



Careful Actions Can Lead to Good Luck

An open mind and a positive outlook could help you nab that dream job

By [MERYL DAVIDS LANDAU](#)

Posted: December 15, 2010

Suzanne Garber was a managing director for an international logistics company in 2008 when, during a career development meeting toward the end of her stint in Brazil, a senior executive asked her about her passions. After Garber excitedly shared her twin loves of travel and helping people in need, the man retrieved papers from his fax machine and handed them to her. They were from a recruiter looking to fill a chief operating officer position at a Pennsylvania-based company that provides medical and security services to clients living or traveling abroad. "I think we are going to lose you," the man explained to a surprised Garber, "and I want you to be happy." A few months later, she found herself in Pennsylvania in a job that exactly matched her dream.

Garber thinks "divine timing" may deserve some credit for her move, but she firmly believes that luck didn't randomly strike. She set herself up to be offered opportunity, she says, and then she seized it. "I took a risk in being completely transparent with this person," she says. "I believe my education and work and life experience prepared me for that moment."

Psychologists studying the concept of luck would agree. People tend to think events in life happen randomly, but there are steps they can take to dramatically increase their good fortune, says British psychologist and researcher Richard Wiseman, author of *The Luck Factor*. For example, when people who consider themselves lucky think about the past, they view their history in terms of the successes rather than the failures. "This is important, because if you scan the world for the things that are positive, your brain sees similar opportunities going forward," says Shawn Achor, a business consultant and author of the new book *The Happiness Advantage*. Other ways to improve your luck on the job:

Visualize what you hope will happen. When University of Michigan psychology professor Colleen Seifert realized she wanted to study the decision-making of young doctors, she knew she needed a collaborator who had access to these physicians. Seifert decided to employ a method she has studied, "predictive encoding," a process to prime her mind to recognize such a study partner if she happened upon him. She's found the technique can increase by as much as 50 percent the chance that you'll subsequently act as you desire. Seifert spent hours envisioning this encounter in detail, going so far as to rehearse, out loud, the line she would use to begin her proposition. Several months later, when she was unexpectedly introduced to such a scientist at a conference, she launched into her pitch, and a collaboration was born. "People said to me, 'You're lucky to have met him.' In some ways I was, but without my mental preparation [the partnership] never would have happened," Seifert says.

To use this method yourself, envision different scenarios that will lead to your goal and visualize in as much detail as you can muster what each resolution might look like. Seifert is living proof the method works, and not just on the job. Years ago, she spent time imagining herself being open and engaging in her quest to improve her social life, and soon she felt comfortable enough acting that way to flirt with a man working behind the counter at her dry cleaner. They've now been married for a decade.

Be open to what's around you. In his book, Wiseman tells of an experiment he conducted using two people, Martin, who describes himself as lucky, and Brenda (not their real names), who believes she is not. Each was sent into a coffee shop that Wiseman had prepared by positioning money on the floor and a successful-looking businessman at the counter. When Martin arrived, he found the money and chatted up the man, opening himself to new business possibilities. Brenda missed the cash and drank her coffee in silence. Lucky people may not be out there actively looking for opportunities, Wiseman says, "but their relaxed approach to life helps them notice what is happening around them." To boost your odds of becoming lucky, he suggests, bring a playful and childlike mind-set to novel situations instead of letting rigid expectations limit what you see.

Trust your gut. In one of Wiseman's surveys, 80 percent of self-described lucky people told him their intuition played a key role in their career choices—some 20 percent more than in the "unlucky" group. Because the unconscious discerns patterns and situations that the conscious mind is oblivious to, he notes, people who trust their hunches often find it serves them well. One salesman Wiseman interviewed reported landing \$250,000 worth of business from a client his colleagues considered not worth cultivating. His instincts said otherwise.

Practice appreciation. Each morning, send a short E-mail recognizing a colleague or employee in your department. It's an exercise in having an impact, which, Achor says, makes you more likely to take actions in unfamiliar situations, such as approaching a stranger when networking or reaching out to a potential new client. You'll enhance the mood of the recipient, too, boosting his or her odds of a lucky day.

- See a slide show of the [Best Apps for iPhone, iPad](#).

1/14/2011

Careful Actions Can Lead to Good Luc...

- *Check out our gallery of [Whispers political caricatures](#).*
- *Check out this month's best [political cartoons](#).*

Copyright © 2011 U.S. News & World Report LP All rights reserved.
Use of this Web site constitutes acceptance of our [Terms and Conditions of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).