Non-Microspeak: Boiling the ocean

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Some time ago, MSN Careers listed *Boil the ocean* as a workplace phrase you should learn. Thankfully, the phrase (meaning "to attempt something impossibly ambitious") is not currently in wide use in Microspeak. However, a friend of mine who works in another industry tells me that it is not only very much alive in his line of work, it became corrupted as it was imported. My friend's industry involves companies from around the world, and although the working language for meetings is English, most of the participants are not native speakers of the language. He suspects that the phrase *boil the ocean* was introduced into the collective consciousness without a formal definition, and the company representatives at the meeting missed out on the *impossible* part of the definition, interpreting it instead as merely meaning *to attempt something ambitious*.

As a result, at their meetings, you will hear people say things like "Let's try not to boil more than one ocean."

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