



American Expression E2313 Go to the dogs

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The phrase "go to the dogs" is an idiomatic expression meaning to deteriorate, decline, or become ruined. It often describes a situation where something or someone has experienced a significant downturn in quality, condition, or status. This expression is used to convey a sense of degradation, where the subject has fallen from a previously better state to one that is markedly worse.

The origin of "go to the dogs" is somewhat unclear, but it likely stems from historical contexts where scraps and leftovers, considered worthless, were thrown to the dogs. In older times, dogs were often seen as scavengers rather than pets, and giving something to the dogs meant it was no longer valuable or worth keeping. Over time, this idea evolved into a metaphor for decline and deterioration.

In contemporary usage, the phrase can apply to various contexts, including personal behavior, businesses, institutions, or even societies. For example, if a once-successful company starts losing money, making poor decisions, and failing to meet customer expectations, people might say that the company is "going to the dogs." Similarly, if someone who was once diligent and responsible starts neglecting their duties and making poor life choices, it could be said that they are "going to the dogs."

The expression carries a strong negative connotation, emphasizing a significant drop from a state of respectability or functionality to one of neglect or disrepair. It often suggests that the decline was preventable or that it results from mismanagement or poor decisions. For instance, when a neighborhood known for its cleanliness and safety starts experiencing crime and neglect, residents might lament that the area has "gone to the dogs."

Understanding the factors that contribute to such a decline can be essential for preventing or reversing the trend. For businesses, this might involve reassessing management practices, customer relations, and product quality. In personal contexts, it could mean addressing behavioral issues, seeking support, and making more positive life choices.

The phrase is also used in more hyperbolic or exaggerated senses to criticize or comment on changes that someone perceives as negative. For instance, older generations might say that modern music or culture has "gone to the dogs" if they feel it has declined in quality compared to their preferences or experiences.

In summary, "go to the dogs" is an idiomatic expression signifying decline, deterioration, or ruin. It reflects a fall from a previously better state to a significantly worse one, often due to neglect, poor decisions, or mismanagement. The phrase highlights a noticeable and often lamented drop in quality or standards, applicable in various contexts from personal behavior to broader societal changes. Recognizing and addressing the causes of such decline is crucial for restoring or maintaining quality and functionality.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some examples of businesses or institutions that you believe have "gone to the dogs," and what factors contributed to their decline?
 2. Have you ever witnessed a neighborhood or community that has "gone to the dogs"? What were the visible signs of this deterioration?
 3. In what ways can individuals or organizations prevent themselves from "going to the dogs"?
 4. How does the phrase "go to the dogs" reflect societal attitudes towards change and decline?
 5. Can you share a personal experience where you felt something in your life was "going to the dogs," and how did you address or reverse the situation?
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