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THE **LACK** FACTOR

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Abridged from **The Luck Factor** by Dr. Richard Wiseman

the power of luck

LUCK exerts a dramatic influence over our lives. A few seconds of bad fortune can unravel years of striving, while a moment of good luck can lead to success and happiness. Luck has the power to transform the improbable into the possible; to make the difference between life and death, reward and ruin, happiness and despair.

Psychologists have studied how our lives are affected by our intelligence, personality, genes, appearance, and upbringing. Measuring intelligence and categorizing people's personalities is relatively straightforward, but how do you quantify luck and control chance? I began by carrying out a survey to discover the percentage of people who considered themselves lucky or unlucky, and whether people's luck tended to be concentrated in one or two areas of their lives or spread across many different areas.

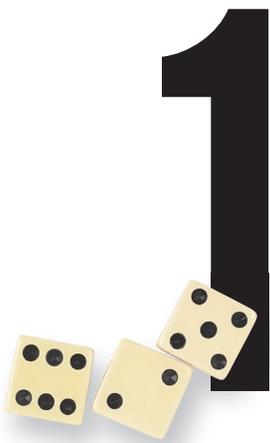
With a group of students, I visited the center of London at different times over the course of a week and asked a large number of randomly chosen shoppers about the role of luck in their lives. The survey revealed that 50 percent of people indicated they had been consistently lucky and 14 percent said they had been consistently unlucky. There was a very strong tendency for people who said they had been lucky in one area of their lives to indicate they had also been lucky in several others. The same was true for unlucky people.

There were too many people consistently experiencing good and bad luck for it all to be chance. Instead,

there must be something causing things to work out consistently well for some people and consistently badly for others.

I conducted scientific research with a group of 400 exceptionally lucky and unlucky people from all walks of life. The youngest was an eighteen-year-old student, the oldest was an eighty-four-year-old retired accountant. I conducted lengthy interviews with many of them and asked others to keep diaries. Some were invited to my laboratory to take part in experiments, and others completed complicated psychological questionnaires.

This research revealed four main differences between the lives of lucky and unlucky people:



Lucky people **consistently encounter chance opportunities** and meet people who have a very beneficial effect on their lives. In contrast, unlucky people rarely have these sorts of experiences, or they meet people who have a negative effect on their lives.



Lucky people **make good decisions** without knowing why. Unlucky people's decisions tend to result in failure and despair.



Lucky people's **dreams, ambitions, and goals have an uncanny knack of coming true.** Unlucky people are the exact opposite.



Lucky people **have an ability to turn their bad luck into good fortune.** Unlucky people lack this ability and their bad luck causes nothing but upset and ruin.

make your luck

principle one

Lucky people **create, notice, and act upon** the chance opportunities in their lives.



Do lucky and unlucky people approach life in the same way, and if not, were different viewpoints responsible for creating the positive and negative events in their lives?

Often, our expectations make a difference in whether we try something, how hard we persist in the face of failure, how we interact with others, and how others interact with us. I concentrated my research efforts on understanding the different ways in which lucky and unlucky people thought and behaved.

Principle One: Make Your Luck

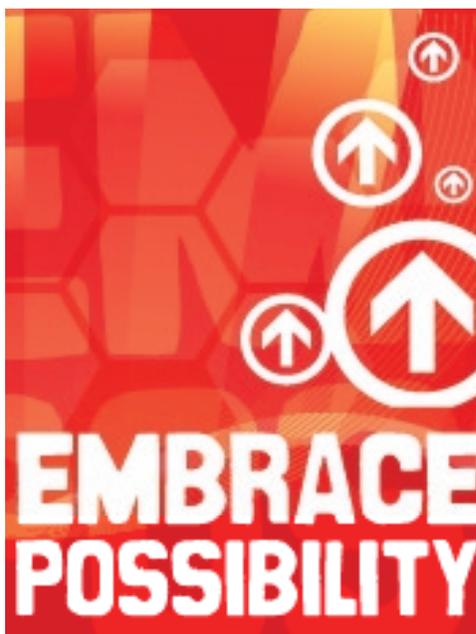
Lucky people create, notice and act upon the chance opportunities in their lives.

