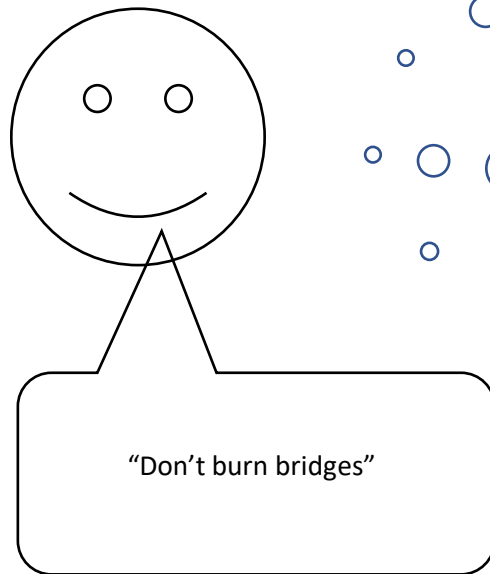


What does, “Don’t burn bridges” mean?

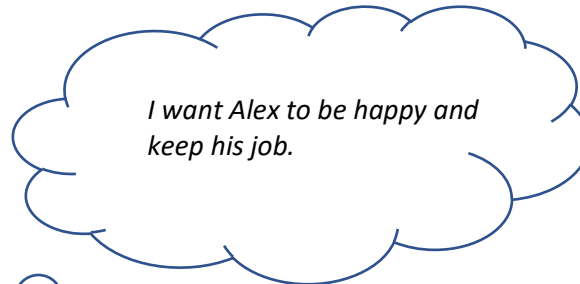
People learn the meanings of words as they grow. They also learn the meanings of specific phrases, called idioms. This article describes what the idiom “Don’t burn bridges” means.

This is Joe. He is talking to Alex. Alex is worried that he may lose his new job. If Joe says...

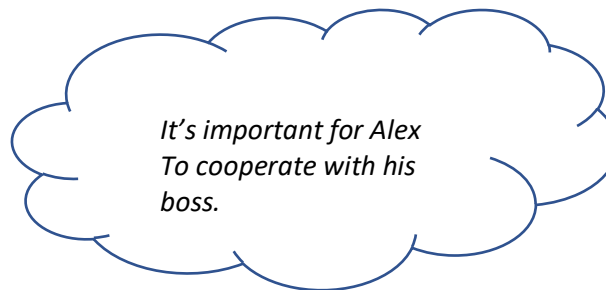


he may have ideas to help Alex keep his job. Joe may be trying to give Alex *advice*.

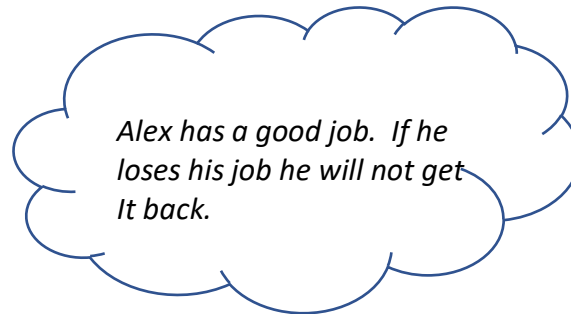
Joe may be thinking that...



or



or



“Don’t burn bridges” does not refer to fire or any foot, rail, or highway suspension. Historically the phrase has been used to mean no way to return if a course of action is pursued or a current action continues. To Alex it means that cooperating and being reliable with others may help to save his job.

Many times, “Don’t burn bridges” is used with a comfortable voice by a friend or a family member. An example of this is when Joe used the phrase to give his Alex some *friendly* advice.

Sometimes “Don’t burn *your* bridges” is used by a co-worker or boss at work. The word ‘your’ in the phrase may mean this is more of a warning than it is friendly advice, especially if it is accompanied by a serious voice. In this case, “Don’t burn your bridges” means that it’s important to work on more effective responses soon. Of course, the phrase may be used in many other situations, too.

Understanding the history of a phrase, noticing where the conversation takes place, who is talking, and tone of voice can help to determine what is meant each time the phrase, “Don’t burn bridges” is used.