



Misaeng (An Incomplete Life) is the story about corporate office workers in the fictional trading company One International, a story which deeply resonated with its viewers and became a cultural phenomenon for its vivid portrayal of the corporate world. This series revolves around the protagonist Jang Geu-Rae (Yim Si-Wan), as he and other employees at the company tread their way through the grueling world of corporate life as "Misaeng".
Let's learn English through Misaeng!

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tvN 1주년 특별기획 **미생** 1주



Misaeng Episode 4.

In the following scene, Manager Oh Sang-Sik realizes that all his efforts to win a contract with a former high school classmate of his were futile and learns the reason behind it.*

Oh Sang-Sik: What's the reason? You don't like the delivery terms?

Byun Hyung-Cheol: No, the delivery terms are excellent. But to be honest, we had no intention of doing business with you in the first place. We decided it's not marketable yet.

Oh Sang-Sik: If you knew it wasn't going to happen, why did you test the waters?
 (...)

Byun Hyung-Cheol: I'll make it clear and simple for you to understand. You may not be aware of this, but in the old days, you always bossed me around and I had to grovel*.

Oh Sang-Sik: What?

Byun Hyung-Cheol: So, just think of this as me playing the boss for once.

* futile 헛된, 소용없는 / grovel 비굴한 태도를 취하다, 기다

1. Today's Expression

"Test the waters"

(간을 보다)

Today's expression is "test the waters". Testing the waters refers to the act of trying to figure out what people think about something before deciding whether or not to do it. It is commonly used when you have a possible plan or a product you'd like to execute or release, and you want to see how it will be received. The expression can be used in everyday conversation as well as in a business setting.

Similarly, you can also say

- » feel out the situation
- » check things out
- » check out the situation

One thing to note, however, is that although "test the waters" can be colloquially* translated to '간을 보다' in Korean, this expression is not used when you are trying to see if the food has been seasoned* properly. In this case, you "taste" the food, not "test the waters".

* colloquially 구어체로, 회화체로 / season (양념을) 넣다, 양념[간]하다

2. Special Tip!

*The former
and
The latter*

The terms "the former(갑)" and "the latter(을)", although they are ubiquitously* used in business contracts in Korea, do not have English equivalents*. They literally* translate to the "First Party" and the "Second Party"; the "One" and the "Other".

However, the colloquial use of "the former" and "the latter" in Korean culture warrants* a translation separate from the contract-based definition mentioned above. In this case, "the former" can be translated to "the side with an advantage," while "the latter" can be described as "the side that needs something from the other side (the former) and is often expected to grovel and act in an obsequious* manner". As for the side that wields* the power in this relationship, "the former" can abuse its power, which can be expressed in the following ways:

- » boss ~ around
- » be bossy (to ~)
- » be on a power trip

* ubiquitously: 어디에나 있는, 아주 흔한 / equivalent: (...에) 상당[대응]하는 것, 등가물 / literally 문자[말] 그대로 / warrant 정당[타당]하게 만들다 / obsequious: 아부하는, 비굴한 / wield: (권력·권위 등을) 행사하다