

If you've ever heard someone say "**we need to raise the stakes**" during a meeting or negotiation, but wondered what it really means, you're not alone. This popular business idiom has roots deep in casino games like poker, but it's commonly used in everyday English at work and beyond.

In this blog post, we'll unpack the *raise the stakes meaning*, especially in a business setting. We'll look at how casino and card idioms sneak into workplace conversations, explain the difference between the literal and figurative meanings, and show you how to use context to make sense of idioms you hear. Plus, you'll get a few quick dialogues to see "raise the stakes" in action.

Along the way, we'll mention resources like VOA Learning English and *Words and Their Stories*, which are great for discovering idioms and phrases, as well as a fun example from MrQ online slots, where casino language lives on literally rather than figuratively.

Casino and Card Idioms in Everyday English

English is full of expressions borrowed from the world of gambling, especially card games and casinos. These idioms often reflect risk, chance, and decision-making—things we all face at work sometimes!

- **Raise the stakes:** Originally from poker, it means to increase the amount of money players risk.
- **Call someone's bluff:** To challenge someone who seems to be pretending or exaggerating.
- **Play your cards right:** To handle a situation cleverly.

At the office, you won't be betting real chips or cash, but these phrases capture similar ideas of risk-taking, challenges, and strategic moves in projects, negotiations, and leadership.

Note: When you hear these idioms, remember their tone tends to be casual or semi-formal. You might hear "raise the stakes" casually tossed around in meetings or emails, but probably not in very formal reports without explanation.

Example: Casual vs Formal Tone

Context	Example Phrase	Tone
Team brainstorming meeting	"If we want the client, we need to raise the stakes and offer more value."	Casual
Quarterly business review	"Increasing our investment in marketing will heighten our exposure to risk and reward."	Formal (no idioms)

Literal vs Figurative Meaning of "Raise the Stakes"

Literal meaning: In casinos or card games like poker, to "raise the stakes" means to increase the amount of money that players bet during the game. This makes the potential winnings bigger but also increases what's at risk.

Figurative meaning: In the workplace or everyday conversation, "raise the stakes" means to increase the risks, responsibilities, or consequences involved in a decision or action—making the outcome more important or urgent.

For example:

- *Literal:* "He raised the stakes by betting £50 instead of £20."
- *Figurative:* "With the new product launch, we really raised the stakes for the marketing team."

In business, raising the stakes often means that higher consequences—good or bad—are on the line. This can motivate people to perform better or increase pressure and tension.

Quick Dialogue: Literal vs Figurative

At MrQ online slots:

A: I'm going to raise the stakes to win bigger prizes! B: Careful, that means you could lose more too.

At a team meeting:

A: By cutting the deadline in half, we're really raising the stakes for the development team. [gambling idioms in meetings](#) B: Yeah, the pressure is on, but it could push us to finish faster.

Tip from VOA Learning English: Their website offers simple stories and videos where you can hear idioms used naturally, helping you get the hang of figurative and literal meanings by context.

Using Context to Decode Idioms at Work

Idioms like "raise the stakes" can be tricky because their meaning depends heavily on context. The same phrase can signal different feelings or levels of seriousness depending on who says it, where, and how.

Here's what to watch for:





1. **Situation:** If people are talking about money, bets, or literal risk, the meaning is probably literal.
2. **Topic:** Business growth, project risks, negotiations? You're likely in figurative territory.
3. **Tone & Audience:** Is it a casual chat, sales pitch, or a formal report? The language will adjust accordingly.

For example, if you hear this in a sales call, "raising the stakes" might mean making a more tempting offer but also facing higher expectations. If it's in a project meeting, it could mean adding more demanding deadlines or goals.

When it sounds weird note: Avoid using "raise the stakes" in very formal writing or with people who may not know casino terms, or it may confuse or sound odd. Instead, say "increase the risks" or "heighten the consequences" for clarity.

Common Mistake: Confusing Stakes with Prices or Dollar Amounts

One slip ESL learners and even native speakers sometimes make is thinking "raise the stakes" means "increase prices" or "quote higher dollar amounts." But the phrase doesn't specify any particular price or number—it's about the level of risk or importance involved.

This is why, when searching for exact prices or costs related to "raising the stakes," you won't find concrete dollars attached to it—just a sense of higher consequences or challenges.

For example, a company might "raise the stakes" by signing a partnership that could either make or break their reputation, but no specific price tag is implied just by the phrase itself.

Business Idioms You Can Use Instead of "Raise the Stakes"

If you want to vary your business vocabulary or sound more formal, here are some alternatives to "raise the stakes":

- Increase the risk
- Heighten the consequences
- Up the ante (another gambling phrase, casual)
- Raise the bar (focuses more on standards)
- Put more on the line

Example: "By expanding our market internationally, we are putting more on the line but also opening new opportunities."

Summary and Where to Learn More

The phrase "**raise the stakes**" comes from poker and casinos, meaning literally to bet more money. At work, it figuratively means increasing the risks or consequences of a decision or action. Casino and card idioms like this often pop up in everyday English, especially in casual or semi-formal business talk.

When you encounter idioms, always look at the situation and tone to figure out if they're meant literally or figuratively. For more practice and examples, you can visit the VOA Learning English website or subscribe to *Words and Their Stories*, a newsletter that digs into idioms and phrases.

By the way, if you want to see the literal roots of such idioms in action, try games like MrQ online slots, where betting language lives on as actual gameplay terms—no guessing needed!

Understanding "raise the stakes" well will help you join business conversations with confidence and even spice up your vocabulary when discussing risks, challenges, or opportunities.

One Last Quick Dialogue

A: The client wants faster delivery. This really raises the stakes. B: True, but it also shows they trust our team.

That's raising the stakes meaning in a nutshell—higher consequences, but also higher rewards.