



CASE #2001-11 (A)  
NOVEMBER 2001

## Augusta Richards (A) Responding to Plagiarism

Augusta Richards (her friends call her Dusty) is a tenured professor of strategy at the Boston University School of Management. She has been a professor for over fifteen years, developing a reputation as a top scholar in her field of entrepreneurship by writing many articles and books. As a top scholar, she knows, or knows of, most of the other senior scholars in her discipline. And likewise, most know of her and her work. This community of scholars meets regularly at academic conferences, reads each other's work in academic journals and communicates often through email and listserves. Interaction stretches across North America, Europe and the Far East.

On August 12, 2001, she received an email from a professor in Norway she had never met before. It read simply,

Dear Professor Richards,

Are you aware that several sentences and full paragraphs from your 1996 paper in *Advancements in Entrepreneurship* were copied in a paper by Professors Alpha, Beta and Gamma in the *Basic Handbook of Entrepreneurship Research*, 2000?

Best,  
Olav Gustafson  
Norwegian School of Business

It was a short message, startling for its brevity and its bluntness. Dusty was stunned. She emailed to thank the Norwegian scholar and quickly referred to her paper, an article she had published five years earlier. The Alpha et al. paper proved more difficult to find. The *Basic Handbook of Entrepreneurship* was an obscure book and she had to wait for two weeks while inter-library loan acquired a copy for her. When she finally had a chance to sit down with both papers for a comparison, her outrage grew with each overlapping

© 2001. This case was written by Professor Andrew Hoffman with guidance and input from Professor Candida Brush as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

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sentence. This was as blatant an act of plagiarism as she had ever seen or heard about (see appendix A).

Dusty was livid. This violated the most important value she held regarding academic scholarship - the value of integrity. "Being an academic without having integrity is a contradiction" she fumed. "Plagiarism is the worst of all possible offenses an academic can commit. How can we uphold values in the classroom if we do not uphold them in our own careers? An MBA student caught in such a flagrant violation would be asked to leave the program. Shouldn't we do the same to a colleague for the same offense? It is first and foremost, stealing from the person who wrote the original ideas, in this case me. And second, it does not bode well for the person who succeeds by employing such tactics." Not only as a defense of her own work, but also for the good of the academic community, she felt very strongly that such an affront to professional ethics could not stand. This person must be punished, firmly and visibly.

Yet, even with such vehement feelings over the issue, she held some reservations. "If this is made public, it will destroy this person's career," she reflected. "Anyone caught in plagiarism will suffer a tremendous blow to their professional credibility, one that a scholar might not likely resurrect themselves from. And even if the scholar was forgiven by his or her colleagues, would they be able to overcome the psychological trauma that would accompany such exposure?"

Something else gave her a moment of pause. She had not heard of the first or third authors on the paper -- Terry Alpha and Pat Gamma. But the second author, Chris Beta, was an esteemed professor at a prestigious East Coast college and a prominent member of the scholarly community of which she was a part. They had met once more than five years ago and she knew that Beta's reputation as a researcher and writer was impeccable. "Why would Beta do such a thing?" "Chris must not have known," she speculated. In academic papers, it is the first author who is responsible for the majority of the work, while second and third authors contribute smaller portions. She searched the other author's names on the web through the affiliations listed on the paper. Terry Alpha was a brand new professor at a State University in the mid-west. Pat Gamma was not even listed on the university web page and Dusty assumed that Pat was a doctoral student or research assistant.

Dusty was unsure about the tack she should take in resolving the situation. There was no way that she was going to let this pass, but she did not want to take an action until she had thought through the consequences of them. The reputation and career's of several academics lay in the balance. One was a senior colleague who earned a stellar reputation. One was a new junior faculty member whose early career could be truncated by her actions. And the third may be a professor in training who may be asked to leave the program. Dusty wanted justice, but she also wanted it in proper proportion. She wanted to make sure this never happened again, but if mercy could help her achieve this end, she didn't want to eliminate this possibility.

