

Luck Is No Accident:
Making the Most of Happenstance
in Your Life and Career

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What do these have in common?

- Pita Chips
- Liquid Paper
- Rogaine
- Viagra
- Title of the Book: “Luck Is No Accident”

Unexpected or Unplanned
 (“Happenstance”) Stories

- In every case, people who took action to create opportunities for themselves, despite encountering setbacks, obstacles, uncertainty, and happenstance

How to Plan Your Career

Frank Parsons, 1908

1. Know yourself
2. Know occupations
3. Use “True Reasoning” to make a match
4. Conduct the job search

The Truth About My Career
Was It Pure, Dumb Luck?

- Planned to be a lawyer
- Majored in African History
- First post-BA job at Xerox
- First job in counseling at Stanford
- Current tenure track job at CSUS

“Pure, Dumb Luck!”

- **“Was my career a matter of pure, dumb luck?”**
- **NO. I took numerous actions to create my own luck.**

The Actions That I Took

- Performed well academically once I chose African History
- Changed to a more satisfying career by pursuing a Master's degree
- Took action, demonstrated social skills, and used persistence to find a new internship at Stanford
- Applied for a full-time job at Stanford, despite being an intern
- Pursued doctorate mid-career despite being discouraged about future option in academia
- Convinced wife of the benefits of the new job opportunity

How You Control Unplanned Events

- Before the unplanned event, your actions position you to experience it.
- During the event, your sensitivity recognizes possible opportunities for action.
- After the event, your actions enable you to benefit from it.

The Truth About Your Career

- **Can you think of an example unexpected event that you created by your own actions that had a major impact on your career?**

Assumption About Chance Events

- **Traditional**
 - Help people plan so as to minimize the effects of chance events
- **Happenstance Approach**
 - Help people create and capitalize on chance events

How You Control Unplanned Events

- Before the unplanned event, your actions position you to experience it.
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Assumption About Indecision

- **Traditional**
 - Help people overcome indecision and make a choice
- **Happenstance Approach**
 - Welcome indecision as a sensible approach to a complex and unpredictable future

“What are you going to be when you grow up?”

- Expected answer: “I’m going to be a . . . (list prestigious job title here).”
- Better answer: “I’m just a kid, how can you expect me to answer that now?”

“It is always a good idea to have a game plan in life, but make sure you write in pencil and have an eraser ready.”

Graduating high school student

“Why do they expect me to plan now what I’ll be doing for the rest of my life?”

Graduating College Senior, from article titled “Undecided and Proud of It”

“The career I’ll be pursuing in five years hasn’t been created yet.”

16 year old high school student

“What do you do?”

- Expected answer: “I’m a (put your job title here).”
- Better answer: “I have many interests and am involved in different activities at home, in my community, and at work. Which would you like here about first?”

How did “overcoming indecision” become the goal?

- Frank Parsons (1908) originated the model of know yourself, know occupations, and use true reasoning to make the match.
- If career counselors cannot find a match that the client will accept, counseling is automatically deemed to be a failure.
- Typically the failure of a counseling experience is then blamed on the client.
- Over the years a long list of names has been proposed to label clients who refuse to follow Parsons’ advice (Gordon, 1998).

Some Categories of Career Decidedness

- Very Decided
- Decided uncomfortable
- Unstable Decided
- Indifferent Decided
- Informed Indecisive
- Tentatively Undecided
- Transitional Indecisive
- Seriously Undecided
- Chronically Indecisive
- Anxious Undecided
- Developmentally Undecided
- Planless Avoidant

Unmindful
Openminded

A Better Goal for Career Development:
Taking actions to achieve a more satisfying career and personal life.

- Actions: exploring, interviewing, researching, expressing interests, establishing contacts, joining clubs, volunteering, trying part-time jobs
- Career and personal: intertwined
- Life: transitions continue for a lifetime

“Counselors would benefit by viewing happenstance as a normal aspect of career choice.”

Miller, 1983

“There are strategies that you can pursue to lure luck out of hiding.”

Peters, 1993

“Most people agree that chance has played an important part in their careers.”

Betsworth & Hansen, 1996

“Planfulness and chance are important to career development. It will be the task of career counselors to help cultivate prepared minds.”

Williams, et al, 1997

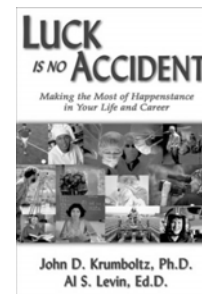
“People can make chance happen by pursuing an active life that increases the number of fortuitous encounters they are likely to experience.”

