

# Borrowed Work?

## Dilemma:

I recently attended a meeting in another department in my company and was surprised to see some of the slides that I had developed a month ago show up in someone else's presentation. Some were my exact slides, not even revisions. If they had taken the time to ask, I'm fairly certain that I would have consented. But the presenters didn't give me any credit verbally or on the slides. And they didn't ask my permission to use them. Do I have any right to be upset about this? What should I do about it?

## Response from Katherine A. Macrone, CCP, SPHR, Lead Compensation Analyst, Moffitt, Nine-year WorldatWork member

I would have to consider many factors in this situation before deciding on any actions. First, if these were slides developed at your work for use in your work environment, then in most cases they would be considered the property of the organization—physically and intellectually. If they were used in an internal presentation, then I would say the behavior was thoughtless, but not unlawful or illegal. If they were used by someone outside the organization, then there may be a violation of intellectual property rights and/or copyright infringement.

I would suggest approaching the individual who used these and just let him or her know that you developed these

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slides. You could also request that if they were to use information put together by you again, they let you know in advance—just in case the information had changed so they would not be using inaccurate data. That should be the best approach to getting the cooperation you are looking for.

Of course you may have been usurped by a co-worker that likes to take credit for other people's work. There is not much you can do about that kind of person except restrict access to your work—much harder to do if the person is above you.

## Response from Donya B. Rose, Managing Partner, The Cygnal Group, Five-year WorldatWork member

There are two principles in play here:  
 (1) Sharing ideas and building on each

other's good work is part of what makes teams powerful and productive, and (2) Being generous with credit for good ideas and good work encourages people to share good ideas and do good work. Most companies expect employees to relinquish any true ownership of ideas created on the job, in the legal, intellectual-capital sense of ownership. So reusing your work may not be something for which permission was needed. However, failing to credit you was not helpful.

At a minimum, you should discuss the oversight directly with the presenter, making sure he or she is aware of the source of the content, emphasizing your delight that your ideas seemed valuable enough to build on, and gently suggesting that it would have been a good idea to share credit. You could say something like, “I love it when ideas take on a life of their own, and begin to really influence decisions and results. And I always feel it's great to help the organization understand that it takes all of us to make these changes happen by giving credit to all those who have contributed along the way.” 

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