She began to ask her colleagues for advice, carefully withholding the names of the authors until she decided what to do. A senior editor at one of the most distinguished journals in her field recommended she take a very hard line. He told her to write a formal letter to all the authors of the paper, all the editors of the *Handbook* and all the dean's of the schools where the authors teach. Further, he suggested that she very publicly bring this to the attention of the academic community. "Throw the book at them. There is no defensible excuse for this. Leaving aside that this a legal violation of copyright law, it is your professional responsibility to maintain the standards of academia for these people and for all who live by those standards. The interests of these authors is irrelevant to your decision. Your path of action is clear" This seemed harsh to Dusty. She couldn't help but think of the author's reputations and did not want to hurt them unnecessarily.

Another colleague within the school recommended she tread lightly. He recommended that Dusty just make a phone call to each author, no written correspondence, and be done with it. "Just let them know that you caught them. Scare the daylights out of Alpha and threaten to go to the dean if you ever hear of such a thing again. Your name carries enough weight that you will be listened to. What do you want in the end anyway? You want this person to never do this again. If you are sufficiently stern, you will have achieved your goal. What more do you want?" He also felt it was unwise of Dusty to tarnish the reputation of so senior a scholar as Chris Beta. "This could backfire and hurt you too," he warned. This solution seemed to cast her as an enforcer or vigilante and she didn't like that. She respected the academic process and wanted to deal with this situation in a professional way. While she wanted to be fair, she wanted the offender to pay some price for this crime.

Still a third suggested she just do nothing. He reasoned that this was a minor handbook, one that few people might read, and that the lead author will suffer a permanent trauma early in the career path if she takes action. "Don't make a big deal out of this. It isn't your problem. The kid just made a mistake. Let it go. We've all made a mistake here or there in our lives. This is just the literature review part of your paper anyway. It really isn't the most important part of the paper. Alpha just got lazy and did something really dumb. Let it go." Dusty didn't like this option either. She wanted to make sure that this kind of thing never happened again. That, above all else, was very important to her.

What would you do? How would you handle the situation? How would you balance an interest in mercy with an interest in justice, or would you? How would you balance the interests of the authors with those of the broader academic community, or would you? What would be your steps towards resolving this issue?