Bandura, 1998

Planned Happenstance: Creating Unexpected Career Opportunities

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The Happenstance Approach Reduces Stress

1. It's OK to make career plans as long as you are open to changing those plans.
2. Make career decisions when you are ready.
3. You have permission to make mistakes.
4. You are encouraged to create balance in your life.

Comparing Traditional Career Development with the Happenstance Approach

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| <p>■ Traditional Approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What are my interests? – What skills have I enjoyed using in the past? – What are my values? | <p>■ Happenstance Approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How can I develop new interests? – How can I develop new skills? – How can I change for the better? |
|--|--|

What You've Been Told

- About Your Career: "Pick an occupation now that will satisfy you for a lifetime."
- If Applied to Your Love Life: "Get married to the first person you date."
- Creating Luck: "Begin exploring—even without knowing if it will lead to a match made in heaven."

Common Myths vs. New Thinking

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|--|---|
| ■ Don't let unexpected events disrupt your plans | ■ Make the most of unplanned events |
| ■ Choose a career goal as soon as possible | ■ Always keep your options open |
| ■ Do all you can to make your "dream" come true | ■ Wake up – before your dream comes true |
| ■ Take action only when you're sure of the outcome | ■ Try It – Even without knowing the outcome |
| ■ Avoid making mistakes | ■ Go ahead and make mistakes |

Common Myths vs. New Thinking

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Wait for a lucky break | ■ Take action to create your own luck |
| ■ Go for a job only if you have all the skills | ■ Go for the job – then learn the skills |
| ■ Put your career first | ■ Enjoy yourself – the good life is balanced |
| ■ Always hold on to your beliefs | ■ Overcome self-sabotage |
| ■ Believe that luck is just an accident | ■ Remember that luck is no accident |

1. Expectations about career development

- Goal: Prepare for a future in which unplanned events are a normal and necessary component. Explain that:
 - Anxiety about planning the future is normal and can be replaced by a sense of adventure.
 - The goal is to create a more satisfying life.
 - A satisfying life consists of many components: work, family, relationships, hobbies, community involvement, exercise, nourishment, meaning, affiliations, entertainment, music, art.

1. Expectations, continued

- Plotting a career path is a life-long learning process that requires you to make innumerable decisions in response to unexpected events.
- No one can predict the future—everyone's career is influenced by many unplanned events.
- The task is to create and benefit from future planned and unplanned events one step at a time.
- Naming a future occupation is only one possible starting point for exploring career opportunities.

2. Identify the concern as a starting place

- Goal: Identify what would make life more satisfying.
- Can you describe past activities in your life where you felt really energized?
- How did you happen to discover these energizing activities?
- How can you incorporate those energizing activities into your life right now?
- What other interest areas seem intriguing for you to explore now?

3. Use successful past experiences with unplanned events as a basis for current actions

- Goal: Become empowered by seeing that past successes contain lessons for present actions.
- Tell me a story about how some unplanned event has influenced your life or career
- What had you done that put you in a position to be influenced?
- How did you recognize the opportunity?
- After the event, what did you do to capitalize on it?
- What skills and predispositions did you use then that would come in handy now?
- How did you make contact with key people then?
- How did others learn about your interests and skills?
- What similar types of actions could you take now?

4. Be sensitized to recognize potential opportunities

- Goal: Learn to reframe unplanned events into career opportunities.
- Tell me a chance event you wish would happen to you.
- How can you act now to increase the likelihood of that desirable event?
- How would your life change if you acted?
- How would your life change if you did nothing?

5. Overcome Blocks To Action

- Goal: Overcome blocks to action.
- What do you believe is stopping you from doing what you really want to do?
- What would be the first step you could take now to move closer to what you want?
- What do you believe is stopping you from taking that first step?
- How would your life become more satisfying if you were to take action?

Steps of the Happenstance Approach

- Clarify expectations about career planning
- Identify concerns as a starting place
- Use successful past experiences with unplanned events as a basis for current actions
- Be sensitized to recognize potential opportunities
- Overcome blocks to action

Remember That Luck Is No Accident

- Unplanned events will inevitably have an impact on your career
- Reality may be offering you better options than you could have dreamed
- Engaging in a variety of activities will help you discover what you like and dislike

Remember That Luck Is No Accident, continued

- You can create your own unplanned lucky events
- Every experience is a way to learn
- You can find a variety of satisfying activities at work and outside of work
- Beliefs that keep you open to new ideas and experiences will help you overcome internal obstacles

“My career had all the straight line consistency of a ball of yarn. Did I know where I was headed? Absolutely not. Did I plan my career moves in a logical progression? Absolutely not. There was no grand design. I was stumbling cheerfully through life, succeeding, falling on my face, picking myself up and plunging ahead, holding onto some simple values, trying to live with a civil heart as someone said, always learning, always trying, always wondering.” *John Gardner*