

Catch Word #81 – To steal someone's thunder

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone. It's Maura.

Jessie: And Jessie. And here at Culips, we always focus on natural, everyday English and conversation.

Maura: Mmhmm. Now, if you want to know more about our podcast or you want to learn more about this episode, you can go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and you can become a member.

Jessie: And then once you're a member, you can access the learning support materials. And those include a transcript of the episode, detailed explanations about some of the words and phrases we use, and a quiz to help you test your comprehension.

Maura: And you can also donate, which we always appreciate because it helps us continue making podcasts for you.

Jessie: Absolutely.

Maura: Now, today's episode is a Catch Word episode. And in these episodes, we look at expressions and idioms and similar expressions. We give you examples and detailed explanations of those expressions.

Jessie: And today's theme is different ways to talk about getting or giving attention, recognition, or praise. So, today we're going to talk about, first, an idiom to say that someone took everyone's attention away from another person and put the attention on themselves.

Maura: And we're also going to look at an idiom that says that someone unexpectedly or suddenly became the most interesting part of an event or a performance.

Jessie: And then finally, we'll talk about a saying that you can use to acknowledge someone's contribution or ability, to direct attention towards them.

Maura: Mmhmm. So, really, all these expressions have to do with where the attention and focus is, on which person.

- Jessie: Exactly. And throughout the whole episode, we'll also introduce you to some other useful vocabulary related to attention and recognition.
- Maura: Great. So, let's get started. What is our first expression today?
- Jessie: Well, our first expression is the idiom **to steal someone's thunder**.
- Maura: Yeah, **to steal someone's thunder**.
- Jessie: And **to steal someone's thunder** actually has two similar meanings. It can either mean to take everyone's attention away from someone else to put it on yourself...
- Maura: ...or **to take credit for** something that someone else did or **to take credit for** someone else's idea.
- Jessie: Right. So, in either case, you're taking all the attention, all the recognition, for yourself.
- Maura: Right. So you're taking the attention that someone else should get and you're taking it just for you.
- Jessie: Exactly. So, for example, at a business, a manager could **steal one of his employees' thunder** by taking the employee's good idea and presenting it to everyone as if he **came up with** it himself. So in that case, he would be **stealing the employee's thunder**.
- Maura: Right. I feel like I've seen this situation in movies, where there are two people competing for a job and one employee takes the idea of another employee to look good. So the first employee **steals the other one's thunder**.
- Jessie: Yeah. And having someone **steal your thunder** is never a pleasant experience; it's always a bad thing. Sometimes, like in those movies, somebody **steals someone else's thunder on purpose**, to make themselves look good or because they want to be the **centre of attention**.
- Maura: Right. And sometimes people do it **by accident**. They don't mean **to steal the other person's thunder**, but they have bad timing or they have a similar idea, and so they take the attention away from that person.

- Jessie: Exactly. Yeah, for example, I might be at a party and I just finished telling everybody that I'm going to move across town next month. And then you come up and join the conversation and say, "Hey, guess what? I'm moving to Asia next month." Now you've **stolen my thunder**, because your news was much bigger than mine, but you didn't even know that I had said that, so you could've done it accidentally.
- Maura: Right. And because you just told everybody your news about moving across town, no one really got a chance to ask you about it or be interested in your story before I came in and said that I was moving to Asia. When I came in and said that I was moving to Asia, everyone became interested in my story and my plans, and then no one really cared about your moving.
- Jessie: Exactly. Should we do a dialogue example?
- Maura: Sounds good.
- Jessie: Hey, Julie. It was so nice to see you at the dinner party last night.
- Maura: Yeah, it was such a fun night.
- Jessie: But I was wondering, why didn't you tell anybody that you just got engaged? That's such exciting news!
- Maura: Well, you know, I was going to, but then Susan mentioned that she was pregnant, which is so exciting! I didn't wanna **steal her thunder**, so I just decided to wait and tell people about my engagement later.
- Jessie: Oh, that's really thoughtful of you. Let her have her time **in the spotlight** and you can talk about your news later.
- Maura: Yeah, I'll be engaged for a while. There's no hurry. So, in that example, I had some big news to share, but I didn't want **to steal a friend's thunder**, so I decided not to say it.
- Jessie: Right, because it's not nice **to steal someone's thunder**, you wanted to save your news for another time.
- Maura: Right. Then we can both have attention separately.
- Jessie: Yeah. Maura, where does this phrase come from? What's its origin?

