

## LAW 7

GET OTHERS TO DO THE WORK FOR YOU, BUT ALWAYS  
TAKE THE CREDIT

### JUDGMENT

*Use the wisdom, knowledge, and legwork of other people to further your own cause. Not only will such assistance save you valuable time and energy, it will give you a godlike aura of efficiency and speed. In the end your helpers will be forgotten and you will be remembered. Never do yourself what others can do for you.*

## TRANSGRESSION AND OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

In 1883 a young Serbian scientist named Nikola Tesla was working for the European division of the Continental Edison Company. He was a brilliant inventor, and Charles Batchelor, a plant manager and a personal friend of Thomas Edison, persuaded him he should seek his fortune in America, giving him a letter of introduction to Edison himself. So began a life of woe and tribulation that lasted until Tesla's death.

### THE TORTOISE, THE ELEPHANT, AND THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

*One day the tortoise met the elephant, who trumpeted, "Out of my way, you weakling—I might step on you!" The tortoise was not afraid and stayed where he was, so the elephant stepped on him, but could not crush him. "Do not boast, Mr. Elephant, I am as strong as you are!" said the tortoise, but the elephant just laughed. So the tortoise asked him to come to his hill the next morning. The next day, before sunrise, the tortoise ran down the hill to the river, where he met the hippopotamus, who was just on his way back into the water after his nocturnal feeding. "Mr Hippo! Shall we have a tug-of-war? I bet I'm as strong as you are!" said the tortoise. The hippopotamus laughed at this ridiculous idea, but agreed. The tortoise produced a long rope and told the hippo to hold it in his mouth until the tortoise shouted "Hey!" Then the tortoise ran back up the hill where he found the elephant, who was getting impatient. He gave the elephant the other end of the rope and said, "When I say 'Hey!' pull, and you'll see which of us is the strongest. "Then he ran halfway back down the hill, to a place where he couldn't be seen, and shouted, "Hey!" The elephant and the hippopotamus pulled and pulled, but neither could budge the other—they were of equal strength. They both agreed that the tortoise was as strong as they were. Never do what others can do for you. The tortoise let others do the work for him while he got the credit.*

ZAIREAN FABLE

When Tesla met Edison in New York, the famous inventor hired him on the spot. Tesla worked eighteen-hour days, finding ways to improve the primitive Edison dynamos. Finally he offered to redesign them completely. To Edison this seemed a monumental task that could last years without paying off, but he told Tesla, “There’s fifty thousand dollars in it for you—if you can do it.” Tesla labored day and night on the project and after only a year he produced a greatly improved version of the dynamo, complete with automatic controls. He went to Edison to break the good news and receive his \$50,000. Edison was pleased with the improvement, for which he and his company would take credit, but when it came to the issue of the money he told the young Serb, “Tesla, you don’t understand our American humor!,” and offered a small raise instead.

Tesla’s obsession was to create an alternating-current system (AC) of electricity. Edison believed in the direct-current system (DC), and not only refused to support Tesla’s research but later did all he could to sabotage him. Tesla turned to the great Pittsburgh magnate George Westinghouse, who had started his own electricity company. Westinghouse completely funded Tesla’s research and offered him a generous royalty agreement on future profits. The AC system Tesla developed is still the standard today—but after patents were filed in his name, other scientists came forward to take credit for the invention, claiming that they had laid the groundwork for him. His name was lost in the shuffle, and the public came to associate the invention with Westinghouse himself.

A year later, Westinghouse was caught in a takeover bid from J. Pierpont Morgan, who made him rescind the generous royalty contract he had signed with Tesla. Westinghouse explained to the scientist that his company would not survive if it had to pay him his full royalties; he persuaded Tesla to accept a buyout of his patents for \$216,000—a large sum, no doubt, but far less than the \$12 million they were worth at the time. The financiers had divested Tesla of the riches, the patents, and essentially the credit for the greatest invention of his career.

The name of Guglielmo Marconi is forever linked with the invention of radio. But few know that in producing his invention—he broadcast a signal across the English Channel in 1899—Marconi made use of a patent Tesla had filed in 1897, and that his work depended on Tesla’s research. Once again Tesla received no money and no credit. Tesla invented an induction motor as well as the AC power system, and he is the real “father of radio.”

