

FORUM

Be Sure to Give Me Credit, Dad

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Guidelines for managing potential conflict regarding professional credit are presented. These include: (a) acknowledge that professional credit is a very sensitive issue; (b) determine credit decisions early enough in a project so that the participants can adjust their workloads to correspond to the credit that they expect to receive; (c) develop a credit policy for students and research assistants who participate in projects; (d) view professional credit in the context of the broader clinical and/or research endeavor; and (e) develop a credit policy that is fair, equitable, and understandable.

KEY WORDS: professional affairs, research

At a recent augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) conference, I enjoyed dinner with one of my professional colleagues. Our conversation ranged from personal to professional to family topics. Part of our discussion centered on this unusual AAC family of which we were a part; people from such different "roots" who have gathered about a central mission. My colleague and I concluded that we were pleased to be part of this family. However, as the evening progressed, he related a professional concern that reminded me that our professional family is not immune from some of the negatives that have plagued creative personnel from many fields.

He related the unsettling problem of a long-term colleague who had become very sensitive about profes-

sional credit. Disagreements about order of authorship, inclusion of new colleagues in clinical and research projects, and initiation of separate research projects seemed to be threatening the ongoing relationship of this productive team. Interestingly, I was aware that these two had survived other threats to their working relationship. They had managed a period of time when their research related workloads seemed to be quite uneven, because one had assumed administrative responsibilities. They continued to work productively during times of liberal and tight funding. They had "stuck it out" through a "dry spell" when some ventures were not very successful. Now, they were perhaps in a terminal struggle over credit. As we reflected together on this problem, we reminded each other of a number

Editorial Note: The forum section is designed to develop the field of augmentative and alternative communication through the discussion and debate of clinical/educational, technical/manufacturing, and theoretical/empirical issues. The forum is designed for letters to the editor, position papers, and in some cases papers which may be considered provocative by some members of the profession. Readers are encouraged to submit letters to the editor about manuscripts published in AAC. Such letters may amplify basic points or issues raised in the original paper or may take exception to procedures, data analysis, interpretation, and discussion in the original papers. Readers are also encouraged to submit original position papers of "think pieces." Papers in this section undergo the same peer review process as other manuscripts with the exception that letters to the editor are given an expedited review. The expedited review process typically involves only three members of the editorial board (including the associate editor of original manuscripts when the letter to the editor is making reference to previously published papers). This procedure for letters is designed to increase the possibility of letters being published in the one or two issues immediately following the original manuscript. Readers are encouraged to submit papers to the journal which are specifically identified for this section of the journal, being designated as either a letter to the editor or a position paper. Readers are strongly encouraged to submit potentially publishable comments on any manuscript in the journal. However, we are particularly interested in receiving comments on items published in this section of the journal.

of research teams from a variety of fields who had not survived the struggle for credit. This was not an isolated problem.

Later, in my hotel room, I called home to contact my family. This particular call was concluded with a wide ranging discussion with Jonathan, my 12-year-old son. Through the years he had learned to extend these conversations in an effort to postpone his usual bed time. On this particular evening, he told me about a presidential candidate who had withdrawn from the campaign because of his failure to properly assign credit for quotes that he had used. When I finally insisted that we say "good night," Jonathan concluded with one of his favorite lines, "Be sure to give me credit, Dad." With a chuckle he added, "or you'll never be president."

He was aware that during my presentations, I often quoted his observations and wisdom. He was proud of it. Through the years he had seen and played with many AAC devices. He had met many persons who were unable to speak and had become quite close to some of them. In these ways, he had shared my world. With his outgoing, pre-adolescent personality, he was quite generous with his comments. As he became older, his interest in my use of his ideas began to increase. By his twelfth year, he was insisting on credit. Upon hanging up the phone, I realized that my young son had refocused my attention on the professional concern of my colleague at dinner.

In a field such as AAC, research and clinical activities are complex in that they often include clinical, technical, educational, and administrative expertise. Rarely does a single individual possess the range of skills necessary to complete these activities alone. Therefore, we usually work in research and clinical teams. Thus, the issue of fair and equitable assignment of credit is a common and continuing concern. Because of the relatively small size of our field, we can hardly afford to lose productive research teams for any reason.

Having worked in several large research oriented institutions, I have seen too many credit battles and abuses. Having worked with a wide variety of individuals through the years, I have dealt with credit conflicts on several occasions. The following are several guidelines that have been useful.

First, we must acknowledge that as humans we are very sensitive to all issues related to credit. It is difficult for us to acknowledge to our colleagues that this could ever be a problem for us; therefore, we tend to avoid talking about it. Age and experience appear to be neither a friend nor foe in this matter. If our work "cultures" can reflect an awareness that credit-related concerns are to be expected, discussed, and resolved, most credit-related conflicts can be managed and productive teams maintained. Several authors have written about professional credit (Brown & Krager, 1985; Winston, 1985). These articles may encourage discussion of this sensitive topic.

