Career Navigation coza

PLANNED HAPPENSTANCE

Turning Adversity into Opportunity

In tough times, when career certainty is a vague memory, it's normal to re-appraise one's life and direction.

Time to take stock and see what shakes loose. In this short guide, I'll take you through an approach that has helped me throughout the years in thinking through career challenges.

It's a powerful and simple technique that has loads of applications, so read on and enjoy!

THE BASICS: PLANNED HAPPENSTANCE

Chance beneficial events are not necessarily that random. Sure, lots of successful people say that they "Were lucky," when asked. But luck is a very wide, very undefined word.

When we unpack "luck," it turns out that there are several key skills that "lucky" people tend to use more often than not, thus generating their own "luck."

There are 5 core skills that help you generate beneficial career events. So stop believing in "luck" and start generating some of your own!

This approach, known as Planned Happenstance, is based on research of high performing career trajectories and people who seem to have had a charmed career life.

- **At its core, Planned Happenstance is about taking advantage of all possible opportunities in your environment and activating the possibilities of having change beneficial events happen to you.**

FIRST STEPS: WHAT DO I WANT?

Sit down in a comfortable, quiet spot. Get a cup of your favorite beverage. Ready? Now, think of 2 chance, beneficial events you would love happen to you right now. Think of "lucky" events in your career, personal life, financial life, and family life that would really be great if they occurred.

Write down these events. Maybe you wrote something like, "I'd love to win the lottery!" or "I get the promotion to Head of Sales," or "I find my one true love!".

Don't censor or limit yourself. Let your imagination guide you!

SECOND STEPS: LET'S GET REAL

Now that you've got a few dreams, let's start the process of making them a reality!

We'll start with a few key questions:

- Write down the main difference this event will make to your life right now. For instance, if you wished for the classic, "winning the lottery", really think through how your life would be different if you won all that money. What would you do? Where would you go? Would you still work in your current job? And so on.

- When we start thinking about the changes we'd like to see in our careers or life as a result of this "lucky" event, it begins the process of turning what seems to be a fantasy into some actual, attainable goals. For instance, if one of the changes a lot of money would make in your life is that you'd

travel more, then “Travelling more” becomes an actual goal with actual, measurable steps you can take to achieving this.

THIRD STEPS: CULTIVATE PLANNED HAPPENSTANCE SKILLS

There are 5 core skills that seemingly lucky people tend to use more than those who are not as lucky.

To attain the goals you’ve set out in the previous step, you’ve got to start cultivating these today!

Core Skill 1: Persistence

Sticking to your goals, despite initial resistance and setbacks is vital in achieving important goals.

For instance, Stephen King, the world-famous horror writer, was initially rejected around 150 times before getting published in a little known magazine, which in turn, motivated him to publish his first novel. The rest is history. But what if he’d quit after rejection slip number 20? Or 100? Would we even know his name? Probably not.

Developing this skill:

- Think of times in your life when being persistent really paid off or had a positive result. What did you do differently in those times? How did you bring yourself to be dogged in your approach?

- Learn from these events and cultivate a similar mindset to future goals.

Core Skill 2: Risk Taking

Sad, but true. Very few people succeed in their careers without taking a few risks along the way. Safe is easier, but also far less likely to bring you what you really want.

Developing this skill:

- Take a look at one of the goals you wrote down. There will almost certainly be some risk involved. If you realized that the beneficial event you identified would result in you having more autonomy by being self-employed, then perhaps the risk you need to take is to leave the safety of salaried employment.

- Identify what might be preventing you from taking the leap. Common culprits are: An overdriven need for safety and comfort, wanting to have everything 'just right' before making a decision or making a move, or the need for perfect knowledge of all outcomes

Core Skill 3: Curiosity

Successful people are often more curious than those around them. They seem to have a limitless fascination with the world around them as well as a wide array of topics and knowledge domains.

In science, there are countless examples of a researcher's curiosity leading to breakthroughs. Often, dramatic discoveries are only possible if a person is willing to investigate something unexpected, or outside of the norm. As Neil deGrasse Tyson said, most scientific discoveries are not ushered into the world by someone shouting "Eureka!" Instead, it's someone saying, "That's odd.."

Developing this skill:

- Unfortunately, most adults lose their sense of curiosity and fascination with the world when they exit university and start their first job. Perhaps life just gets too busy, or we get too comfortable with what we know about the world.

- To develop curiosity is to break through your current conceptions of what you believe to be "interesting." So, for this skill, I'd like you to identify a topic or domain of knowledge that you currently find 100% not interesting at all! Maybe you chose "History" or "Sport" or whatever. Your assignment: Spend the next week or two researching this topic. Read all you can on it. FIND SOMETHING INTERESTING! Yes, you will find something. I promise.

This exercise will help you to er-awaken your sense of curiosity, which is a vital skill, and not, as some believe, something you're born with.

Core Skill 4: Optimism

In discussing this skill, it's important to say right away that there is something like being overly optimistic. What I'm talking about is the sort of naive, annoying optimism that is espoused by some self-help gurus and other charlatans that would have us believe that every single bad thing that happens to us is "great" or "character-forming" or even "secretly beneficial".

That's not optimism. That is, at best, hopelessly childish and at worst, tantamount to victim-blaming.

In Planned Happenstance, optimism is simply the ability to combat feelings of negativity and cynicism that could delay you in reaching your important career or life goals. For instance, if you're looking for an ideal romantic partner, having negative beliefs about your own desirability, or telling yourself, "It's never going to work" will definitely be obstacles in your quest!

Developing this skill:

- Think of examples of people in your life who, due to negativity, passed up opportunities in their lives they should have embraced.

- Identify possible negative beliefs you may be holding on to that might do the same. Even if you find it difficult to believe in their opposite, pretend to do so for a few weeks and see what happens.

Core Skill 5: Flexibility

How stuck are you in your opinions? Just like a similar condition of the heart, the head can develop a certain hardening of the *categories*. How vested are you in thinking of yourself as an X? How is that affecting you achieving your goals?

Success is often the result of flexible thinking being applied to novel problems. Unfortunately, most people give up after only a few tries, thinking that if their first approach won't work, nothing will.

But flexible thinkers take a few steps back from problems and generate alternatives. They recognize that you can't solve a problem using the same type of thinking that created it.

Developing this skill:

- Think of a couple of recent career or life challenges you've encountered. Write down your top 3 strategies that you usually employ to solve these.

- Now, think of how someone else, perhaps someone you admire, would solve these? How would their approach differ from yours? What can you learn from this?

FINAL STEPS

Now take all the 5 skills and apply them to at least one encounter, one conversation, or one opportunity that comes your way in the next two weeks.

Be alive to possibility in your environment!

Assume that every event, encounter and conversation you have may be an opportunity to grow, learn, and move closer to your professional and personal goals.

Good luck! But I hope that you won't need "luck".

If you would like to know more about how Planned Happenstance can benefit your career, drop me a line at: harper@careernavigation.co.za or call me on: 072-248-9855.