Volkswagen admitted fitting more than 10 million of its cars with devices to cheat emission tests. Its chief executive, Martin Winterkorn, quit after the scandal broke.

In his resignation statement, Winterkorn said he was “not aware” of having done anything wrong. But prosecutors have opened a criminal investigation into him to “clarify the chain of responsibility.”

The former chief may or may not be criminally responsible for the matter, but when an organization makes a mistake, it is hard for its leader to shirk (逃避, 迴避) responsibility. The idiom to use is “難辭其咎” (nan2 ci2 qi2 jiu4).

“難” (nan2) is “hard,” “difficult,” “辭” (ci2) means “to decline,” “to shirk,” “to avoid,” “其” (qi2) is “that,” “that person’s” and “咎” is “fault,” “blame.” Literally, “難辭其咎” (nan2 ci2 qi2 jiu4) is “it is hard to shirk that blame.” It means “can hardly absolve oneself from the blame.”

When someone makes a mistake and tries to wriggle his or her way out of taking responsibility, you can tell that person you “難辭其咎” (nan2 ci2 qi2 jiu4). The character “辭” (ci2) has many meanings. Apart from “to shirk,” it may also mean “to dismiss,” “to fire.” The term “辭退” (ci2 tui4) means "to fire," “to discharge.” It can also mean “to resign,” as in “辭職” (ci2 zhi2).

In Hong Kong, whenever something goes wrong, the people like to ask the related official to quit. Quitting the job is easy. Skirting blame and responsibility is much harder.

**Terms containing the character “難” (nan2) include:**

- **難題 (nan2 ti2)** – a difficult problem
- **艱難 (jian1 nan2)** – hard
- **難忘 (nan2 wang4)** – hard to forget
- **難過 (nan2 guo4)** – to feel sad, miserable