

Enter Search Here



TRY: beauty gifts hair don'ts lose weight

Home » Career and Money Tips

April 18, 2012

# The Formula for Success

Three powerful women, among the best in their fields, reveal what it really took to get ahead—and what the view looks like from the top. (Hint: It's spectacular!)

1

Like 16

Tweet 6

1 of 3 »



**Lisa Randall** Theoretical physicist, Harvard University

WHY DO WOMEN STILL lag behind men in science and math? Not because they have less aptitude, as dated stereotypes suggest. Rather, studies show that young girls tend to be steered elsewhere by social and educational forces that shake their confidence.

Somehow, Lisa Randall never got that memo.

"I was always good at math, but I was good at everything," says Randall, a professor at Harvard University who is widely regarded as the nation's pre-eminent theoretical physicist — which means she's an ace in an über-wonky branch of science that uses math to unlock the mysteries of nature. "It sounds obnoxious, but I was just smart. In school, it's kind of obvious when you're learning things faster than other kids."

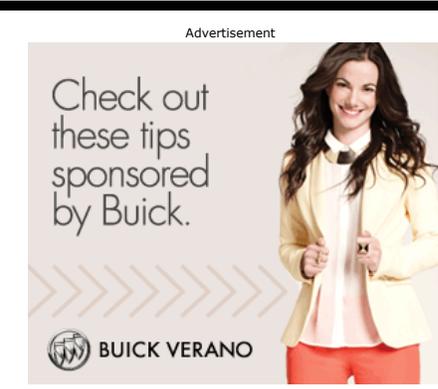
She discovered physics early on, while a student at Manhattan's elite Stuyvesant High School. "It definitely seemed an odd career path," acknowledges Randall, who grew up in a middle-class family in Queens, the daughter of a salesman and a teacher. "But I liked the idea of doing something that applied to the world, not just doing abstract problems. I liked the idea that you're solving a problem that hasn't been solved before."

Randall, who earned her undergraduate degree at Harvard in just three years, has always been

exceptional. She was the first female theoretical physicist to receive tenure at MIT and Harvard, and in 2007, she earned a spot alongside Tina Fey and Warren Buffett as one of *Time* magazine's most influential people in the world. But Randall insists she never set out to crack any glass ceilings. "I just don't think in those terms," she says. "The fact that I was first meant there was no one before me — but it wasn't an active thing I was doing."

A gifted teacher, Randall, 49, is so articulate at dissecting physics' most brain-bruising concepts — from the nature of minute subatomic particles to the vast reaches of cosmology — that she's become a regular on TV talk shows ranging from *Charlie Rose* to *The Colbert Report*. "We so much want science to say, 'This is the way it works,' that we lose sight of the fact that this uncertainty is actually interesting," she told Jon Stewart during an appearance on *The Daily Show* last October. (She was there to plug *Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World*, her third book.) "My hope is that if people learn more about physics and are

connect with **marie claire:**



what's hot right now

marieclaire.com:

- 10 Hairstyles Men Love
- Felicity Jones: La Dolce Vita
- The Vagi-Luxe List
- White Collar
- Working Girl
- What We Love About May
- New Couple Rules
- Office Confidential
- 50 Stylish Sundresses
- Model Skin Secrets
- Stars In Spring
- Iconic Eyes
- The 2012 Denim Guide
- Spring's Top Heels
- Be a Man Magnet
- Insider Secrets to Flawless, Touchable Skin

today's featured video

aware of it, then they won't be so afraid of it."

While Randall's appealing TV persona and Jodie Foster-ish good looks haven't hurt her publicity efforts — last summer she was named one of the hottest female professors in the country by a college webzine — she's still an anomaly in a profession that is, without question, a boys club. (An estimated 90 percent of physics professors are male.) Randall is smart enough to know that all the publicity she generates — "When you're reaching out to people beyond the scientific community, image does matter" — helps crack the door open a little wider for other women. "If you keep telling girls they're less good at science, that will probably be self-fulfilling. But there are quite a lot of women who are good at it," she adds.

