



Right place, right time? Not!

By Lori Silverman

When I was taking an organizational behavior course from Larry Cummings at UW-Madison, he made a casual remark about a commonly used adage. "The secret to capitalizing on opportunities is not about being in the right place at the right time," he said. "It's about being in so many places at so many times that you happen to find yourself in the right place!"

Often we assess an opportunity by looking at the cold, hard facts that surround it—what some might call the business case. If this is all you go by, Larry suggests you may miss the chance to spontaneously connect with others in a way that enhances your personal and/or professional life. He also asks us to question what we mean by "right." How do you know at any given moment what constitutes right place and right time? Maybe "right" is a value we can only assess in hindsight. Chances are high that if we were to wait for these perfectly timed moments—assuming they were to occur—we would lose all forward momentum in our lives.

Can you put it on the calendar?

Many time management courses teach us that to be productive we need to make the most of our time. Numerous scheduling systems exist to help us do this. But how do we schedule opportunity?

Several years ago, I had to cancel a trip to Costa Rica at the last minute and found myself with a month of free time around the end of the year. As I sat at my desk, lamenting the loss, I came across a request for short articles in a professional magazine; the due date was the following week. I called a colleague and suggested we submit a piece that highlighted our client work. Fast forward one year. The article was the second most read article in the best selling issue of the magazine in its 50-year history. We ultimately landed a book contract because of the interest it generated. Neither the article or book opportunity were on my "to-do" list or calendar.

Taking advantage of opportunity means having some flexibility in your schedule so

you are available when it knocks on your door. You can achieve this by leaving a small block of time open on your calendar each day. And, when your calendar suddenly changes, be open to something new replacing what you had planned—and act on it.

Preparing yourself for opportunity

Believing that opportunity exists all around you is a key step in preparing for it. How often do you receive information about an event that interests you—a meeting, a party, a concert, a conference or seminar—that you cannot attend because of its timing? Do you keep that information, just in case? There is always the possibility that something might shift on that day to make it possible for you to show up.

Another way of preparing for opportunity is to place yourself in situations that you have not considered before. You never know what they might bring. For years I dealt with regularly occurring migraine headaches. One day I saw a colorful poster advertising Tai Chi classes on Saturday mornings. While I knew nothing about Tai Chi, I was searching for something new to do on the weekends. The instructor was a chiropractor who had supplemented his studies by living in a Buddhist monastery for seven years. A quiet sort of fellow with a very powerful presence. Many of the students were also patients of

his who told me how he had helped them. A few weeks after starting the class, I made an appointment to ask him about my headaches. A few months later, with his help, they disappeared. How was I to know before attending classes that he would provide the answer to my problem? Taking advantage of new situations often can bring unexpected benefits.

So many places, so many times

It has been almost 30 years since I heard Larry Cumming's remark. Taking his words to heart has brought me many opportunities. They can do the same for you. Find ways to put yourself in many places. Add flexibility to your schedule. Capitalize on novel situations that present themselves even if the benefit is not apparent. You have everything to gain. What do you have to lose?

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