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Session 144 - The Secret of Stellar Careers: Serendipity + Planning = Success

Most people can recall a series of circumstances where something amazing happened "by chance," such as, for example, seeing their favorite athlete excel after years of preparation. The athlete's triumph could perhaps have been dreamed of, but the timing could not have been predicted, which goes to show how success is often the result of both proper planning and serendipity. Jay Liebowitz, DrSc (Orkand Endowed Chair in Management & Technology, University of Maryland University College), one of the panelists for *The Secret of Stellar Careers: Serendipity + Planning = Success*, said it best: "Man Plans, God Laughs" – which essentially alludes to how there is at least some element of "divine intervention" to how one's career unfolds.

Lynn King (Assistant Vice President, Clinical Operations, Rho, Inc.) mentioned how people are often asked, "Where do you see yourself five years from now?" The questions that really need to be asked, she suggested, are "Where do you see yourself six months or a year from now?" and "If my role went away today, what will I do tomorrow?" This makes people focus on the short term and how it's best to be mentally prepared whenever an opportunity arises.

Where does deliberate planning stop and serendipity begin? Ursula Jorch, MEd, MSc (President, Jorch Consulting, Inc., Canada) explained that while deliberate planning is necessary to find the right direction in one's career, it is merely a place to start. Keeping an open mind and being flexible is key in the long run – your planning may hinder you from realizing other possibilities if you have no flexibility. Jorch started out her career making plans and learned that too much planning could limit one's career and the level of greatness they reach. Instead, she suggested that a good way to approach yourcareer is to make a list of people in comparable fields, which can help you visualize the possibilities of other career opportunities. These individuals can help you to identify your own strengths, perhaps even some that you never knew you possessed. She also suggested taking a skills inventory test to assess your skills and see how they may be utilized in other professional areas.

What are tools for serendipitous opportunities?

Liebowitz emphasized the importance of networking, especially through the many avenues provided by social media, and the importance of innovation, which can happen when connecting with those outside of your own career discipline. Session Chair Sandra A. Wiejowski, PharmD, RPh (Senior Director, Global Medical Review, AbbVie, Inc.), visited the importance of the "Zig Zag" approach: It can sometimes be beneficial to make a lateral move, or even take step back in pay, to gain more experience in your field, instead of trying to climb the corporate ladder in a straight vertical line. Many people are doing this now, she explained, and it often makes them a better job applicant.

How to notice serendipity when it's in your face?

Be aware that others can see in you what you cannot. Along the way, people may simply suggest ideas for your consideration with such phrases as, "Have you ever considered..." or "You are really good at ..." Allow these to help lead you. At the same time, there is nothing wrong with regular and direct self-analysis. Ask yourself, "Am I heading in the right direction at this point in my life as it relates to my career? What are the guiding forces that would make me happy in my career? Money? Power? Health? Spirituality? What is it I really want?" These can be the hardest questions to ask yourself at any age.

At all times, make yourself aware of what you really want and where you want to be in your career, Jorch concluded, because it is key to remember that you are

the creator of your own work and that serendipity will follow when you have properly planned and prepared for it.

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