**Appendix A**  
**Comparison of Segments of the Two Papers**

Segments from Richards' 1996 paper in <i><u>Advancements in Entrepreneurship</u></i>	Segments from Alpha, Beta and Gamma's 2000 paper in the <i><u>Basic Handbook of Entrepreneurship Research</u></i>
<p>....New ventures do not own or control resources (Stevenson &amp; Gumpert, 1985). In essence, they are organizationally <i>resource-free</i> in that resources are not yet committed to a framework of specific use or opportunity (Becker &amp; Gordon, 1966). The founder(s), or champion(s), of the new venture must first make the relevant resource decisions: prioritization, recruitment of partners, and selection of resource combinations (Becker &amp; Gordon, 1966; Van de Ven, 1993; Casson, 1982; Hart, 1995). However, current applications of resource-based theory in the strategic management literature assume that the initial establishment of a resource base and commitment to an opportunity have already taken place. How the initial resources for a new venture are assembled is a theoretical gap....</p>	<p>.... The assembly of various resources is central to implementation of the entrepreneurial opportunity (Katz &amp; Gartner, 1988; Stevenson &amp; Gumpert, 1985). At the time of a start-up, new ventures are, in essence, resource-free, in that resources either are not yet available, or are yet to be committed to a specific use or opportunity (Becker &amp; Gordon, 1966; Stevenson &amp; Gumpert, 1985). The founding team of the new venture must first make the relevant resource decisions: resource assembly prioritization, recruitment of outside partners and key personnel, and selection of resource combinations (Becker &amp; Gordon, 1966; Van de Ven, 1993; Casson, 1982). However, current applications of resource-based theory in the entrepreneurship and strategic management literature assume that the initial establishment of a resource base and commitment to an opportunity have already taken place. How the initial resources for a new venture are assembled is a theoretical gap....</p>
<p>....The recognition of a firm as a heterogeneous bundle of resources, as follows from resource-based theory, leads to the need for a systematic categorization of resources in order to better understand, evaluate, and select the resources necessary for the start-up process. Early typologies were useful in the discussion of the strategic management of existing firms in which the organization of resources is largely complete (Ansoff, 1965; Andrews, 1971; Hofer &amp; Schendel, 1978; Dollinger 1995). More recently, a typology has been proposed which explicitly acknowledges the uncommitted nature of resources in the start-up process as well as the crucial influence of the venture founder(s) upon the initial resource collection. Resource categories of human, social, organizational, physical, and financial are found to be theoretically derived, resulting in a model that is both parsimonious but complete enough to provide for the discussion of the entrepreneurial process (Richards &amp; Greene, 1996; Greene &amp; Brown, 1997). The typology of resources allows for the analysis of differences in resource-related behaviors by characteristics of the business founder/owner, as well as characteristics of the business (Green,</p>	<p>....The recognition of a firm as a heterogeneous bundle of resources, as follows from resource-based theory, leads to the need for a systematic categorization of resources in order to better understand, evaluate, and select the resources necessary for the start-up process. Early typologies were useful in the discussion of the strategic management of existing firms in which the organization of resources is largely complete (Ansoff, 1965; Andrews, 1971; Hofer &amp; Schendel, 1978; Dollinger 1995). More recently, a typology has been proposed which explicitly acknowledges the uncommitted nature of resources in the start-up process as well as the crucial influence of the venture founder(s) upon the initial resource collection. Resource categories of human, social, physical and financial are found to be theoretically derived, resulting in a model that is both parsimonious but complete enough to provide for the discussion of the entrepreneurial process (Green &amp; Brown, 1997). The typology of resources allows for the analysis of differences in resource-related behaviors by characteristics of the people who play the key roles in resource assembly (Green, Richards, &amp; Brown, 1997).</p>

<p>Richards, &amp; Brown, 1997). In this paper we are interested in a business characteristic, the organizational context of corporate venturing (Van de Ven et al., 1989).</p> <p><b>Human Capital.</b> The customary discussion of human capital, consisting of achieved attributes linked to productivity (Becker, 1964) is here augmented with qualities defined as relevant to an entrepreneur: judgement, insight, creativity, vision, intelligence, ability to perceive opportunities, values and beliefs (Dollinger, 1995). An essential difference between the typology applied here and other typologies is that the human capital of the start-up venture is located solely in the founder or founding team. This individual(s) is both the foundation and fountainhead for all other resources that will become the organization and thus has an influence on the start-up process that is instrumentally different from any other members of the organization....</p>	<p><i>Human Capital.</i> The traditional definition of human capital, found in the economics literature, describes it as consisting of achieved attributes linked to productivity (Becker, 1964). The entrepreneurship literature further extends this definition by specifying the qualities relevant to an entrepreneur: judgement, insight, creativity, vision, intelligence, innovativeness, ability to perceive opportunities, values and beliefs (Dollinger, 1995; Kirzner, 1973; Schumpeter, 1934). Green, Richards, and Hart (1999) maintain that the human capital of the start-up venture is located solely in the founder or founding team: "This individual(s) is both the foundation and fountainhead for all other resources that will become the organization and thus has an influence on the start-up process that is instrumentally different from any other members of the organization" (p. 109)....</p>
<p><b>Social Capital.</b> Social capital is crucial to entrepreneurs, encompassing both actual and potential resources flowing through a relationship network established either individually or collectively, as well as consciously or unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1983, Coleman, 1988). Relationship may evolve from the entrepreneur's family of origin or a personally developed network (Green &amp; Brown, 1997). Social capital is an instrumental resource, an investment made in order to acquire other types of resources, or even additional social capital. One outcome of these networks is the development of trust, which promotes the exchange of resources (Fukuyama, 1996)....</p>	<p><i>Social Capital.</i> Social capital is crucial to entrepreneurs, encompassing both actual and potential resources flowing through a relationship network established either individually or collectively, as well as consciously or unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1983, Coleman, 1988). Relationships may evolve from the entrepreneur's family or a personally developed network (Green &amp; Brown, 1997). Social capital is an instrumental resource, an investment made in order to acquire other types of resources, or even additional social capital. One outcome of these networks is the development of trust, which promotes the exchange of resources (Fukuyama, 1996)....</p>
<p>...These behaviors are similar for independent entrepreneurs, who also depend on informal networks and contacts to gain information, assistance, and start-up capital (Aldrich &amp; Zimmer, 1986). For both, the networks provide for the deployment of social assets when needed (Venkatamaran et al., 1992). It is these personal networks that also provide for recruitment and socialization of new members (Van de Ven, 1988). In addition, components of the network, such as size, strengths of the ties within the network, and time devoted to these relationships are posited to affect initial profits (Aldrich &amp; Zimmer, 1986; Granovetter, 1973)....</p>	<p>... Entrepreneurs depend on informal networks and contacts to gain information, assistance, and start-up capital (Aldrich &amp; Zimmer, 1986). The networks provide for the deployment of social assets when needed (Venkatamaran et al., 1992). It is these personal networks that also provide for recruitment and socialization of new members (Van de Ven, 1988). In addition, components of the network, such as size, strengths of the ties within the network, and time devoted to these relationships are posited to affect initial profits (Aldrich &amp; Zimmer, 1986; Granovetter, 1973)....</p>
<p><b>Physical Capital.</b> Physical resources are tangible goods needed to operate the business and include</p>	<p><i>Physical Capital.</i> Physical resources are tangible goods needed to operate the business and include</p>

