



American Expression E2430 Keep one's own counsel

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The phrase "keep one's own counsel" means to choose not to share one's thoughts, plans, or feelings with others, opting instead to rely on one's own judgment and discretion. This expression underscores the value of privacy, self-reliance, and introspection in decision-making processes. It suggests a level of independence in one's thinking and actions, emphasizing the importance of personal discretion in managing one's affairs.

Originating from a time when wise counsel was highly valued, the idiom reflects the practice of deliberating privately before making decisions, rather than seeking or being swayed by external opinions. It carries a connotation of wisdom and prudence, as it often involves carefully considering one's actions without external influence, which can lead to more authentic and self-aligned outcomes.

In a professional context, keeping one's own counsel can be crucial in environments where confidentiality or strategic thinking is required. Business leaders, for example, might keep their own counsel when negotiating deals or developing sensitive strategies that require a high level of discretion. By withholding their plans and intentions from even their closest advisors until a clear path forward is envisioned, they maintain a strategic advantage and avoid premature leaks of information that could compromise their position.

Similarly, in personal life, someone might keep their own counsel in situations involving delicate family matters or personal decisions that require deep personal reflection, such as career changes, relationship decisions, or ethical dilemmas. This approach allows individuals to process their thoughts and feelings without external pressures, leading to decisions that are more in tune with their personal values and long-term goals.

However, while there are benefits to keeping one's own counsel, this practice also has its drawbacks. Isolating oneself from external advice can sometimes lead to a narrow perspective, as it excludes potentially valuable insights that could inform or improve one's decision-making. It can also lead to a sense of loneliness or isolation, especially if carried to an extreme, where a person consistently shuts out the viewpoints of others.

Furthermore, in settings where collaboration and team input are valued, consistently keeping one's own counsel might be seen as secretive or uncooperative. It can hinder team synergy and trust, as colleagues may feel excluded or undervalued if one member of the team does not share thoughts or participate in the collective decision-making process.

In conclusion, to keep one's own counsel is to navigate the fine balance between independence and isolation. It involves a deliberate choice to rely on one's own judgment, which can lead to more authentic decisions aligned with personal values and insights. However, it is important to recognize when to open up and seek others' opinions to avoid the pitfalls of a too-narrow perspective and ensure well-rounded, informed decisions. This idiom not only highlights the value of personal discretion but also the complexity of decision-making in both personal and professional realms.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can keeping one's own counsel enhance decision-making in high-pressure environments, and when might it become a liability?
2. What are the potential social or relational consequences of consistently keeping one's own counsel in personal relationships?
3. In what situations is it more advantageous to seek external counsel rather than relying solely on one's own judgment?
4. How can leaders balance the need for discretion with the benefits of transparency in collaborative settings?
5. What are the psychological effects of keeping one's own counsel, especially when dealing with complex or emotionally charged situations?