The way lucky people think and behave makes them far more likely than others to create, notice, and act upon chance opportunities in their lives. People who tend to think and behave in the same way are said to have the same personality. I compared the personalities

of lucky and unlucky people on the five dimensions of personality: agreeableness, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism, and openness.

Agreeableness is a measure of the degree to which someone is sympathetic toward others and willing to help them. Lucky people scored no higher on agreeableness than unlucky people. Conscientiousness is a measure of the degree to which a person is self-disciplined, strong-willed, and determined. There was very little difference in the conscientiousness scores of lucky and unlucky people.

The groups did, however, obtain very different scores on the remaining three personality dimensions – extroversion, neuroticism and openness. The differences explained why lucky people constantly encounter chance opportunities in their lives while unlucky people do not.



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Principle One: Make Your Luck

Subprinciple 1: Lucky people build and maintain a strong “network of luck.”

Lucky people score much higher than unlucky people on extroversion, and there are three ways in which extroversion significantly increases the likelihood of having a lucky chance encounter – meeting a large number of people, being a “social magnet,” and keeping in contact with people.

Lucky people dramatically increase the possibility of a lucky chance encounter by meeting a large number of people in their daily lives. The more people they meet, the greater opportunity they have of running into someone who could have a positive effect on their lives.

Social magnets attract others because, without realizing it, they exhibit the types of body language and facial expressions that other people find attractive and inviting.¹ Lucky people exhibit exactly the same pattern of behaviors. Upon reviewing video tapes of interviews with lucky and unlucky people, we found that the lucky people smiled twice as much as the unlucky people, and engaged in far more eye contact. The lucky people also tended to engage in three times as much open body language (point their bodies toward the person they are speaking with, uncross their arms and legs, make gestures that display open palms) as the unlucky people.

Lucky people are also effective at building secure and long-lasting attachments with the people they meet. They are easy to get to know and most people like them. They tend to be trusting and form close friendships with others. As a result, they often keep in touch with a much larger number of friends and colleagues than unlucky people. This network of friends helps promote opportunity in their lives.

Together, these actions result in a massive “network of luck” and a huge potential for chance opportunities. And it takes only one chance encounter to change a life.

learning to be lucky

Connect four

Each week for the next month, strike up a conversation with at least one person whom you don't know very well, or don't know at all. Try to initiate a conversation only with people who look friendly and approachable. Capitalize on a naturally occurring situation, such as standing in line or sitting next to someone on a train or plane. To break the ice, ask the person for information or help. If the person seems friendly, elaborate on your opening question.

Play the contact game

Each week, make contact with one person whom you haven't been in touch with for a while. Look through your address book and make a list of the names and telephone numbers of all the people you haven't spoken to for a while. Simply choose someone, pick up the phone, and make the call.



Principle One: Make Your Luck

Subprinciple 2: Lucky people have a relaxed attitude toward life.

People who obtain a low score on the neuroticism dimension of personality are generally calm and relaxed, and people who obtain a high score are more tense and anxious. Lucky people score much lower on neuroticism than unlucky people, and this makes a big difference. Because lucky people tend to be more relaxed than most, they are more likely to notice chance opportunities.

The same principle applies when lucky people meet and chat with other people. They are relaxed and attuned to the opportunities around them. Lucky people see what is there, rather than trying to find what they want to see. As a result, they are far more receptive to any opportunities that arise naturally.

learning to be lucky

**Relax, then do it**

Many lucky people describe using various forms of relaxation techniques to lower their stress levels. This exercise will help you adopt a more relaxed approach to life and lower the tension in your body and mind. Run through it each time you feel yourself becoming anxious.

First, find a quiet room or place. Then, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Next, imagine yourself in a scene that you find relaxing. Imagine what you would see. Imagine what you would hear. Imagine yourself taking in all aspects of your surroundings. Then, imagine all of the tension in your body slowly dripping away. Spend a few moments letting a feeling of total calm move through your body.

