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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The English We Speak

### To keep a lid on it



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

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(sound of coffee cup being put on a table)

**Li**

Thanks for the coffee, Neil. What a good idea to present The English We Speak from a coffee shop!

**Neil**

Yes, Li, it's good to get out of the studio - and anyway, I get the coffee for free here.

**Li**

You don't pay for it?! So why do you get it for free?

**Neil**

(Sounding slightly vague) Contacts.

**Li**

Err... contacts?

**Neil**

Yes, people I know. Don't tell anyone but my friend works here and... well... when the boss isn't around, he gives me the coffee for free.

**Li**

(loudly and surprised) He gives it to you for free?

**Neil**

Ssshhh! Keep your voice down. If he gets found out he'll get the sack – you know, lose his job. We need to keep a lid on it.

**Li**

Keep a lid on it?! Why do we need to keep a lid on the coffee? Are we trying to hide it?

**Neil**

No Li. When you say *keep a lid on something*, it means keep it a secret – or keep it quiet about it...

**Li**

Oh I see.

**Neil**

The phrase can also mean keep something strongly under control. Like your loud voice – control it and don't tell everyone! Keep a lid on it.

**Li**

We had better hear some examples while I drink my coffee... quietly!

**Examples**

We need to keep a lid on the company merger – if the newspapers get to hear about this, our share price will drop.

Our baby is due in November but keep a lid on the news – we haven't told our parents yet.

Please – keep a lid on your emotions – otherwise the waiter is going to ask us to leave!

**Li**

So that is keeping a lid on something. (sips coffee) Mmm, this coffee does taste good but I don't like the idea that you got it for free – it's dishonest... I might have to tell someone about this dishonest behaviour.

**Neil**

Ah! You mean you're going 'to lift the lid' on what I'm doing – that means to tell someone about something bad – well, you can but you know what that will mean?

**Li**

What's that?

**Neil**

You'll be buying the coffee next time – and it's not cheap!

**Li**

Oh right – let's just keep it our little secret for now shall we?

**Neil**

OK Li!

**Both**

Bye.