By definition, idioms are expressions unique to a particular language that we shouldn’t interpret literally. Here, we explain the meaning and background of a few idioms commonly used in business. While idioms can be useful figures of speech, be sure to use them sparingly!

1) **Value-added**
   
   **Definition:** Traditionally, the term “value-added” refers to value that is added to a product or material at each stage of manufacturing or distribution. However, businesses now frequently apply this term to intangible products and services.

   **Usage:** “Several researchers have studied the value-added role of venture capitalists.”

   **Note:** In business, “value-add” is also used in relation to people, which has been the subject of discussion on National Public Radio. In an interview on August 26, 2008, Mark Warner, then a candidate for the U.S. Senate, asserted, “I think my value-add would be to put together what I’m calling the ‘radical centrists.’” The following day, commentator Robert Siegel tried to explain the meaning of value-add, a term he found oft-used in “biz-speak, a language a little related to English.”

2) **At the end of the day**
   
   **Definition:** Ultimately; in the end.

   **Usage:** “At the end of the day, employees are our greatest asset.”

   **Note:** This phrase was cited by a Dow Jones Factiva executive as the cliché most often used in newspaper articles in 2006. According to Chris Pash, Director of Content for the Asia-Pacific region, the Washington Post and the New York Times both used the phrase 135 times in the first half of 2006.

3) **Down to the wire**
   
   **Definition:** The last minute; just before the deadline.

   **Usage:** “The team worked down to the wire to finish the project on time.”

   **Note:** In the 19th century, wire was placed across horse racetracks above the finish line. The wire helped to determine which horse’s nose crossed the line first. A very close race would have been “down to the wire,” or one whose outcome was unclear until the very last second.

4) **Glass ceiling**
   
   **Definition:** An unacknowledged barrier to advancement, especially for women and people of color.

   **Usage:** “In many professions, it is difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling to the upper level of management.”

   **Note:** Katherine Lawrence and Marianne Schreiber of Hewlett-Packard coined the term in 1979 to describe their difficulties in career advancement at HP. The phrase later appeared in a 1986 Wall Street Journal article, and has been in common use ever since.

Sources:  
http://www.eslmania.com/students/idioms/Business_Idioms.htm

The Consultants in the Kenan-Flagler Business Communication Center proudly bring these tips to you. From resumes and cover letters to presentations and PowerPoint slide design, the Center can help you with all your communication needs. Stop by and visit us in McColl 2125, or visit our website for more information.