

Idiom by Lon Yan

網開一面

wang3 kai1 yi2 mian4

Toronto policeman constable Niran Jeyanesan caught a teenager stealing a dress shirt, a necktie and a pair of socks at a Walmart store.

Upon questioning, the young man said he needed the outfit for a job interview, and that he needed a job to help his family because his father fell sick and lost his job.

Normal procedures would have the young man charged with theft. But Jeyanesan decided that he would do differently. He bought the outfit for the young man and told him to go to the interview. What he did can be called “網開一面” (wang3 kai1 yi2 mian4).

“網” (wang3) is “a net,” “a network,” “to catch with a net,” “開” (kai1) “to open,” “to start,” “一面” (yi2 mian4) “one side,” “one section,” “one aspect.” Literally, “網開一面” (wang3 kai1 yi2

mian4) is “open one side of the net,” “leaving one side of the net open.”

The idiom means “to give the wrongdoer a way out,” “let the caged bird fly,” “to give one’s opponent a way out.”

“網開一面” (wang3 kai1 yi2 mian4) is an act of kindness, a display of mercy. Some might think all who commits crime should be punished by the law, and law enforcers should not have the discretion to let off an offender.

But others argued prison is not always the best response to criminal acts. In this case “網開一面” (wang3 kai1 yi2 mian4) is clearly the better choice – the young person called back and told the policeman he landed the job.

Terms containing the character “網” (wang3) include:

漁網 (yu2 wang3) – fishing net

羅網 (luo2 wang3) – a net; a trap; a snare

漏網 (lou4 wang3) – to slip through the net; to escape capture

互聯網 (hu4 lian2 wang3) – internet