



American Expression E0793 Steal someone's thunder

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To "steal someone's thunder" is an idiomatic expression used to describe the act of taking credit for another person's idea, achievement, or work, thereby diminishing their recognition or overshadowing their accomplishments. The phrase originates from the theatrical world, specifically from the play "The Rehearsal" written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan in 1671.

In the play, a character named Sir Fretful Plagiary bemoans the fact that his plays are often criticized for lacking originality. To address this issue, he comes up with a spectacular scene featuring thunder and lightning effects that he believes will impress the audience. However, before he has the chance to showcase this scene, another character steals his idea and incorporates the thunder and lightning effects into their own production. This leads Sir Fretful Plagiary to exclaim, "Oons! If I call my servant, he is sure to steal my thunder."

Since then, the phrase "steal someone's thunder" has become a popular metaphor for situations where someone's unique contribution or accomplishment is overshadowed or co-opted by someone else, thereby depriving them of the recognition they rightfully deserve.

The expression is often used in various contexts, including creative industries, professional settings, and everyday conversations. For example, in the world of business, if an employee suggests an innovative idea at a meeting, and someone else presents it later as their own, they are said to have stolen their colleague's thunder.

In the field of arts and entertainment, the phrase is applicable when a creative work or performance is imitated or replicated without giving credit to the original artist or performer. Plagiarism and copyright infringement are instances where someone's thunder is stolen, undermining their intellectual property rights and artistic contributions.

In personal relationships, stealing someone's thunder can occur when one person shares exciting news or accomplishments, only to have another person redirect the attention back to themselves or share similar news to compete for attention.

While the phrase often carries negative connotations, it is crucial to consider intent and context when assessing situations where someone's thunder appears to have been stolen. In some cases, individuals may unintentionally replicate ideas or achievements due to shared interests or exposure to similar influences. In other instances, it may result from a genuine oversight rather than a deliberate attempt to diminish another's accomplishments.

Addressing the issue of stealing someone's thunder involves promoting a culture of recognition and credit-giving. Encouraging open communication, acknowledging and celebrating individual contributions, and giving credit where it is due can foster a supportive and collaborative environment where ideas are respected and creativity is nurtured.

In conclusion, "steal someone's thunder" is an idiomatic expression that refers to taking credit for another person's idea, achievement, or work, thereby overshadowing their contributions. Originating from the theater, the phrase has become a metaphor for instances where individuals fail to recognize or attribute the accomplishments of others. To foster a positive and respectful environment, it is essential to acknowledge and celebrate individual contributions, promoting a culture of recognition and credit-giving.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever experienced a situation where someone stole your thunder by taking credit for your idea or work? How did you handle the situation, and what strategies do you think can prevent such occurrences in collaborative settings?
2. In the age of social media and digital content, how do you view the issue of stealing someone's thunder in terms of intellectual property rights and copyright infringement? What measures can be taken to protect creative works and ensure fair recognition for content creators?
3. The phrase "steal someone's thunder" is often associated with professional and creative industries, but can you think of any examples in personal relationships where someone's accomplishments or news were overshadowed by others seeking attention or validation?
4. In highly competitive environments, such as academia or business, the pressure to achieve recognition can sometimes lead to unethical behavior, including taking credit for others' work. How can organizations foster a culture of integrity and proper attribution to prevent such occurrences?
5. The digital age has made it easier for ideas and content to be shared and disseminated quickly. How can individuals and communities navigate the fine line between inspiration and plagiarism to avoid inadvertently stealing someone's thunder while still fostering creativity and collaboration?