

What should I do when a co-worker steals my ideas?

Question: "I'm searching for tips on how to handle co-workers who steal, tweak and execute others' ideas and then smile with glee when receiving recognition for it. How should I handle it? Should I keep my ideas to myself and only share them with upper management or in a group setting where I'll receive the credit?" —Lisa

Comments

Isn't it amazing how others want to take credit for good ideas. I keep dates/times and the idea(s) of everything that I come up with. I do not share, unless I truly know the other person can add or improve upon what I have come up with then I always use a "let's work together so we can share the credit attitude", which does work even if I take a secondary seat once it is out there sometimes. Always, if I do this I let the person I have spoken with know someone in upper management like my suggestion to get some additional input from "you" in tweaking this. I always make sure before I let other know the ideas that can save the company money and time I document and let upper management only know, then I suggest who would be of assistance on the project. It's not about you but how it will benefit the company that really counts.

Posted by: | September 14, 2007 at 09:46 AM

I just read an article about this and their suggestion was to eliminate any doubt about whose idea/suggestions by taking notes. Something like 'we then discussed various ways to eliminate the middleman. Mary suggested (whatever), Sue thought trying (whatever), etc.

That way there could be no doubt as to who suggested what, when.

Posted by: Pam | September 14, 2007 at 01:57 PM

The problem with sharing with one's supervisor is that supervisor's can also be guilty of idea-stealing. The best way is to make suggestions in a group setting or to provide it in writing (email) to more than one person. Although I agree to a point with anonymous about benefiting the company instead of oneself, I believe that a person receiving due credit he/she has earned is good for morale, helps make them more visible for promotions (thus the back-biting), and allows ideas to flow more freely. I have seen departments even become hostile when this type of behavior goes unchecked.

Posted by: Anita T. | September 14, 2007 at 02:17 PM

Let's take another viewpoint: the person who took your idea is fully aware of what he/she has done, and probably believes that you will not confront him/her about it. So, do just that: walk up to the person and say, "why did you pass off my idea as your own?" In most cases, the person will be so taken aback that you won't have to worry about a repeat performance. If he/she truly believes they own the idea, tell them that you have proof it's yours and if it happens again, you're going to upper management and personnel. And when it does happen, do just as you promised.

Posted by: Cindy Brock | September 15, 2007 at 08:26 AM

I would use e-mail as a means to convey your idea. Document your idea and e-mail it to the people in your organization who can implement it. Copy your supervisor, so he/she will know who generated the idea. You will then have a record of when the idea was submitted and any responses received.

Posted by: | September 17, 2007 at 12:58 PM

I track my ideas in my Lotus Notes Journal but I also use cc to key persons as part of a "keeping you in the loop" on what I am working on. This way others are aware of my ideas. Really I believe in the team instead of my own credit however, you want to keep creative juices flowing and encourage people. Stealing ideas stifles creativity and team spirit.

Posted by: Karen | September 17, 2007 at 02:27 PM

I like the email trail. A tactic I have used is after a meeting where ideas are "shared" I send a follow-up email to the people involved and my supervisor (other supervisors as appropriate) summarizing what was said and done. For instance, "in today's marketing meeting, I suggested we incorporate a new logo into our print ads. John then expounded on this. Sue has agreed to take on the task of contacting design artists...". This way, as ideas are being worked out, there is an understanding that at the very least, it was a team effort and all people, including me and can get their share of the credit.

Posted by: Meredith | September 18, 2007 at 11:56 AM

My supervisor has each of his direct reports submit a 'Weekly Status Report' to him every Friday by 3pm. In that report, we are to document (bullet point) our Weekly Accomplishments, Goals (for the following week), and our Major Challenges / Mitigating Actions. This last section is intended to identify any important issues you are dealing with, to bring it to your supervisor's attention. Aside from noting the issue, also, most importantly, what you are doing about it (i.e. mitigating action).

This is a great forum for documenting our 'ideas', discussions with our peers, issues & solutions, etc. It's been a great tool for all of us.

Posted by: Kristi | September 21, 2007 at 12:53 PM

It's true that folks will often use our ideas as their own. In some way that is flattering. In others it is really annoying, especially if they do not acknowledge us.

But think of the situation where one might spend all of their effort protecting their ideas. They might never complete any of them on their own because more often than not we need the help of others to complete them. Further, spending time and energy continually protecting ideas often inhibits developing new ones. And, an idea is nothing if it is not implemented.

Now imagine someone who has numerous ideas and chooses to freely share them. The best ideas will get developed by them or others, they will be able to move on to newer, bigger, better ideas, and eventually will be recognized as a source of ideas and innovation.

Why do so many of us feel that we'll only have a few good ideas and they must be protected so we get credit? Although it seems counter intuitive, my experience shows that success flows from sharing ideas and efforts more than from protecting them and overtly seeking credit.

Posted by: Bernie | September 21, 2007 at 01:11 PM