- Maura: Well, in the 18th century, there was a playwright, which is a person who writes plays. His name was John Dennis, and he built a device that made sounds like thunder for one of his plays. But unfortunately, his play wasn't very successful and not many people saw it, but the idea of the device that makes thunder was used in another play, which became very popular. And so, the writer of the second play got all the credit for the thunder, because that's the show that was popular and that's what everyone knew it from.
- Jessie: Oh, wow. So, the second writer got all the attention for creating this new device, even though the other writer actually used it first.
- Maura: Exactly. OK, now let's look at a similar expression to **to steal someone's thunder**.
- Jessie: Yeah, let's look at the expression **to steal the show**.
- Maura: **To steal the show**. It's very similar to **to steal someone's thunder**, but it's a little bit different.
- Jessie: So, **to steal the show** means to suddenly or unexpectedly become the **centre of everyone's attention**. And it could be used in the context of an actual show, like a TV show, or a movie, or a play, or it could be used more figuratively, in the context of some kind of performance, a presentation, or an event, or even just telling a story to all your friends.
- Maura: Yes, but the idea of a show is always there. Also, **to steal the show** isn't always a bad thing. When one person **steals another person's thunder**, it's always negative; it isn't a good experience. But if you **steal the show** and get all the attention, you're not taking the attention from someone else. It could be a positive thing.
- Jessie: Yeah. If one performer gives an especially wonderful performance, they might stand out the most, but their good performance probably also makes the other actors look good as well.
- Maura: Right. So that's one big difference, that **to steal the show** can be a good thing and it doesn't mean that you're taking attention away from other people.
- Jessie: Should we do a dialogue example?
- Maura: Sure.

- Jessie: Hey, so how was your office party? That was last weekend, right?
- Maura: Yeah, it was so fun. We actually had a karaoke machine and everyone was taking turns singing their favourite songs and joking around. And this one girl, her name's Joan, she sang so well. She totally **stole the show**. It was awesome.
- Jessie: That sounds like a great party.
- Maura: It really was. I'll remember it forever.
- Jessie: So, in that example, there was a kind of show, a performance of karaoke, where everyone was singing. But it could also be something like a business presentation, and if one speaker gave an especially good talk, they could steal the show in the business presentation.
- Maura: Mmhhh. Or you could be at a party and one person starts telling a really interesting, exciting story in a very captivating way, and that person could **steal the show**.
- Jessie: Yeah, so everyone turns their attention towards them; they really **stole the show**.
- Maura: So, the first two expressions we looked at were about taking the attention for yourself or getting the attention, but the last expression is about giving the attention, or the credit, to another person who deserves it.
- Jessie: Exactly. So, our last expression is **to give credit where credit is due**.
- Maura: Mmhhh. I'll repeat that: **to give credit where credit is due**.
- Jessie: And this is really the opposite of **stealing someone's thunder** or **stealing the show**. Instead of **taking the attention and the credit for yourself**, you're giving credit to somebody else. You're acknowledging their contribution or that they did a good job.
- Maura: Right, because someone might say *thank you* to you or give you a compliment, but really, sometimes you don't deserve it all. Maybe someone else helped you, or it was someone else's idea, and so you want to give that person credit.

- Jessie: Right. And I think that's a really noble thing to do. If you accomplish something great, you might deserve a lot of credit and a lot of recognition, but if other people helped you, then it's nice to recognize them as well.
- Maura: I agree. It's a really kind thing to do and very **humble**.
- Jessie: So, let's do a dialogue example for this one.
- Maura: Great. Paula, I wanted to tell you, your presentation yesterday was really interesting.
- Jessie: Oh, thank you so much. I worked really hard on preparing it, but I have **to give credit where credit is due**. All the statistics, all the numbers, that was John and his team. They worked really hard on **coming up with** that.
- Maura: Oh, wow. Well, I'll have to tell him he did a good job too, then.
- Jessie: He'd appreciate that.
- Maura: OK, good. So, in that last example, Jessie, you wanted **to give credit where credit was due**.
- Jessie: Right. I wanted to **share the spotlight** with the other people who helped me with the presentation.
- Maura: Right, because it's always a kind thing to do.
- Jessie: Exactly.
- Maura: Now, let's review the expressions that we looked at one more time.
- Jessie: OK. So, first, we started with **to steal someone's thunder**.
- Maura: Right, which is to take attention from one person and put it on to yourself.
- Jessie: And next, we talked about **to steal the show**.
- Maura: And this means that someone becomes the most interesting part of an event or performance, so they get all the attention.
- Jessie: And then last, we talked about **giving credit where credit is due**.