Last year, she was among only a few women to attend the prestigious Solvay Conference, an international gathering devoted to questions in physics and chemistry. "I joked on Twitter that the ratio of X to Y chromosomes at Solvay had stayed the same for the last century," Randall says, laughing. OK, so it's a joke that might not resonate with those who don't count a scientific calculator among their must-have gadgets, but name another physics professor who tweets more than 3,500 followers messages like, "Natalie Portman, first non-blond female physicist in a movie" (referring to *Thor*).

Randall, who isn't married and doesn't have children, spends the bulk of her time teaching, writing, and promoting her books. Her personal life is inextricably tied to her work — for which she is unapologetic. "There are women for whom family is a priority, and they do it," she says. "It just wasn't as much a priority for me." But lest you think she's holed up alone in a windowless office somewhere, Randall also writes operas in her spare time. In 2009, she collaborated with composer Hector Parra on an opera that premiered at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and cocurated an exhibition for the Los Angeles Arts Association called "Measure for Measure," an exploration of our perception of scale.

Still, her first love is science. "I'm happiest when I'm just doing a project," she says. "When you're actually doing physics, there are moments when things click into place and you see things you didn't see before. It's just fantastic."

**LISA RANDALL'S TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- 1. DON'T LOOK FOR GLASS CEILINGS.** In male-dominated professions, sometimes it's best to hunker down, work hard, and pay no mind to the challenges. "The fact that I was first meant there was no one before me—but it wasn't an active thing I was doing," Randall says of her accomplishments.
- 2. DON'T UNDERSELL YOURSELF.** Too many women downplay their skills. Not Randall. "I was always good at math," she says. "But I was good at everything. It sounds obnoxious, but I was just smart."
- 3. LOOKING POLISHED PAYS OFF.** Randall's fashion sense and good looks help sell her message: to demystify physics and get more women into the profession. "When you're reaching out to people beyond the scientific community, image does matter," she says.

**relatedlinks**

- The Formula for Success
- 10 Tips to Climb to the Top of Your Career
- 10 Career Tips for 2010
- The Secret of Our Success
- Success Secrets of 30-Something Moguls

1 2 3 NEXT

1

Like 16

Tweet 6

[Reader Comments](#)

[See all Career and Money Tips Articles](#)

Sponsored Links

**Shop Leatherology.com**

Online Boutique for Unique Leather Gifts with Personalization.  
[www.Leatherology.com](http://www.Leatherology.com)

**Perfect Interview Answers**

Prepared To Answer Any Question? Watch Our Formula For Best Answers.  
[www.InterviewSuccessFormula.com](http://www.InterviewSuccessFormula.com)

**Aviel Electronics**

America II is an authorized distributor of Aviel Electronics.  
[www.americaii.com](http://www.americaii.com)

**Quantum Health Analyzer**

Quantum Resonance Magnetic Analyzer  
 50% OFF 30 Reports NEW 2012  
[www.allthingshealthy1.com/](http://www.allthingshealthy1.com/)

**You could WIN**  
**marie claire's**  
**\$25,000**  
**cash giveaway**  
**enter now**

*daily giveaway*



Chocolate Bags Red Structured Raffia Bag from Snapette

**enter now**

[see all giveaways](#)

*celeb stories*

**The New Angelina Jolie**

The movie star/director/mom shows off a sillier side for our MC cameras.

**read more**



**other latest stories:**

- Dress Code: Ally Hilfiger's Real Style
- Zoey Deschanel: Her Street Style
- Zoey Deschanel's Cover Shoot Style
- Zoey 101
- Dress Code: Kate Foley's Real Style
- Need to Meet: Lena Dunham
- Need to Meet: Annie Mac
- Leighton Meester: Drama Queen

*latest blog entries*

**Follow the Rainbow to Spring Nails**

For spring, Dara Adeeyo upped the clear nails and colored tip trends to feature lots of pretty hues at once.  
 05/09/12

**Milking It**

Dairy alternatives have cropped up faster than you can say "vegan cupcake." But are they healthier? 05/09/12

**A Beautiful Way to Fight Cancer**

The Beauty Book for Brain Cancer, a compilation of