

Get Lucky!

Susanne Ruder

From the December 2006 issue of PROFIT magazine

Some guys have all the luck. Take Jeff Ives, president of Ives Insurance Brokers Ltd. in Essex, Ont. He lands accounts where others fail. His company's sales growth averaged 200% during hard years, when other brokers withered. And he was one of 11 people hand-picked out of about a thousand peers to attend the Mercedes-Benz Driving School.

Yep, Ives sure is a lucky guy. But Ives doesn't believe in pure luck — except maybe in the lottery. And even then, as the saying goes, you can't win if you don't play. More often, he says, luck is a result of your own actions. "I put myself in a position to increase opportunities," says Ives. "Say I want to pick up a certain account, and I'm not successful knocking on the person's door. I find out where the person eats lunch; maybe I find out what functions they attend, and I go to those functions." Meanwhile, Ives' competitors have all made the same initial front-door contact and wonder how he made it through the door. "They think I'm lucky, when all it comes down to is a lot of hard work."

Ives is right. It turns out luck isn't happenstance, kismet or some magical force; rather, it's the product of certain behaviours and thought processes. That's the finding of Richard Wiseman, a psychology professor at the University of Hertfordshire in England. A former professional magician, Wiseman led a 10-year study, The Luck Project, to explore why some people seem charmed while others seem doomed. The results, elaborated on in his 2003 book *The Luck Factor: The Four Essential Principles*, reveal that not only do people make their own luck, good or bad, but that it's possible to boost your luck quotient.

After conducting interviews and experiments with more than 400 people who considered themselves to be especially lucky or unlucky, Wiseman identified four principles at play among the fortunate ones: they maximize their "chance opportunities"; listen to their intuition; expect good things to happen; and put a positive spin on bad luck, to better deal with it.

Adopt these approaches, and make 2007 your luckiest year ever.

1. Maximize your "chance opportunities"

You have opportunities for good fortune all around you — you just have to learn to spot them. According to Wiseman's research, generating, noticing and acting upon chance opportunities is second nature to lucky people. Here's why: personality tests revealed that lucky people scored significantly higher than unlucky people when it comes to extroversion and openness. Typically, they're social butterflies who are adept at meeting people. They're open to new experiences in their lives, and they like unpredictability. As such, Wiseman says, lucky people tend to travel and have more social encounters. To spark more lucky breaks in your life:

Strike up conversations with strangers

You never know who you might meet and how they can help you, so chat with people in lineups, at sporting events and on airplanes. Chip Wilson, founder and chairman of Vancouver-based sportswear manufacturer

Lululemon Athletica Inc., first met Darryll Kopke on a plane. The two started talking, hit it off and kept in touch. Wilson eventually hired Kopke to be his manager of special projects, calling the hire one of the best he has ever made.

Shake up your routine

It's easy to get stuck in a rut, says Wiseman, and talk to the same people at events or take the same route to and from work each day. And that's the problem: by doing things the way you always have, you'll quickly exhaust your sources of new opportunities, much like returning to the same sales prospects week after week. Seek new experiences that will introduce variety into your life. One "lucky" participant in Wiseman's study, for example, noticed that whenever he went to a party, he gravitated toward the same type of people. To disrupt his routine, he would think of a colour and speak only to those wearing that colour. It was a fun and easy way to ensure he met different people. Other changeups: take a different route to work or read books you would normally pass up.

Network

Social encounters are your passport to connections that count. Attend a variety of networking events, including those you would not typically attend. "[Staff are] members of everything from Innovators Alliance [an Ontario-based peer-advisory group] to our local Kinsmen club," says Jeff Ives. "We put ourselves out there."

Publicize your expertise

Increase your visibility by getting your name in the public domain. Contact media and offer yourself as an expert source. Explore public-speaking opportunities. Or start a blog: Studies show that 42% of Canadians and 39% of Americans have read blogs.

Learn how to make small talk

Good conversation skills will help you develop and nurture relationships necessary for business and personal success. Even acquaintances can be powerful ties, say Judy Thomson and Gayle Hallgren-Rezac, Vancouver-based co-authors of *Work the Pond! Use the Power of Positive Networking to Leap Forward in Work and Life*. Two key ways to improve your chit-chat abilities: ensure you always have two or three things to talk about; and when conversing, ask questions and listen carefully for information that will keep the conversation rolling.

Groom or doom

It's no secret that people are more inclined to work with attractive people, says image consultant Shannon Smith, president of Toronto-based Premiere Image International. Look your best by adopting professional attire, grooming, body language and manners.

