Lesson Plan: Making decisions

Your business English students may be cool-headed decision makers in their office environments but what about in real life-or-death situations? Using a series of unique scenarios which would require the essential critical thinking skill of decision-making, this communicative activity from In Company 3.0 Upper Intermediate level (B2) has students discussing their hypothetical actions in extreme situations.

Level: Upper Intermediate B2
Time: approx 60 minutes or longer depending on how the activities are used

How to use this lesson plan:
The lesson can be used for the whole class, who can work in pairs and small groups. Download and print out the Student’s Book pages so each student has a copy and download the audio files. Give Student B in each pair a copy of the additional photocopiable section on ‘Worst-Case Scenarios’ from the end of this lesson plan.

Learning objectives
This unit* is about decision-making in business, as well as in one’s personal life.

Students start by discussing decision-making and what they would do in different life-or-death situations. They do a quiz on survival situations, and focus on the language of likelihood and giving advice. They then practise giving advice in a fluency-based task.

A recording offers insight into the decision-making process at three different meetings. Students study some of the idioms used in the recording and practise the language of decisions.

Students discuss crisis management in the workplace, and read and summarize two recent accounts of crisis situations at McDonald’s and Mercedes. They focus on the use of definite and indefinite articles and practise key collocations for dealing with crises.

The unit concludes with a case study – a crisis at Coca-Cola – and students take part in a roleplay as a group of crisis management consultants to the company.

The grammatical focus is on articles and the lexical focus is on English for marketing.

In this first section, students discuss decision-making before reading a short text from a website on worst-case scenarios.

1 Ask students to brainstorm different ways of making decisions. Ask students to read and explain the quotation from Margaret Thatcher (she says it’s dangerous not to say which side you support in an argument).

2 Focus attention on the photograph and on the title of the text and ask students to predict the content of the text. Check/Pre-teach: to lurk, to pass out, shark fin. Students read the text quickly and check their predictions.

Get students to read the text again and discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Ask students to give feedback on anything interesting arising from their discussion. Point out that there is also a worst-case scenarios book, which may have been translated into the students’ own language.

3 In order to generate interest in the quiz, elicit examples of life-or-death situations and ask students to assess their survival skills on a scale of one to ten. With weaker groups, check/pre-teach: to roll, cliff edge, crash barrier, to play dead, to flap, to drown, to collapse, to touch down, insulation, to leap, obstruction, to skid, to plunge, to wind up/down, to trap, to freefall, to snorkel, to punch, to splash about.

Divide the class into two groups, A and B. A students stay on the page; B students should be given a copy of the additional ‘Worst Case scenarios’ from the photocopiable cut-out section at the end of this lesson plan. Ask students to read the quiz questions quickly, encouraging them to guess any new words from context before you answer vocabulary queries. Set a time limit of five minutes and ask students to hold their meetings. When they have finished, ask them to give their choice of answers.

1:1 notes
Do the lead-in and vocabulary check as outlined above. Assign a certain number of worst-case scenarios to you and your student. Each of you should then explain and justify your choices, making comments and discussing each scenario as appropriate.

4 Put the students in pairs and ask them to report back on their quiz questions, the alternatives, and on the decisions they took.

5 (Tracks 2.22–2.29) Check/Pre-teach: to resist, fierce, futile, to overshoot, to triple, to crawl, water pressure, to grab, in distress, vulnerable. Play the recording, pausing after each extract so that the students can check their answers.

ANSWERS
1 c 2 b 3 a 4 b 5 b 6 b 7 c 8 a

Track 2.22 audio script
1: Don’t even think about jumping from a moving vehicle. At 70 miles per hour the chances of surviving are remote. And crashing into the mountainside at this speed will almost certainly send you straight through the windshield. So, even though you may be scared of going over the cliff, your best chance of slowing the car down is to repeatedly run it against the crash barriers. After all, that’s what they’re there for.

