

My boss stole my identity!

I.D. theft in the workplace is becoming more common, but workers are still forced to trust their employers with sensitive information, says Fortune's Stephanie Mehta.

By [Stephanie Mehta](#), Fortune senior writer

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(Fortune Magazine) -- Anyone who works in an office - or watches "The Office" - knows how torturous cubicle life can be: unflattering fluorescent lights, insecure supervisors and clueless co-workers can all take their toll. Now, it seems, there's a new indignity: bosses who steal their employees' identities.

Terrence D. Chalk, a well-known White Plains, N.Y., entrepreneur, may have done just that. The Justice Department says Chalk, CEO of a computer services company called CompuLinx, applied for loans and credit cards using the names of employees or clients, falsely claiming they were officers of his firm.

Charges include conspiracy and credit card fraud, and if he's convicted, he faces up to 165 years in prison. Chalk, who was quoted frequently in computer industry trade publications and served on local charity boards, has made other enemies too.

Once his case became public, assorted associates came out of the woodwork, claiming the entrepreneur owed them money. And a former business partner told the local paper that Chalk used his deceased father's personal information to get a loan. Chalk's lawyer didn't return calls.



ILLUSTRATION: JOHN CRAIG

ID-stealing bosses are the exception, but they are out there, says Linda Foley, executive director of the Identity Theft Resource Center, a leading nonprofit that provides information and support for fraud victims.

In fact, Foley started the center in 1999 after her boss used information on Foley's tax forms to apply for credit cards and a cell phone. And earlier this year a judge in upstate New York sentenced a computer entrepreneur to seven years in jail for tax fraud and stealing the IDs of employees and friends.

"It is very hard when an employer or co-worker does this to you, because you somehow feel you are safe in the workplace," says Foley.

Yet the office is fertile territory for a would-be identity thief: Workers constantly leave personal information lying around on their desks or office fax machines. People place wallets and bags - containing Social Security cards, checks and other information thieves use to commit fraud - in the same place every day, making them easy pickings.

But even if you're extra cautious in the workplace, you're still no match for a boss who wants to steal your identity. After all, there's one institution you really can't hide a Social Security number from: your employer.