

Taking Credit: Spotlighting Your Accomplishments

By Miriam Bamberger, CPCC and Heather Bradley, CPCC

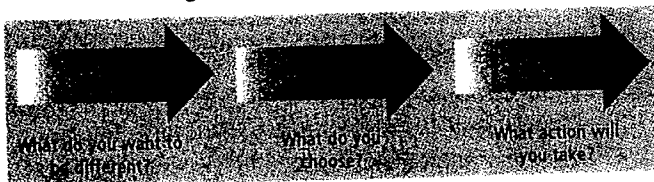


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Getting credit for good work is a critical key to career advancement. As we have noted in this column, it is not enough simply to do good work. Promotions do not always go to the most qualified candidate. Often, they are awarded to the candidate who is best *positioned*. Making sure the spotlight shines on you is critical to advancement.

Yet there is a delicate balance between taking credit for your successes and coming across as arrogant or boastful. How do you navigate this potential minefield? The Flourishing Process™ will help you initiate discussions to boost your career, not harm it.

The Flourishing Process



First, ask yourself *what* decisions do you want to influence?

- More meaningful work assignments?
- Partnership?
- Promotion?
- Something else?

The irony regarding taking credit is that the people who make assignments and advancement decisions need and want to know about your performance so they can make their own well-informed decisions. Clarifying what you want to be different will help you make the distinction between providing useful information and simply tooting your own horn.

Second, *who* will make these decisions? A clear picture of whom you want to influence will help you recognize and be prepared for key opportunities when they present themselves.

In formal situations, such as interviews or performance reviews, you are *expected* to discuss your contributions. In fact, *not* taking credit in these situations can be a strike against you. If you do not have a formal review, ask for feedback. This creates the opportunity for you to take credit and gives your manager or supervisor a chance to recognize your contributions.

Informal interactions are far more common. We meet others in the hallway or the elevator and ask, "How are things going?" A one-word response, such as "Fine" or "Great," will not do much to advance your career. Instead, take credit by sharing a success story, such as, "I learned the most interesting thing as I prepared for the Acme case last week," or "I'm getting ready for my third deposition."

The more you practice, the more comfortable you will be when the stakes are high, such as finding yourself in the elevator with the CEO or a prominent partner.

Third, and perhaps most significant, develop a clear picture of *what behavior* is acceptable in your organization and what is not. Before saying anything, look around. What are others saying? What are they *not* saying? How do your colleagues talk about their successes? Ask your mentor or a trusted colleague for insight.



Choosing a Frame of Mind

Some attorneys balk at the idea of "taking credit." Indeed, how you *approach* taking credit directly influences the impression you make. Your frame of mind is a choice, which will have as much, if not more, of an impact than the specific words you choose.

For example, if you view taking credit as bragging or office politics, your success stories are likely to come across as awkward and insincere. By contrast, viewing it as a key piece of your career advancement strategy will help you come across as a professional sharing information.

Choosing New Habits

If taking credit is a new behavior, you will also need to choose new habits to support it. There are several possibilities:

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- Increasing the frequency of what you already do;
- Decreasing the frequency of something you do often;
- Starting new activities; and
- Stopping activities that aren't useful.

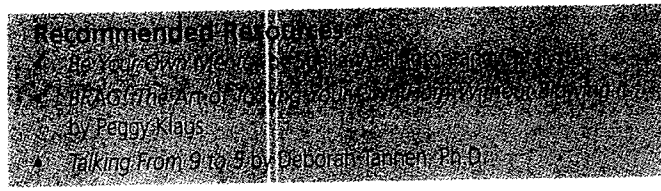
Be honest with yourself and identify where you may be unintentionally sabotaging your efforts to take credit. You may notice that the first person who speaks in a meeting gets credit for results, whether or not that person was responsible for them. Or you may realize that while you have diligently been working through lunch at your desk to complete more work, the person who has lunch with the higher-ups gets better work assignments. Turn the spotlight on yourself by consciously and intentionally choosing new habits.

Examples:

- I choose to speak up before being called on in department meetings, even if it is uncomfortable.
- I choose to ask one partner to lunch every month.
- I choose never to say "Fine" when someone asks, "How's it going?" I choose to prepare and deliver a fresh success story every week.



The key to taking credit is recognizing and seizing various opportunities as they present themselves, rather than plan-



ning and delivering a formal pitch. Think of it in terms of preparing a case.

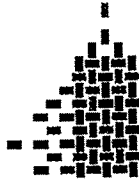
Collect Evidence

Ask internal and external clients to share their appreciation in writing. Forward notes or letters to your boss and highlight them in your performance review. If a client sends flowers or a food basket as thanks, share the gift with your supervisors and colleagues to generate "buzz."

State the Case

From all of the projects you are working on and successes you have had, select two or three that are particularly relevant or flattering, and polish them into a well-practiced success story.

- **Be interesting.** Frame an accomplishment in terms of something intriguing you learned. Share what was *interesting* about an assignment, rather than simply what you did.
- **Be specific.** Specific answers create more credibility than generalities. Saying you conducted two depositions will advance your case more than saying you did "a lot."
- **Be succinct.** Going on and on can turn others off. Cover all the salient points, then let the other person connect the dots or ask follow-up questions.



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