



18 QUESTIONS FOR NEXT BUSAN

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How Busan Recognizes Good People

There are two ways to choose people — sorting by criteria, and scouting over time. The more precise measurement becomes, the more anyone can sort. The one differentiator a city keeps is the eye that watches a person long enough to recognize them. And that eye grows only in repeated encounters.

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Sorting and Scouting

There are two ways to choose people.

One is *sorting*. Education, career, certificates, portfolio, awards. You set criteria, pass those who meet them, drop those who don't. It is fast, looks fair, and is easy to explain. Almost every selection in Busan — youth grants, startup packages, hiring — chooses people this way.

The other is *scouting*. Will this person last? Does this person love Busan? Will this person stay when things get hard? The things not on the checklist. The things that don't convert to numbers. So it is far harder, slower, and harder to explain than sorting.

The claim of this essay is simple. **The eye that recognizes good people is not made by measurement. It grows in repeated encounters.**

Numbers don't tell you who a person is

In earlier essays we saw what Busan does not measure. Measurement is only a tool that tracks whether trust is growing; it does not create trust. Choosing people is the same.

Measurement grows more precise by the year. A person's schooling, record, output, reputation — a machine now analyzes and scores them in seconds. Sorting people by measured values is already leaving human hands. The tools that sort faster and more accurately grow cheaper every year.

So sorting alone gets no one ahead. When everyone applies the same criteria with the same tools, everyone sorts out the same people. The only

difference left is one — *the eye that recognizes what the checklist cannot show*. Where measurement ends, the work only a human can do begins.

This is why Busan loses its builders. Busan's selection is skilled at *sorting* but clumsy at *scouting*. The person who passes the checklist passes anywhere. The person Busan must recognize is the one the checklist cannot see — but who loves Busan deeply.

The sorted and the scouted are not the same

The limit of choosing people by a single evaluation shows in the numbers too.

In Korea, the one-year survival rate of new businesses is 64.8%, the three-year rate 44.5%, the five-year rate 32.1%. Two of every three that start are gone within five years. At the moment of selection, all of them looked promising. The documents were excellent, the pitch was smooth, the checklist was passed. But *the ability to pass a checklist* and *the ability to last five years* were different things.

Sorting sees only *the moment of selection*. How that person works a year later, how they endure failure three years on, whether they are still there after five — a single evaluation cannot know. What Busan must truly recognize is not *the person who is good now* but *the person who will last*, and sorting cannot tell the two apart.

Even the accelerator known as the world's most selective decides admission by documents and a short interview. Fast and efficient — but that method ends up choosing *the person who writes a good checklist*. That may differ from the person a city actually needs: the one who will stay.

Scouting is only possible through repetition

The work of recognizing good people — English calls it *scout*: to find a buried gem and follow it for a long time. French says *reconnaître* — *re* (again) plus *connaître* (to know), to know only after seeing not once but again and

again. Japanese 見出す means to draw out and discover what was buried. Three languages point at the same thing. Recognizing a person is not *cutting away* but *finding*, and it is possible only through *repetition*.

So how is that eye trained? There is only one way. *Repeated encounters*. You cannot know a person by seeing them once. Only after seeing them again each quarter, checking where last year's work stands this year, watching whether a promise was kept — do you finally see *this person*. The eye cannot be written into a manual. It accumulates only within the time one person has watched another, at length. That time cannot be shortened. However fast the measuring tools become, *whether someone will last five years* becomes visible only by spending close to five years.

For Busan to become a city that recognizes good people, it needs not more sorting but places built for *repeated encounters*. Not a program that ends after one year's grant, but a structure that sees the same person again across several years. Not an evaluation whose judges change each time, but a structure where the gaze that has watched one person long continues. Not a one-time selection that confers a qualification, but a structure where trust accumulates over time. This is not to say the city needs more middle managers to watch people. It is to say the time of watching the same person long must be embedded in the institution itself.

This runs in the opposite direction from *efficiency*. It is slow, takes effort, and is hard to prove in numbers. But — in an age when measurement is finished, it is the one differentiator a city can hold. Scouting good people is the first place Busan has not yet built. What builds that place is not a more refined evaluation sheet, but *the promise to watch one person for a long time*.

And after scouting — how do you grow them? The next question.

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