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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The English We Speak

### Take to the cleaners



*NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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*(Helen bumps into Rob in her local laundrette.)*

**Helen**

Hello Rob. I didn't know I would find you here. I love this laundrette. The washing machines are very efficient.

**Rob**

I hope so. I bought a very expensive washing machine for my house but when I put my clothes in, they ended up dirtier!

**Helen**

What do you mean?

**Rob**

Well, apparently there's some oil leaking in the motor and it stained all the washing! So I'm trying to wash them again here in this laundrette!

**Helen**

Oh, I can see all the yellowish stains ... This white shirt ... it's an expensive, designer one ...

**Rob**

Yes, it is. That was my best shirt. It's probably ruined now! If this stain doesn't come out, I'll sue the washing machine manufacturers! I'll take them to the cleaners!

**Helen**

Calm down, Rob! It's the shirt that has to be taken to the cleaners!

**Rob**

Not exactly, Helen. In English, when we say we're going to 'take someone to the cleaners', we mean we're going to take a lot of money from them.

**Helen**

So you want to ask the company to give you a lot of money – maybe all they've got – to compensate you for the loss of your very expensive shirt.

**Rob**

Yes! I'm very angry with them. Anyway, you can use the phrase in a sports context, too, when one team defeats another one by a large number of points. 'Take to the cleaners' is today's expression in *The English We Speak*. It used to mean getting money from someone else in a dishonest way but now it can just mean getting a lot of money from someone else.

**Helen**

Shall we listen to some examples of how this phrase is used?

**Rob**

Yes.

**Examples**

*My husband cheated on me with my best friend! I'm going to get the best divorce lawyer in town and take him to the cleaners!*

*My team has the best players and we'll take you to the cleaners in this Sunday's match!*

**Helen**

No need to sue the company, Rob. Call your washing machine manufacturer and ask them to replace it.

**Rob**

But I'm angry!

**Helen**

Don't be. I can take you to the cleaners, but not in the sense of this idiom. I can take you to the cleaners next door – the people who remove stains from clothes. They're very good.

**Rob**

Okay. Well, do you think they might be able to remove this stain?

**Helen**

Of course they can. Come on, Rob.

**Rob**

Okay. Come on, take me to the cleaners! Thanks, Helen.

**Helen**

You're welcome. Bye.

**Rob**

Bye.