Yet none of these discoveries bear his name. As an old man, he lived in poverty.

In 1917, during his later impoverished years, Tesla was told he was to receive the Edison Medal of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. He turned the medal down. “You propose,” he said, “to honor me with a medal which I could pin upon my coat and strut for a vain hour before the members of your Institute. You would decorate my body and continue to let starve, for failure to supply recognition, my mind and its creative products, which have supplied the foundation upon which the major portion of your Institute exists.”

## Interpretation

Many harbor the illusion that science, dealing with facts as it does, is beyond the petty rivalries that trouble the rest of the world. Nikola Tesla was one of those. He believed science had nothing to do with politics, and claimed not to care for fame and riches. As he grew older, though, this ruined his scientific work. Not associated with any particular discovery, he could attract no investors to his many ideas. While he pondered great inventions for the future, others stole the patents he had already developed and got the glory for themselves.

He wanted to do everything on his own, but merely exhausted and impoverished himself in the process.

Edison was Tesla's polar opposite. He wasn't actually much of a scientific thinker or inventor; he once said that he had no need to be a mathematician because he could always hire one. That was Edison's main method. He was really a businessman and publicist, spotting the trends and the opportunities that were out there, then hiring the best in the field to do the work for him. If he had to he would steal from his competitors. Yet his name is much better known than Tesla's, and is associated with more inventions.

*To be sure, if the hunter relies on the security of the carriage, utilizes the legs of the six horses, and makes Wang Liang hold their reins, then he will not tire himself and will find it easy to overtake swift animals. Now supposing he discarded the advantage of the carriage, gave up the useful legs of the horses and the skill of Wang Liang, and alighted to run after the animals, then even though his legs were as quick as Lou Chi's, he would not be in time to overtake the animals. In fact, if good horses and strong carriages are taken into use, then mere bond-men and bondwomen will be good enough to catch the animals.*

HAN-FEI-TZU, CHINESE PHILOSOPHER, THIRD CENTURY B.C.

The lesson is twofold: First, the credit for an invention or creation is as important, if not more important, than the invention itself. You must secure

the credit for yourself and keep others from stealing it away, or from piggy-backing on your hard work. To accomplish this you must always be vigilant and ruthless, keeping your creation quiet until you can be sure there are no vultures circling overhead. Second, learn to take advantage of other people's work to further your own cause. Time is precious and life is short. If you try to do it all on your own, you run yourself ragged, waste energy, and burn yourself out. It is far better to conserve your forces, pounce on the work others have done, and find a way to make it your own.

*Everybody steals in commerce and industry.*

*I've stolen a lot myself.*

*But I know how to steal.*

*Thomas Edison, 1847-1931*

## KEYS TO POWER

The world of power has the dynamics of the jungle: There are those who live by hunting and killing, and there are also vast numbers of creatures (hyenas, vultures) who live off the hunting of others. These latter, less imaginative types are often incapable of doing the work that is essential for the creation of power. They understand early on, though, that if they wait long enough, they can always find another animal to do the work for them. Do not be naive: At this very moment, while you are slaving away on some project, there are vultures circling above trying to figure out a way to survive and even thrive off your creativity. It is useless to complain about this, or to wear yourself ragged with bitterness, as Tesla did. Better to protect yourself and join the game. Once you have established a power base, become a vulture yourself, and save yourself a lot of time and energy.

### THE BLIND HEN

*A hen who had lost her sight, and was accustomed to scratching up the earth in search of food, although blind, still continued to scratch away most diligently. Of what use was it to the industrious fool? Another sharp-sighted hen who spared her tender feet never moved from her side, and enjoyed, without scratching, the fruit of the other's labor. For as often as the blind hen scratched up a barley-corn, her watchful companion devoured it.*

FABLES, GOTTHOLD LESSING, 1729-1781

Of the two poles of this game, one can be illustrated by the example of the explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa. Balboa had an obsession—the discovery of El Dorado, a legendary city of vast riches.

