

# Knowing Yourself and Knowing How to Create Your Own Good Luck Are Keys to Career Planning

*by David P. Helfand, Ph.D.*

The most important piece of advice I can offer today's job seeker is to first figure out, as best as you can, exactly what you want to do. This is the first and possibly the most important step in the career planning process. If relevant career options are not identified, the remaining steps (researching career options, resume writing, job searching, and interviewing) become more and more difficult to complete and, when completed, are more likely to result in job dissatisfaction.

Once you have identified what you most want to do, everything else that follows falls into place more easily. Researching career ideas is more focused, resumes are easier to complete and reflect greater direction, job searching/networking efforts are often more productive and oral presentation/interviewing skills more effective.

The best way for any job-seekers today to best prepare themselves for whatever follows is to understand the career planning process and complete all the steps thoroughly. For example, when identifying career options, do the necessary self-assessment, understand what your preferred interests, skills, and values are and their relationship to career possibilities. As you explore options concentrate on two questions; what aspects of the career areas you're considering will be more up-and-coming (and thus make you more employable) in the future and how can you best maintain flexibility in how you can fit into the world of work. Only good research (through written and people resources) on your part will help you to find the answers to these questions.

If someone were interested in the art field, for example, it may be advisable to consider computer graphics with all the opportunities the Internet seems to be offering. On the other hand, social workers have great flexibility in the world of work because of the many work settings that they can plug into (all educational settings from elementary schools to universities, as well as hospitals, mental health clinics, corporate employment assistance programs, HMO's, private practices, nursing homes and more). In fact, it wouldn't be unusual for a social worker to combine two or three of the options mentioned on a part-time basis to equal a full-time job, especially if full-time jobs were hard to come by. This kind of configuration is what author William Bridges refers to as a composite career. Currently, at least 25 percent of the workforce is contingent (part-time, temporary, independent contractors, or consultants), and the numbers are sure to increase in the future.

One needs to take charge of one's own career as if it was a business (another idea espoused by Bridges) and not rely on others to insure security in the hectic job market of today and into the future. By building in career options that have favorable employment outlooks and offer greater flexibility, job-seekers can better meet this.

Job-seekers should recognize that they have the power within them to create their own good luck. You've heard the saying that luck is "when preparedness meets opportunity," which may sound a bit corny, but I believe it's true for life in general and especially so when it comes to career matters.

If you have any doubt try this little exercise. Think of a recent success/accomplishment (small or large) that was unexpected. Now ask yourself: Did that success come about on its own or as a result of some action that you took (though seemingly unrelated at the time and perhaps one month to a year or more prior)? Did you choose at some point to participate in some way rather than not to? Chances are you probably just answered yes, you took some action, chose to participate and experienced unexpected positive results at some point thereafter. You created luck (perhaps when preparedness met opportunity) for yourself.

This is a message I try to get across to my clients. Without taking action chances are one can predict the results (usually not much). Once you decide to take action, to participate wherever possible, there's no predicting what might come about (often much). With this posture toward life good fortune will come your way and perhaps lead to your next career.

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

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