Phil
Welcome to The English We Speak, with me Phil…

Feifei
And me, Feifei.

Phil
We have a phrase which is about being able to judge how the people around you think or feel.

Feifei
‘Read the room’. When could we use it?

Phil
Well you know that we’re all so busy at work we had to cancel our holidays to make sure that everything gets done.

Feifei
I know! Terrible! I’d been planning to go somewhere for ages, and now that’s all ruined.

Phil
Someone from the other team came in and started talking about the great holiday they are going on next week. He tried to get us interested in it, but none of us want to talk about holidays right now – he needs to learn to read the room!

Feifei
Some people just don’t get it, do they? You’d think they’d be able to read the room from people’s reactions.
Phil
No, he just kept going on about it, saying how nice the beaches are and how
great the weather is where he’s going. He definitely wasn’t reading the room.

Examples
You’ve been talking to us about football for 15 minutes now – none of us care.
Read the room!

Look, the three of us have given up sugar, and you’re offering us doughnuts?
Come on, learn to read the room!

You’re always complaining, but read the room – none of the rest of us feel like
that.

Feifei
You’re listening to The English We Speak from BBC Learning English, and we are
learning the phrase ‘read the room’, which means to judge how the people
around you feel, or what they think about something. We often use it when we
don’t think people are doing it.

Phil
Yes, it’s often used in the imperative to criticise someone who isn’t doing it. If
they say something inappropriate, or just something that no one else is
interested in. Now Feifei, did I tell you about my new hobby…

Feifei
Read the room, Phil! I don’t want to hear any more about your stamp collecting.

Phil
Maybe I do need to learn to read the room better!

Feifei
You do that! We’ll see you next time.

Phil
Bye!

Feifei
Bye.