



# Thirty Ways To Get Lucky

*Luck and coincidence can be important career ingredients*

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HOW DO YOU DEFINE LUCK? Is it, as Webster says, simply a “chance happening of fortunate or adverse events?” Or is it something that has played a larger role than normal in your business and personal life? After many years of studying successful people, it is my belief that there are ways to tap into luck and make it work overtime on your behalf. (Don’t worry: this won’t be an article about how to Feng Shui your lab bench.)

The most successful entrepreneurs are often described as “lucky,” despite the fact that many of them have suffered their share of failures. Read a few biographies of the winning businesspeople of the last century and you’ll find that most of them happened upon a significant amount of “right place at the right time,” which is a form of luck. I’ve confirmed this myself on many occasions; when in the past I have conducted in-depth interviews on behalf of client companies, I am always surprised at how many prosperous people count on luck and coincidence to come to their aid.

A decade ago, bestselling author Tom Peters wrote about this topic in *ChemTech*<sup>1</sup>. I enjoyed reading about his views on the two ways that one can view business success. One of these viewpoints is the traditional “Up early in the morning, work harder than the other guy” approach. What I found so interesting is Tom’s *second* type of successful person: Men and women who share a solid work ethic, but whom Tom believes have actually found ways to attract luck.

“There are strategies that you can pursue to lure luck out of hiding,” he said. As I read Tom’s article, I began to see more of this ethereal element in every success that I have had. Behind each well-thought-out move on my part there was some element of luck. This is true whether it was good timing, the coincidence of meeting the right person at the right time, or just a flash of insight that came because I was prepared. And it is that preparation that really sets the stage for attracting luck to your side.

In fact, some folks say that luck is really just “opportunity awareness.” As you read the following list of strategies to lure luck out of hiding, think about some effort that you are involved in right now—is there anything that you can do to be

a bit luckier? If you are an entrepreneur, it may be the difference between a business plan that generates a modest \$500,000 backing and one that pulls in a \$10 million investment!

## Strategies Shared by Lucky People

- 1) Believe that the next headhunter call you get could be really important and give him or her your attention. Someone you know, possibly yourself, could be affected for the better by that call.
- 2) Go through that pile of business cards on your desk and send a half-dozen of the most interesting people personal notes with article reprints that you think they would enjoy.
- 3) Find out about the social activities available at the next conference you are attending and participate. Get signed up for golf, tennis, or any extramural activity where you will have a chance to make new acquaintances.
- 4) Pay attention to your next coincidence. Is there anything that you could learn from it, perhaps something that might benefit you by paying closer attention than normal? Ask yourself, “Why was it that I was put in this room today with this person?”
- 5) Put a “Friday Afternoon Phone Call Program” into effect. Each Friday, call two or three professional friends, mentors and networking contacts, with no intent other than to keep in touch. You will be surprised by the critical business information that a program like this can bring to your attention.
- 6) Someone you know is working too hard. Lighten that person’s load by accepting part of his responsibility and give him a break. It will be repaid many times over with an improved relationship.
- 7) The next time that someone asks you for advice on a problem, look that person in the eye and really care about what you are hearing. Give her the best of what you know about the problem.
- 8) Dust off that résumé and update your list of accomplishments. It shouldn’t take an interest in a new job to keep track of what you’ve done right over the years. Believe me, it will pay in the long run to have your document constantly updated.
- 9) Take a course on communication skills and learn why it is that you and your boss don’t see eye-to-eye on things. As in all relationships with bosses, it is your responsibility to fix it.

