've covered today, we learned two expressions about not making any progress towards achieving your goal. The first expression was **to not make a dent in something**, which means to make very little progress towards achieving your goal. And the second expression was **to go round in circles**, which means to waste time and energy towards achieving a goal but making little to no progress towards completing it.

**Andrew:** That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye.

## Detailed Explanations

### To not make a dent in (something)

Idiom

In this episode, Andrew and Kassy introduced the expression **to not make a dent in something**. This expression means to not have progressed very far in something. This means that most of the original amount is still remaining. We usually use this expression to talk about tasks like work or chores, or to refer to consuming something such as food or money. Things that can be progressively completed or used up can have a dent made in them.

For example, you could say that someone who has a lot of data on their monthly phone plan but only uses Wi-Fi **doesn't make a dent in their cell phone data** each month.

Here are a few more examples with **to not make a dent in (something)**.

**Lilly:** Why do you have so much peanut butter in your pantry?

**Donald:** My brother works in a peanut butter factory, so he sent me a huge box of peanut butter 2 months ago.

**Lilly:** Really, 2 months ago? But there are still so many jars left.

**Donald:** Yeah, I don't really like peanut butter, so I **haven't really made a dent in it** yet. Do you wanna take a few jars home with you?

**Lilly:** Sure! I love peanut butter!

**Albert:** I can't believe Professor Roberts assigned 200 pages of reading for next week's class.

**Hannah:** I know. All of that, along with the homework for my other classes. I don't know when I'm going to have time to finish it all.

**Albert:** I read for an hour last night, but I **didn't make a dent in it**. I still have 190 pages to go.

**Hannah:** Wow, you're kind of a slow reader.

**Albert:** I know! What am I gonna do?

## To go round in circles Idiom

In this episode, Kassy and Andrew introduced the expression **to go round in circles**, which means to continue to do something without moving forward or making progress. This expression usually means that someone is stuck at a certain point in a task.

Sometimes this expression is also used to talk about a conversation when two people don't properly understand each other and they continue to say the same thing over and over. In this situation, one of the two people might say, "I think we're just **going round in circles**."

Here are a couple more examples with **to go round in circles**:

**Marques:** Have you finished the novel you've been writing?

**Flora:** Not yet. I can't figure out how to write a satisfying end to the story. I keep writing an ending, then deleting it because it doesn't fit. Then I rewrite it, then I delete it again.

**Marques:** Sound like you're **going round in circles**. Maybe you need a change of scenery. Have you tried writing in a different location?

**Flora:** No, I haven't tried that. Maybe that will help. Thanks!

**Jonie:** Did you talk with your supervisor about the problem you were having at work?

**Rick:** Yeah, but we didn't really reach a solution.

**Jonie:** What do you mean?

**Rick:** We just kept **going round in circles**. I'd explain the issue, and then he'd tell me why it wasn't a big deal, and then I would tell him why I thought it was a big deal.

**Jonie:** That must have been so frustrating.

**Rick:** It was.

**Jonie:** I hope you can resolve the issue tomorrow!

## To be tapped Idiom

In this episode, while playing a game with Kassy, Andrew says that he forfeited the game because he **was tapped** on all of the things that he could think of that can be dented. If something **is tapped**, it is all used or has run out. In Andrew's example, he ran out of ideas of things that can be dented.

When you hear this expression, it will usually be said as **to be tapped** on something, such as money, ideas, or resources. The expression can also be used as **to be tapped of** something.

Here are a few more examples with **to be tapped**:

**Mike:** Hey, can I borrow \$10? I'm **tapped** on cash.

**Rachel:** No way! You still haven't paid me back for the last \$10 I lent you.

**Mike:** I know, I know. I promise I'll pay you back next week. I just need to borrow \$10 today.

**Rachel:** OK, fine. This is the last time, though. If you don't pay me back this time, I'm not lending you any more money!

**Mike:** Thanks! I promise I'll pay you back next week.

**Katie:** Is your car OK?

**Michel:** No, I can't get it to start.

**Katie:** What's wrong with it?

**Michel:** I don't know. I checked the gas, the engine, the battery, the ignition, and everything else I could think of and it still won't start. I'm **tapped** of ideas. I suppose I'll have to call a mechanic.

**Katie:** My brother is a mechanic. I'll call him and ask him to come take a look.

**Michel:** Thanks!

## To feel (someone's) pain Phrase

In this episode, Andrew gave an example of someone who is cleaning her house, but even after cleaning all day she has only finished 2% or 3% of her work. Kassy responds by saying, "I can **feel her pain**." **To feel someone's pain** means to empathize or relate to the situation they are in. So, Kassy means that she can empathize with having spent all day cleaning but still having a lot of work to do.

This expression can be used in the third person like Kassy uses it, or it can be used in the second person to say, "**I feel your pain**" when you want to tell someone directly that you empathize with the situation they are in.