- Maura: Right. And this one is quite the opposite. ***To give credit where credit is due*** means that you acknowledge someone else's work or someone else's idea, and so you give attention to that person, not yourself.
- Jessie: So, that's it for us this week. We hope you've enjoyed this episode.
- Maura: And don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, where you can become a member and have access to all of our learning materials. Or you could help us out by making a donation.
- Jessie: And if there's a topic you'd like us to talk about, you can send us an email or leave a comment on our website.
- Maura: Yeah, we get a lot of good ideas from our listeners, so don't hesitate to contact us.
- Jessie: So until next time, this has been Jessie.
- Maura: And Maura.
- Jessie: Bye!
- Maura: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

To steal someone's thunder

When one person **steals another person's thunder**, it means that one person takes the attention away from the other person and puts it on themselves. It can also mean that one person gets the recognition for work that someone else did. As we say in this episode, this is never a good thing to do. Sometimes it happens intentionally and other times it is not intentional. A person might **steal another's thunder** by talking before another person is finished talking, or by saying that an idea is all their own when they actually worked with another person.

Imagine one person who has thunder, and then imagine a second person stealing the thunder so that all the attention and credit is now with them. That's the idea behind this expression.

Here's one more example:

Brian: I can't believe Manuel **stole my thunder** like that at the meeting.

Rebecca: I know! You were right in the middle of telling the bosses about the great work you'd done, when he interrupted and started talking about his own work, using some of your ideas!

To take credit (for)

If someone **takes credit**, it means that they take the recognition for doing something well. In this way, everyone will know who did something well and that person will be appreciated for doing it.

When you do good work, it's always nice to hear it from others, both in your personal life and at work.

Most of the time, this expression is used to talk about someone else. It is possible that someone might say, "I'll take credit for the work," but more often, people give credit to others. You can **take credit**, get credit, or give credit.

Here are a couple more examples and variations of this expression:

Mike: You've got to **take credit** for the work you did on the project. We couldn't have done it without you!

Kevin: No, no. We all worked hard. I don't need any extra credit.

Donna: Sheila really helped us out on our homework assignment.

Ian: Yeah, she did. I'm glad she **took credit** for it during class.

The word *credit* is also popularly used in *credit card*. This is a different meaning for *credit*.

To come up with (an idea)

Here's a prepositional verb for you—with two prepositions! **To come up with** means to think of something or to have an idea. You can **come up with** an invention or you can **come up with** a plan for how to do something. In this episode, **to come up with** is used twice to mean that someone thought of a new idea.

Here are a couple of examples with **to come up with**:

Pam: Those are some good ideas you just told me.

Oscar: Thanks! I **came up with them** last night.

Kathy: Greg told me he thought we should drive to New York this weekend.

Ned: He's always **coming up with** crazy plans.

On purpose

On purpose is used to say how something was done. If a person does an action **on purpose**, it means that they wanted to do it, and intended to do it. If something was not done **on purpose**, it means that the person didn't want to do it, but did it accidentally.

We say in this episode that some people do not steal another person's thunder **on purpose**. Someone might say or do something that takes attention away from another person, but sometimes that's not what they wanted to do.

Here are a couple of examples with **on purpose**:

Helen: I can't believe that Freda broke my favourite vase.

Paul: I'm sure she didn't do it **on purpose**.

Helen: I know, but I'm still sad about it.

Kyle: I can't believe that Shawn asked Brenda about her boyfriend!

Ben: Do you think he did it **on purpose**?

Kyle: I don't know. I'm sure he knew that they broke up last week.

By accident

*To do something **by accident*** is the opposite of *to do something on purpose*. **By accident** means that it was an accident and it wasn't intended.

Here are a couple of examples with *by accident*:

Helen: I can't believe Freda broke my favourite vase.

Paul: I'm sure it was **by accident**.

Helen: I know, but I'm still sad about it.

Lucy: **By accident**, at work today, I knocked over my boss's cup of coffee and it spilt on her keyboard.