Early in the sixteenth century, after countless hardships and brushes with death, he found evidence of a great and wealthy empire to the south of Mexico, in present-day Peru. By conquering this empire, the Incan, and seizing its gold, he would make himself the next Cortés. The problem was that even as he made this discovery, word of it spread among hundreds of other conquistadors. He did not understand that half the game was keeping

it quiet, and carefully watching those around him. A few years after he discovered the location of the Incan empire, a soldier in his own army, Francisco Pizarro, helped to get him beheaded for treason. Pizarro went on to take what Balboa had spent so many years trying to find.

The other pole is that of the artist Peter Paul Rubens, who, late in his career, found himself deluged with requests for paintings. He created a system: In his large studio he employed dozens of outstanding painters, one specializing in robes, another in backgrounds, and so on. He created a vast production line in which a large number of canvases would be worked on at the same time. When an important client visited the studio, Rubens would shoo his hired painters out for the day. While the client watched from a balcony, Rubens would work at an incredible pace, with unbelievable energy. The client would leave in awe of this prodigious man, who could paint so many masterpieces in so short a time.

This is the essence of the Law: Learn to get others to do the work for you while you take the credit, and you appear to be of godlike strength and power. If you think it important to do all the work yourself, you will never get far, and you will suffer the fate of the Balboas and Teslas of the world. Find people with the skills and creativity you lack. Either hire them, while putting your own name on top of theirs, or find a way to take their work and make it your own. Their creativity thus becomes yours, and you seem a genius to the world.

There is another application of this law that does not require the parasitic use of your contemporaries' labor: Use the past, a vast storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. Isaac Newton called this "standing on the shoulders of giants." He meant that in making his discoveries he had built on the achievements of others. A great part of his aura of genius, he knew, was attributable to his shrewd ability to make the most of the insights of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance scientists. Shakespeare borrowed plots, characterizations, and even dialogue from Plutarch, among other writers, for he knew that nobody surpassed Plutarch in the writing of subtle psychology and witty quotes. How many later writers have in their turn borrowed from—*plagiarized*—Shakespeare?

We all know how few of today's politicians write their own speeches. Their own words would not win them a single vote; their eloquence and wit, whatever there is of it, they owe to a speech writer. Other people do the work, they take the credit. The upside of this is that it is a kind of power



that is available to everyone. Learn to use the knowledge of the past and you will look like a genius, even when you are really just a clever borrower.

Writers who have delved into human nature, ancient masters of strategy, historians of human stupidity and folly, kings and queens who have learned the hard way how to handle the burdens of power—their knowledge is gathering dust, waiting for you to come and stand on their shoulders. Their wit can be your wit, their skill can be your skill, and they will never come around to tell people how unoriginal you really are. You can slog through life, making endless mistakes, wasting time and energy trying to do things from your own experience. Or you can use the armies of the past. As Bismarck once said, “Fools say that they learn by experience. I prefer to profit by others’ experience.”

Image: The Vulture. Of all the creatures in the jungle, he has it the easiest. The hard work of others becomes his work; their failure to survive becomes his nourishment. Keep an eye on the Vulture—while you are hard at work, he is circling above. Do not fight him, join him.

Authority: There is much to be known, life is short, and life is not life without knowledge. It is therefore an excellent device to acquire knowledge from everybody. Thus, by the sweat of another’s brow, you win the reputation of being an oracle. (Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

## REVERSAL

There are times when taking the credit for work that others have done is not the wise course: If your power is not firmly enough established, you will seem to be pushing people out of the limelight. To be a brilliant exploiter of talent your position must be unshakable, or you will be accused of deception.

Be sure you know when letting other people share the credit serves your purpose. It is especially important to not be greedy when you have a master above you. President Richard Nixon's historic visit to the People's Republic of China was originally his idea, but it might never have come off but for the deft diplomacy of Henry Kissinger. Nor would it have been as successful without Kissinger's skills. Still, when the time came to take credit, Kissinger adroitly let Nixon take the lion's share. Knowing that the truth would come out later, he was careful not to jeopardize his standing in the short term by hogging the limelight. Kissinger played the game expertly: He took credit for the work of those below him while graciously giving credit for his own labors to those above. That is the way to play the game.