Here are a few more examples with **to feel (someone's) pain**:

**John:** Hey, how did you do on last week's test?

**Joyce:** I got a D! I can't believe it. I studied for that test all weekend and still did poorly.

**John:** Oh no ... **I feel your pain**. Last semester I spend a whole week preparing for a midterm and still failed it. I guess sometimes tests are just a bit too hard.

**Joyce:** I don't know how I'm going to explain this to my parents.

**Brian:** Is your brother coming with us to the basketball game tonight at the high school?

**Julie:** I don't think so. He locked himself in his room and won't come out.

**Brian:** Why? What happened?

**Julie:** He gave a presentation at school, but he got so nervous he ended up running out of the class midway through his presentation. He told our parents that he's never going back to school again.

**Brian:** **I feel his pain**. I'm terrible at public speaking, too. Every time I have to do a presentation, I feel like I'm going to freeze up.

## To take over a contract

### Phrase

In one of the example dialogues from this episode, one of the friends says she is going to call about **taking over a contract** for an apartment. **To take over a contract** means to become the person responsible for a legal agreement that someone else originally signed. People usually **take over a contract** when the person who first signed the agreement doesn't want to stay in the agreement any longer, but can't end it early.

It's very common in some countries **to take over a contract** for someone who is renting a house or apartment and wants to move before the contract ends. We can also use this expression to talk about **taking over business contracts** or any other type of legal agreement.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take over a contract**:

**Gail:** How's it going with your preparations to move to Spain?

**Tyler:** Well, almost everything is ready except I learned that I will have to pay a \$200 cancellation fee to end my cell phone contract early. Otherwise, I have to continue paying \$50 every month while I'm in Spain for a year.

**Gail:** My phone contract ends this month. What if I **take over the contract** for you? Then you don't have to pay the cancellation fee or the monthly fee while you're abroad.

**Tyler:** Really? That would be wonderful. Thanks so much!

**Timo:** Do you know anyone who is looking for a place to rent for the summer?

**Belle:** I don't think so. Why?

**Timo:** My sister is moving out of town for her new job, but she needs someone **to take over the contract** on her apartment for the summer.

**Belle:** I will ask some of my friends to find out if anyone could **take over her contract**.

**Timo:** Thanks. Let me know if you find someone.

## To come to a consensus Phrase

While discussing the example dialogue from this episode, Andrew gives an example of people who have a variety of opinions or different thoughts or different feelings about something, so they can't **come to a consensus**. **To come to a consensus** means to agree about something. This expression is usually used when people have different opinions about something, but they eventually agree on one option.

The word consensus can also be used with other verbs to make different expressions with the same meaning. For example, you can say **to arrive at a consensus** or **to reach a consensus**.

Here are a few more examples with **to come to a consensus**:

**Sue:** Did the family decide what we are going to do for Grandpa's birthday?

**Gary:** I think Mom wants to go to the beach, but Uncle Joe wants to have lunch downtown. Aunt Teri said she wants to spend the day together at Grandpa's house.

**Sue:** We had this same problem on Grandpa's birthday last year. Why can't we ever **come to a consensus**?

**Gary:** The best solution is probably to just ask Grandpa what he wants to do.

**Tom:** You look kind of tired.

**Laura:** I spent the whole day in a meeting at work with my colleagues trying **to come to a consensus** about a new business deal, but no one could agree about anything. We just went round in circles all day.

**Tom:** Wow, that does sound pretty tiring.

**Laura:** And the worst part is since we didn't make a decision today, we have to meet tomorrow to try **to reach a consensus**.

**Tom:** But tomorrow is Saturday!

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## Quiz

**1. To make a dent in something means:**

- a) to break something
- b) to make something out of metal
- c) to hit something with a hammer
- d) to make progress in something

**2. If a group of people comes to a consensus, it means they:**

- a) agree about a decision
- b) go to a concert
- c) are arguing with each other
- d) don't like each other

**3. True or false? If you go round in circles, it means you are stuck and cannot make progress.**

- a) true
- b) false

**4. Which of the following expressions means that a resource has been all used up or run out?**

- a) to be pinched
- b) to be tapped
- c) to be boxed
- d) to be flicked

**5. Which of the following expressions means to empathize with someone?**

- a) to know their name
- b) to feel their pain
- c) to feel their brain
- d) to share their gain

## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What is a problem you've faced that you went round in circles trying to solve?
2. Typically, how easily can you empathize with others? Talk about a time you heard a story and felt that person's pain.
3. Have you ever taken over a contract from someone? Was it a simple or complicated process for you?
4. Discuss a time that you had difficulty coming to a consensus with others. Why was it hard to reach an agreement?
5. What is a task you had to do that was hard to make a dent in? How did you finish the task?

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## Quiz Answers

1.d 2.a 3.a 4.b 5.b

### Episode credits

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