<p>raw materials, plant, property, and equipment (Hofer &amp; Schendel, 1978; Dollinger, 1995). The physical capital of the independent entrepreneur is limited at the outset because few tangible resources are controlled by the founder(s) in the earliest stages of development. However, the quantity of physical resources needed is industry-specific and varies greatly across ventures.</p> <p><b>Financial Capital.</b> Financial resources are primarily money, assets, and stocks (Dollinger, 1995; Grant, 1991; Hofer &amp; Schendel, 1978). For the start-up venture these are the funds used to initiate, operate, and grow the business (Bygrave, 1992). Start-up financial capital for the independent entrepreneur is limited to whatever the founder or founding team is able to raise, usually from personal finances, family, and friends (Shulman, 1997). External funding sources are often available to the start-up due to both the small size, lack of track record, and unknown future of the firm (Stinchcombe, 1965; Aldrich &amp; Auster, 1986). This situation is especially precarious given that financial capital, or the lack thereof, can determine venture outcome (Bruno &amp; Tyebjee, 1982). Therefore, other than personal funds, financial capital that is obtained by the independent entrepreneur comes through the corridors of the founder(s) social capital....</p>	<p>raw materials, plant, property, and equipment (Hofer &amp; Schendel, 1978; Dollinger, 1995). The physical capital of the independent start-up is limited at the outset because few tangible resources are controlled by the founder(s) in the earliest stages of development.</p> <p><i>Financial Capital.</i> Financial resources are primarily money, assets, and stocks (Dollinger, 1995; Grant, 1991; Hofer &amp; Schendel, 1978). For the start-up venture these are the funds used to initiate, operate, and grow the business (Bygrave, 1992). Start-up financial capital for the independent entrepreneur is limited to whatever the founder or founding team is able to raise, usually from personal finances, family, and friends (Shulman, 1997). Venture capital or bank loans are often unavailable to the start-up due to both the small size, lack of track record, and unknown future of the firm (Stinchcombe, 1965; Aldrich &amp; Auster, 1986). This situation is especially precarious given that financial capital, or the lack thereof, can determine venture outcome (Bruno &amp; Tyebjee, 1982). Therefore, for many ventures angel investors become the major, if not the only, substantial source on initial external funding....</p>
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