



## WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

# Go Ahead: 'Steal My Thunder'

September 05, 2020

And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

On this program we teach common English expressions and how to use them.

Many English expressions come from weather. We have talked about many in past shows. Recently we talked about lightning and how it never strikes twice ... except when it does.

Well, today we talk about the noise that comes with lightning. Thunder!

Thunder is an awesome sound. It is nature's warning system. It tells us that something extremely powerful and deadly -- lightning -- may be coming soon.

All this you already know. But did you know this? You can also steal thunder!

That's right -- in English expressions you can.

If you think about it, thunder is pretty amazing. From low **rumblings** to sharp **cracks**, it is easy for thunder to take our attention away from what we are doing. We stop and look to the sky. Is it going to rain? Am I in danger of getting hit by lightning?

As an expression, thunder works the same way. When you steal someone's thunder, you steal attention away from them.

We have many words that mean the same thing. You beat them. You **best** them. You **surpass** them.

Staying in the world of weather we have these two expressions: **outshine** and **eclipse**. If you steal a co-worker's thunder, you outshine her or eclipse her. You take attention away from her and put it on you.

We also have these two words: **outperform** and, from theater, **upstage**. If you outperform or upstage your friend, you have stolen his thunder.

You can steal thunder by simply doing something better.

Here is an example set in a baking competition. This is where people bake something like bread, pies, or a cake and then are judged.

ANNOUNCER: Congratulations to Tanisha Hightower for winning the award for Best Cake with her chocolate cake. In a minute, we will announce the winner for Best Pie. But first, some announcements. We have a lost child. Will the parents of little Timmy please come to the main stage area ...

JACKSON: Well, Clarise, we all know that you will win the Best Pie award. You win every year for your cherry pie.

CLARISE: Well, that is true, Jackson. I have won for the last *five* years with my Famous Cherry Pie. But you never know. Maybe this year someone else will win. I doubt it. But maybe.

ANNOUNCER: And now ...

CLARISE: Shh. They are going to announce the winner.

ANNOUNCER: ... the winner of the Best Pie is ... Doug Johnson for his cherry pie. Congratulations to Doug!

CLARISE: What! There must be a mistake! My cherry pie always wins! And who is Doug Johnson??

JACKSON: He is someone who just totally stole your thunder.

You can also steal a person's thunder by doing something before that person. Let's say you know that someone plans to do or say something – something good. So, you plan to do or say it first.

But remember, it only counts as “stealing thunder” if your words or actions are a success or get a lot of **praise**.

*You can steal my thunder any time*

And that’s the end of this *Words and Their Stories*. Until next time ... I’m Anna Matteo!

*'Cause if it's up to me*

*You can steal my thunder any time*

*Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor. Keith Urban sings the song “Steal My Thunder” at the end.*

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## Words in This Story

**rumbling** – *n.* a low, heavy, continuous sound or series of sounds

**crack** – *n.* a sudden loud, sharp sound

**surpass** – *v.* to become better, greater, or stronger than

**outshine** – *v.* to do better than (someone or something) : to earn more respect or attention than (someone or something)

**eclipse** – *v.* to do or be much better than (someone or something)

**outperform** – *v.* to perform better than

**upstage** – *v.* to draw attention away from

**praise** – *n.* spoken or written words about the good qualities of someone or something : an expression of approval for someone or something

**ingredient** – *n.* one of the things that are used to make a food, product, etc.

**charity** - *n.* an organization that helps people who are poor, sick, etc.

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