* This lesson plan contains selected sections from In Company 3.0 Upper Intermediate, unit 10. Not all of the activities mentioned in the Learning objectives section will be included in this sample lesson plan.
Track 2.23 audio script
2: Resist the temptation to run. You cannot outrun or outclimb a mountain lion. And put any ideas of playing dead out of your mind. While it may work with grizzly bears, to a mountain lion you’ll just look like a free lunch. Your best bet is to shout and flap your coat at the animal to make yourself look bigger and fiercer than you really are. Mountain lions are not proud. If you look like more trouble than you’re worth, there’s a fifty-fifty chance they’ll back away.

Track 2.24 audio script
3: Water transfers heat away from the body 25 times faster than air. So trying to keep warm is more or less futile. And while water transfers heat away from the body, there’s a fifty-fifty chance they’ll back away.

Track 2.25 audio script
4: When landing a light aircraft, make sure that the nose of the plane is six inches below the horizon. As you approach the runway the plane should be flying at an altitude of about 100 feet. If you’re higher, you’ll overshoot the runway completely. The optimum speed on landing is about 60 miles per hour. Go faster and you may take off again. Go slower and you’ll drop like a stone. Upon landing, it’s a good idea to brake as soon as you’ve gained control of the steering. By reducing your groundspeed by 50% you triple your chances of survival.

Track 2.26 audio script
5: The current world record for the long jump is just under nine metres, but most people can barely manage three or four. The chances are you can’t either. To clear four and a half metres in conditions that are far from ideal you’d need a 20 to 30 metre run-up, perfect timing and a great deal of luck. Frankly, your chances are slim. The truck is a much better idea and it is quite possible to fall from the sixth floor completely. Drop vertically and take care to land on your back to avoid breaking it.

Track 2.27 audio script
6: The taxi could take anything from a few minutes to just a few seconds to sink. But there’s not much point trying to force the door open because the water pressure will make this almost impossible. If the car does sink there’ll be little or no air left anyway, so forget about trapping air inside. By far the most sensible thing to do is to open the window and actually let more water in. Even if you can’t escape through the window, once the water pressure inside and outside the car are equalized, there’s a fair chance you’ll be able to open the door and save yourself – and maybe the driver too!

Track 2.28 audio script
7: It’s very unusual for both parachutes to fail, so by struggling with the emergency chute there’s an outside chance you’ll get it to work. But don’t bet on it. You may just be wasting precious time. If you can share one of your friends’ parachutes you’re in with a chance, but just grabbing onto the nearest person is not a smart move. The G-force when the parachute opens will throw you apart. At 14,000 feet and falling at your terminal velocity of 120 miles per hour you’ve got about 75 seconds before your appointment with Mother Earth. So firmly attach yourself to the chest straps of another parachutist. You don’t stand a chance unless you do.
Making Decisions
(Cut out and give a copy of the scenarios to each Student B in each pair for ex. 3 activity.)

‘Worst-case scenaros’ Student B

5 While staying in a hotel in Paris, you wake up to find the whole place is on fire. Your way down is blocked and you end up on the roof. Do you:
   a take a long run-up and jump onto the next building (a distance of four and a half metres)?
   b jump six floors down and land on your back in a truck packed with soft insulation materials?
   c leap well away from the building to clear obstructions and land in the truck?

6 On a business trip to Amsterdam your taxi skids on a patch of oil and plunges off the road and into a canal. In seconds you are half-underwater. Do you:
   a force open the door and swim to safety (taking the driver with you)?
   b wind down the window fully to let the water in?
   c wind the window up to trap air inside the car in case you sink?

7 You agree to do a parachute jump for charity with a group of friends. But as you free-fall from 14,000 feet at 120 mph both your parachute and emergency chute fail to open. Do you:
   a keep struggling with your emergency chute? It must work!
   b grab hold of the nearest member of the group before they open their chute?
   c take valuable time to attach yourself to the chest straps of another parachutist?

8 Whilst snorkelling off the Great Barrier Reef in north-eastern Australia, you suddenly see a large shark swimming swiftly towards you from the depths. Do you:
   a try to attack the shark’s eyes?
   b punch the shark on the nose?
   c splash about and make a noise to frighten it away?