2. Listen to hunches

Your mind is a massive font of information, built up over years, that's amazingly good at detecting patterns. These patterns often express themselves in the form of gut feelings or intuition. Wiseman's research suggests that lucky people make effective decisions by listening to these impressions, which are almost always right. In other words, your inner voice often steers you correctly because it's accessing all the things you've learned on a subject but aren't consciously aware of at any given time. To tune in to your intuition:

Use it or lose it

"We all have intuition. The more you use it, the better you get," says Lynn Robinson, president of Boston-based Intuitive Consulting Inc. and author of *Trust Your Gut: How the Power of Intuition Can Grow Your Business*. Gain confidence in your inner voice by first testing it on low-risk decisions.

Write it down

Whenever you're facing a tough decision, write about it in a journal, suggests Robinson. Then jot down what your intuition is telling you. Ask yourself what feelings you have about the decision and what physical sensations accompany the decision. Review your journal periodically to see how accurate your intuition was.

Clear your mind

Meditation, yoga and breathing exercises help clear the mind, says Helen Goldstein, director of The Yoga Studio in Toronto. With a clearer mind, she says, you're more open to receive inspiration. And practising just five minutes a day will yield results. Goldstein offers this simple "office yoga" exercise: Sit in a chair, feet flat on the floor, palms flat on your lap; roll your upper body forward and slide your hands down slowly toward the ground; dangle there for a few deep breaths to release tension before coming up slowly.

Eat well

3. Expect good fortune

Is the glass half-empty or half-full? Your answer has a profound impact on how you view the world. And the degree to which you think that something is fortunate or not is the degree to which you generate alternatives that are better or worse, says Wiseman. Lucky people are certain that their future is bright, he says. That expectation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because it helps lucky people persist in the face of failure and positively shapes their interactions with other people. Here's how to foster a sunny disposition:

Write a luck journal

At the end of each day, write all the lucky things that happened to you. As the entries add up, you'll grow to adopt a positive outlook based on the good things in your life.

Read inspirational material

Start and end your day on a positive note with inspirational books or audio tapes, such as *The Power of Positive Thinking*, by Norman Vincent Peale, or *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, by Og Mandino. There are also websites, such as Positivepress.com, that will send you an inspirational quote daily via e-mail.

Exercise

Physical exercise improves your mood for both biochemical and psychological reasons, says Larry Leith, a professor at the Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto. Mood benefits can occur with just 20 minutes of exercise, three times a week. Walking, jogging, cycling, swimming and other activities that are rhythmic in nature and work large muscle groups offer the best results.

Carve out worry time

According to psychologist Tom Borkovec, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, worry interferes with experiencing the present, inhibits spontaneity and joy, and compromises problem-solving ability and decisiveness. His studies show that you can reduce anxiety by as much as 40% by dedicating 30 minutes a day solely to worrying. Be alone, write down your fears, and focus on solutions and remedies. Postpone all worries that come up during the day to this session.

Visualize success

"All elite athletes practise visualization, realizing that if they only focus on physical training, they'll fall behind those that do both mind and body training," says Evelyn Chau, principal of Toronto-based Conscious Creation Coaching. Similarly, visualizing what success looks like for you can empower you to overcome emotional, mental and physical roadblocks. You might, for example, have an upcoming difficult conversation with an underperforming employee. Start by picturing a successful outcome, says Chau, then work backward by imagining the words and actions you'll need to reach that outcome.

Reduce complexity

Simplifying your life frees up headspace, allowing you to be more creative, productive and personally and professionally fulfilled, says Catherine Nomura, director of business development at Toronto-based entrepreneurial coaching firm The Strategic Coach Inc. and co-author of *The Laws of Lifetime Growth*.

De-clutter by setting aside at least 24 consecutive work-free hours a week; respond to e-mail immediately and then delete it. Toss any e-mail that you've neglected for more than a month; look at your day planner, if you typically book 10 appointments a week, try cutting that to five.

4. Turn Bad Luck Into Good

Your mother was right when she said, "Look on the bright side." According to Wiseman's research, lucky people employ various psychological techniques to cope with ill fortune. For example, they spontaneously imagine how things could have been worse, they don't dwell on tough breaks and they take control of situations. Here's how you can make lemonade out of lemons:

Use mistakes as learning experiences

"Failure can actually be good for you and your business," writes Debbie Allen, a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based business consultant, speaker and author. "Successful people evaluate their failures, come up with new solutions to the challenge and try again — this time, more educated."

Take control

Don't play the victim. When bad things happen, avoid dwelling in "Pity City," says Jim Clemmer, a business consultant and author in Kitchener, Ont. Sour moods lead to cynicism, despair and inaction. Instead, "de-catastrophize" your fears by recalling times when things have worked out successfully.

Be thankful

Put bad luck in perspective by imagining how the situation might have been worse, suggests Wiseman. His research suggests that lucky people unconsciously soften the impact of unlucky events. When asked to imagine that they have been in a car accident, for example, unlucky people typically

say, "Oh, no, I've been in another car accident!" whereas lucky people might say, "Well, at least I wasn't killed and, besides, I think the guy who hit me is a potential client."