Kamar: Oh no! I'm sure she knows you did it **by accident**. I hope the keyboard still works!

The centre of attention

Someone or something can be the **centre of attention**. To be **the centre of attention** means that all focus and attention is on that person or thing. This usually happens in situations with a small group of people, like at a party or a meeting at work.

Some people love to be **the centre of attention**, and so they always do things to get the focus back on them. These people usually tell lots of interesting or exaggerated stories, speak with loud voices, and use a lot of mannerisms or hand gestures when they speak.

You can't really use this expression to talk about an organized performance. Of course, at a concert, the band will be the focus, but as this was planned, you wouldn't say that the band was the **centre of attention**. Generally, the person or thing that is the **centre of attention** is not planned or organized.

Here's an example with this expression:

Hugh: Nathan is always the **centre of attention**.

Victor: I know. He does tell good stories though.

To be in or to share the spotlight

A spotlight is a big light that is used in performances to draw attention to a particular person or place on the stage. When people talk about *the spotlight*, it can also simply mean where the focus and attention is.

To be in the spotlight means to be the focus. If someone is **in the spotlight**, it means that everyone's attention is on that person. **To share the spotlight** means to share the attention with another person or other people.

Here are a couple of examples with these expressions:

Luke: I hate **being in the spotlight**.

Dave: I know. I'm not comfortable with lots of attention either.

Janis: Where's Adam? I want **to share the spotlight with him**.

Vicky: I don't know. I'll try to go find him so he can also get some of the credit.

To be in the spotlight is a close synonym for *to be the centre of attention*.

To steal the show

To steal the show can be used when talking about any kind of performance. If someone **stole the show**, it means that their performance was the best and that they attracted the attention of the people there.

To steal the show can be good or bad. An actor might **steal the show** and get lots of attention because of a great performance, but the other actors were also very good. It could be negative if an actor with a small part **steals the show**, and then the main actor doesn't get any recognition. This would be most negative from the perspective of the main actor!

Here's one more example with this expression:

Carmen: Penelope really **stole the show** last night!

Amanda: Yeah, she did an excellent job!

To give credit where credit is due

As mentioned above, you can give credit to someone for a good thing they've done. This expression, **to give credit where credit is due**, emphasizes the same thing. This expression might also be used if credit was originally given to the wrong person.

Here's another example with **to give credit where credit is due**:

Herman: Melinda really did a good job on the written proposal last week.

Cindy: Yes, but she should also **give credit where credit is due**. Jon helped her out a lot.

Being humble

In Canadian culture, it's generally considered a good thing to be **humble**. To be **humble** means to not be too proud or arrogant. This is a big reason why stealing someone's thunder is a negative thing, because it can be seen as an arrogant thing to do. **Humble** and modest people do not steal others' thunder, at least not on purpose.

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. To _____ someone's thunder

Please complete the expression by filling in the blank.

- a) take
- b) give
- c) credit
- d) steal

2. **Alison: We didn't know what to do, but then Justin _____ a really good idea.**

Please fill in the blank.

- a) came down with
- b) came up with
- c) came into
- d) came with

3. **Hailey wanted to cut the piece of fabric, so she did.**

Which is definitely true about Hailey?

- a) She cut the piece of fabric on purpose.
- b) She cut the piece of fabric by accident.
- c) She didn't like the piece of fabric.
- d) She didn't have any scissors.

4. **What does it mean if Kyla is the centre of attention?**

- a) She stole the show.
- b) She stole someone's thunder.
- c) She is standing in the centre of the room.
- d) She has all the attention and focus of a group of people.

5. Jolene was in the spotlight.

Which is definitely true about Jolene?

- a) The attention was on Jolene.
- b) Jolene worked behind the scenes.
- c) Jolene was an actress.
- d) Jolene liked to talk.

6. Which is true about the expression *to steal the show*?

- a) It's always negative.
- b) It's always positive.
- c) Sometimes it's negative and sometimes it's positive.
- d) It's always neutral.

7. To give credit where credit is _____.

Please complete the expression by filling in the blank.

- a) do
- b) to
- c) too
- d) due

8. Bill is a humble person.

Which is definitely true about Bill?

- a. He is very proud.
- b. He is arrogant.
- c. He likes pie.
- d. He is not proud or arrogant.

Answers: 1.d 2.b 3.a 4.d 5.a 6.c 7.d 8.d