Second, determine the credit decisions early enough in a project so that the participants can adjust their workloads to correspond to the credit they expect to

receive. Early assignment of credit is very difficult to do. Usually, the senior person on the team must take the initiative to ensure this decision is made. Obviously, if the senior person is perceived as the person who takes undue credit, then such negotiations are very difficult. One of the sure signs of an upcoming credit battle is when the participants begin to "out do" each other as the project comes to a close. Through extensive effort, all attempt to consolidate their position, so that they will receive "appropriate credit." Early assignments of tasks and early decisions will reduce this tendency. Open participation by the research team in the decision-making process might prevent an upcoming credit battle, because unfairness or misunderstanding can be resolved at an early stage.

Third, develop a credit policy for students and research assistants who participate on projects. Make the policy public. Some of the greatest abuses of credit that I have ever seen relate to students. In an academic environment, the relative power of students rarely matches that of faculty or senior staff. Therefore, students nearly always lose when a power struggle over credit occurs. Generally, the student credit policy should cover several areas: conception of the project, pilot work, project design, laboratory use, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. A clear policy will delineate these areas and suggest the expected assignment of credit dependent upon the role of the student in relation to other team members. Although the policy may vary depending upon the work setting, the public communication of the policy and early assignment of credit usually will preclude inadvertent problems. However, if there is a willful effort on the part of faculty or student to take excessive credit for joint work, the grievance procedures of the institution are usually required to resolve the conflict. Unfortunately, participation in a grievance procedure resolves the current problem, but usually destroys any possibility of an ongoing working relationship.

Fourth, as with most other aspects of human relationships, the issue of credit must be viewed within the context of the broader clinical and/or research endeavor. There will be times when the correlation between work and credit on a specific project may not be completely fair for a variety of reasons including health, workload, and time limitations. Within the broader context of a working relationship, inequities can be balanced across a variety of products and projects.

Fifth, senior staff/faculty have a central role to develop a credit "culture" within an organization that is fair, equitable, and understandable. If the leadership within an organization is abusive in the approach to credit, others must accommodate in one of several ways. They can submit and resent, struggle against it and damage their working relationships, or leave to take another job. Each of these options destroys or disrupts productivity. Even if senior personnel are not abusive, they must be aware of other problems. Let me be more personal here.

As a senior faculty member, I am faced with many opportunities to disrupt the credit culture of the re-

search effort where I work. I believe that "when your hair is gray, it is easy to get both more credit and more blame than you deserve." For example, when the AAC community hears something positive about our program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, it is easy to assume that I am responsible, because I am better known than younger faculty or students. Since seniority does not make one immune to the desire for credit, it is very easy for senior personnel to take credit for the work of others, even without appearing to do so. This is particularly difficult in regard to student research. As a faculty advisor, I actively participate in students' educational programs, including the planning and execution of their research. Because I get the invitations to present workshops and seminars, I must carefully and clearly assign credit, if the work that we are doing together is presented.

To suggest that Jonathan understood all of this is obviously a little generous, even for my own son. However, his instruction that I give him appropriate credit revealed a growing sensitivity. Careful, clear assign-

ment of credit by senior staff seems to set the tone for an organization. Tolerance of the inequities that will inevitably occur and patience with human sensitivity about credit will sustain participants during difficult times. Finally, our research and clinical focus must be guided by an abiding awareness of the "magic" that attracted us to the AAC field in the beginning—to assist persons who cannot speak to "talk" and persons who cannot "write" to place words on paper.

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Letters to the Editor

Comment on Mitchell and Atkins

Mitchell and Atkins in their June 1989 article, "A comparison of the single word intelligibility of two voice output communication aids," (VOCAs) compared "the intelligibility of the Echo II Plus and EvalPac speech synthesizers, which are commonly used in communication devices" (page 84). Throughout their article, the authors say that they compared the EvalPac and the Echo II Plus. In fact, the EvalPac is not a speech synthesizer but a communication device that uses a speech synthesizer. Likewise, the Echo II Plus is not a VOCA but a speech synthesizer. What the authors actually said throughout this article was that they compared two different types of equipment: a voice output communication device and a speech synthesizer.

To equate the equipment, the authors had two choices. They could either have said that they are comparing the VOCAs, that is the EvalPac with the Apple IIe microcomputer (the device that housed the Echo II Plus), or comparing the speech synthesizers, here the TMS 5220 chip with the SSI 263 chip. Since Mitchell and Atkins compared speech synthesis intelligibility, perhaps they should have referred to the speech chips. In fact, this problem might have been avoided all together if the authors had described both the synthesizers and the computers that housed them.

How AAC specialists write and present information

reflects our knowledge and philosophy of the field. If we are going to be scientific and to strive for factual, empirical research then we must scrutinize our terminology, our analyses and our research reports. Clinicians who rely on AAC researchers for scientific evaluation of equipment and technology must receive accurate, dependable and detailed reviews. These reports shape our service delivery and the ultimate quality of life for many nonspeaking individuals.

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VOCA System Configurations: A Response to Fried-Oken

We appreciate the opportunity to reply to the concerns raised regarding terminological clarity in our June 1989 article, "A comparison of the single word intelligibility of two voice output communication aids." The concern arises from awkward wording on page 84 of