



# Why Your Boss Takes Credit for Your Work, and 3 Ways to Fight Back

My friend spent the entire weekend writing a 10-page detailed report. He sent it off to his boss for review on Sunday night. When he came into the office on Monday, the boss had already emailed it to everyone, without crediting my friend, and basically claiming the work was all his!

My friend resisted the urge to [throw his boss out the window](#), and he took a note that he'd have to be on guard the next time.

Why would a boss do this? What are the possible remedies?

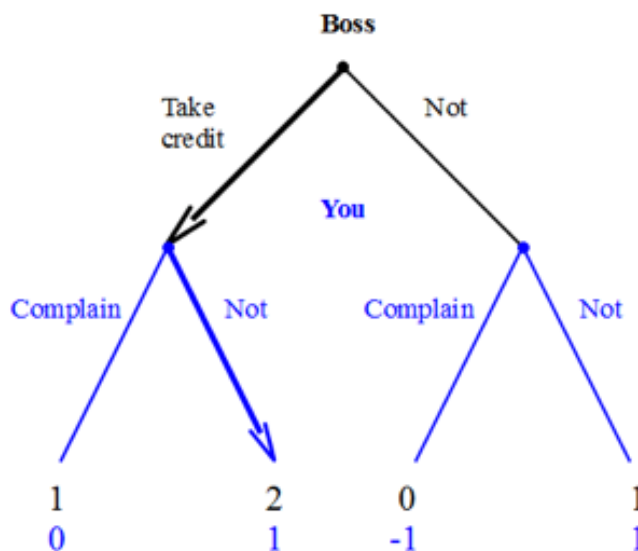
## A brief strategic analysis

Consider a simplistic game where a boss can act first and decide to take credit, and you in response can complain. How might this situation play out?

To start, consider your strategic position. Your only real threat in this game is to complain after the fact.

But therein lies the problem: complaining is generally a weak, self-destructing strategy. It immediately sours the relationship with your boss, it can sound petty to other people in the company, and it can detract attention from your other accomplishments. Come review time, people might remember that you did an excellent job, but they might also have the notion that you are somehow "hard to work with" and "not a team player." Since people often focus on the negative, on balance you are almost losing.

Therefore, the sequential game might look something like the following figure.





(If you wish to argue the numbers, first read an explanation justifying the payoffs is at the end of this post)

The game is easy to analyze. It is a dominant strategy for your boss to “take credit”: if you do nothing, the boss wins big; if you complain, the boss can earn sympathy points from everyone else. Similarly, your dominant strategy is to “not complain”: you can’t risk complaining when your boss isn’t taking credit, and you similarly are often better off letting your boss take credit than raising a storm.

The game, as it is, is rigged in the boss’s favor.

That’s not to say you have to live with it. A strategic approach is that when you don’t like how the game is going, don’t get angry. Change the game.

### **Three tactics to fight back**

#### **1. Speak up**

In researching this post, I came across a nice article about how to [take credit for your work](#).

The person explained that when she was new to a job, she would run ideas through her boss or other people first. Later the boss would bring up the idea at a meeting. She was thrilled to hear the idea was good, but then she realized that she wasn’t getting credit—her boss was!

After realizing her ideas were good, she realized she had to be the one to speak up at meetings.

This idea focuses on the sequential nature of the game. Instead of letting your boss move first, you should change the game and be the one to speak out.

#### **2. Make it public**

This is a bit more devious method so it should be used carefully.

A boss can only take credit if no one else knows the truth. Occasionally you can include co-workers or another boss in a CC when you email the work to your boss for review.

This will be a record of how much work you’ve done. When your boss takes credit, everyone will know you actually did the work.

#### **3. Revelation**

This is a tactic to use sparingly as it is meant to humiliate your boss.

Your boss can only take credit if everyone thinks the boss understands the document. You could strategically omit key details or explanatory steps “by mistake.” When the boss is asked about it, the boss will have no clue how the results were derived. You will get called in to explain the derivation, and it will be clear to everyone who really did the work.





# Mind Your Decisions

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Here is some other advice from around the web.

### **When A Boss Takes Credit For Your Work, [Forbes](#)**

–“Find out what happened: Remain calm and seek to understand their actions with questions such as: “I was surprised to find out you used my presentation and even more surprised that you removed my name as the author. You also let the meeting attendees think you were the one who came up with the new product ideas and analysis. Help me understand why you didn’t give me credit for the work I had done.” Then stop talking and listen to what they have to say without interrupting them.”

### **Does it matter if your boss steals your ideas?, [CNN Money](#)**

–“One approach: Keep your best stuff under your hat until you get a chance to mention it to your whole team at once, either in a meeting or in an email to the group.”

### **Does your boss take credit for your work?, [CareerBuilder](#)**

–“If your boss steals your ideas once, Civitelli says to make a mental note to pay closer attention in the future, in case it’s a recurring problem. If you find it happens multiple times, it’s time to take action.”



Career Woman, Inc.