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- 10) Take a speech or scientific presentation that you have given in the last year and adapt it to print, submitting it to a journal or trade magazine in your field of interest.
- 11) Get with your local scientific or biotech/pharma business association and find out if there is any special help that you can provide to the chapter. A role like Membership Chair or Newsletter Editor would require a modest commitment of your time but could be potentially very good for your future networking.
- 12) Take a different view of some current problem that you are working on. How would others approach this issue? Put on your favorite Graduate Advisor's hat and ask yourself how he or she would proceed. How about your best friend? Your mother or father? Your boss?
- 14) Sometimes opening your mind to new spurts of creativity can attract luck to your side. Have you opened some new channels of thought lately? Read great books on creativity and innovation, such as Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*, or Jack Foster's *How To Get Ideas*.
- 15) Speaking of ideas, many believe that there are ideas floating around in the air! Most lucky people have done something to "tune their antenna" to better receive these. One technique is to combine old ideas into something new and unusual. Take an idea that you've had bouncing around and poke it from some fresh angles.
- 16) Burn the boats. When attacking a foreign shore, Julius Caesar would burn the boats his men arrived on. With no retreat from your problem, how would you then proceed to solve it?
- 17) Develop a three-minute, five-minute, and 10-minute version to the popular interview question, "Tell me a little about yourself." You'll never know when this preparation can come in handy.
- 18) Start watching your physiology and the body position of others, as well. Lucky people tend to have different physiology than those who are ridden with misfortune. Change the way you are sitting or standing until you are in the position you'd assume when you are most energized. Keep it that way. You'd be surprised at what your body position does to your brain.
- 19) Break your morning routine. Each of us has a system that we use each and every day to get going. Whatever it is, change it. Break the routine and leave yourself open for something new. Do you usually go to the club after work? Try the 6 a.m. yoga class!
- 20) Are you awake to the clues that luck places around you? The science of immunology was developed out of a mistake that Pasteur's assistant made in giving too weak a dose of cholera to chickens. Many people wouldn't have investigated the effect that this mistake had made on the immune response.
- 21) Learn "Mindmapping," a visual method of brainstorming developed by researcher Tony Buzan in the late 1970s. Those who know this method well can take any lucky idea and flesh it out in a moment or two with a simple pad of paper.
- 22) The three steps for new ideas are: Preparation, Incubation and Illumination. Dig out the facts, digest them and forget them for awhile. Somewhere down the road, luck will tickle your mind and illuminate a potential idea.
- 23) Eat a bag lunch at the library. Spend one lunch hour each week at the local library, digging up information on anything or everything that interests you. Did you know that only 5% of those in the U.S. have a library card?
- 24) Develop a method to remember people's names. Anyone can do it, and there are several excellent books filled with tips on this process. As Dale Carnegie said, there is nothing more important to a person than the sound of his or her name. Remember people's names and they will long remember you.
- 25) Find a way to tap all the resources that your boss offers. Is there some technical or business area in which your boss truly excels? Do you have a plan in place to learn as much as you can from her while you have the chance?
- 26) Soften your stance. Find two or three of your most stubborn positions (i.e., "Engineers are the only ones who can do process development") and find examples of how you might be wrong<sup>2</sup>.
- 27) Go somewhere boring—on purpose. Find out what comes to the surface when all you have to do is read and reflect.
- 28) The old philosophy about keeping your head down with your nose to the grindstone doesn't work—it only leads to the removal of your nose. You need to be visible. What have you done to increase your visibility in a positive way in your company?
- 29) Are you a "driver" or a "striver"? It used to be fashionable to call top-performers "drivers." In actuality, the luckiest people are "strivers." A striver is a driver with a goal. Too many drivers don't have an ultimate destination<sup>3</sup>.
- 30) Do something that scares you. Feel the power of overcoming a fear of public speaking, skydiving, or anything else that would give you an energy boost in this way.

I close this chapter of *Managing Your Career* with an old Babylonian proverb (please pardon the gender of the pronouns, as Babylonians were not known to be politically correct):

"If a man be lucky, there is no foretelling the possible extent of his good fortune. Pitch him into the Euphrates and like as not he will swim out with a pearl in his hand." ■

### References:

1. Dr. Tom Peters, writing for ChemTech, January 1993, page 10.
2. Richard Carlson, Ph.D., *Don't Sweat The Small Stuff*, Hyperion, NYC, NY, 1996, page 125.
3. Ibid.