Finally, slowly open your eyes and return to the real world. Think about how you feel now compared to before the exercise. Think about how you feel far more relaxed and open. This is a vitally important way of being. It is a powerful state that will be beneficial for your body, your mind and your luck.

Principle One: Make Your Luck

Subprinciple 3: Lucky people are open to new experiences in their lives.

People who obtain a high score on the openness dimension of personality like a great deal of variety and novelty in their lives. They love trying new experiences, new kinds of foods, and new ways of doing things. They tend not to be bound by convention and they like the notion of unpredictability. People who obtain a low score on openness tend to be much more conventional. Lucky people score much higher on openness than unlucky people, and this greater openness can help promote chance opportunities in their lives.

learning to be lucky

Play the dice game

Make a list of six new experiences – things that you have never done before but wouldn't mind trying. Some of the experiences might be fairly simple and others might be more adventurous. Some might require more prolonged effort, others might push back your comfort zone, or some might fulfill a long-held secret desire.

Write down a list of the experiences and number them 1 to 6. Then, roll a die and carry out whichever experience is selected.



your gut is right

principle two

Lucky people **make successful decisions**
by using their intuition and gut feelings.



We are conscious of only a tiny fragment of the factors that influence the way we think, decide, and behave.

Principle Two: Your Gut Is Right

Lucky people make successful decisions by using their intuition and gut feelings.

Lucky people consistently place their trust in colleagues and clients who are honest and reliable, and they make sound choices when it comes to their careers and financial matters. Lucky people simply know when a decision is right. In contrast, unlucky people view many of their poor decisions as yet more evidence of how they are always destined to fail.

Subprinciple 1: Lucky people listen to their gut feelings and hunches.

I examined many different aspects of the way in which lucky and unlucky people made decisions: how they assessed evidence, thought about different

options, and chose one alternative over another. Initially, I found almost no differences between the two groups. Then I examined whether lucky and unlucky people differed on a rather mysterious aspect of decision making, namely, intuition.

I explored the ways in which we use intuition to make important life decisions – the rather curious sensation that something we have just done, or are about to do, is very right or very wrong. More than a hundred lucky and unlucky people answered a short questionnaire concerning the role of intuition in their lives. When it came to luck, intuition mattered.

We are conscious of only a tiny fragment of the factors that influence the way we think, decide, and behave. Instead, we are often driven by our unconscious. My interviews suggested that lucky people’s gut feelings and hunches tended to pay off time and time again. In contrast, unlucky people often ignore their intuition and regret their decisions.

learning to be lucky

Make the decision, then stop

To find out how you really feel about your options, simply choose one of them and commit your decision to paper. For example, if you are uncertain about whether to hand in your notice at work, just go for it and write your resignation letter. Now stop. How do you feel right now? Do you want to move forward with your decision or is there something inside telling you that it doesn’t feel right? When it comes to the crunch, what does your inner voice say to you?



Principle Two: Your Gut Is Right

Subprinciple 2: Lucky people take steps to boost their intuition.

My survey into luck and intuition also revealed that lucky people do many different things to enhance their intuition. Some simply clear their minds, while others invest time in more formal forms of meditation. Some go to a quiet place or stop thinking about a problem and return to it at a later date.

learning to be lucky

Make meditation matter

The idea is not to try to develop any intuitive feelings during meditation. Instead, meditation is a time for clearing your mind of all other thoughts and distractions. It is after meditation, when your mind is quiet and clear, that your intuition will feel at its best.

Find a quiet place and sit in a comfortable chair. Close your eyes and carry out the relaxation exercise described on page 5. Once you feel calm, silently repeat the same word or phrase over and over and over again in your mind. It doesn't matter what the word or phrase is. The important point is that you constantly repeat the word and thereby clear your mind of all other thoughts. After about ten minutes of focused thought, slowly open your eyes.

Over time, you will find it easier to focus your thoughts and create a sense of stillness. Try this exercise three times a week, for about twenty minutes each time, and see what effect it has on your luck.



expect the good

principle three

Lucky people's **expectations about the future** help them fulfill their dreams and ambitions.



...these expectations play an absolutely vital role in explaining why some people obtain their dreams with uncanny ease, while others rarely get what they want from life.

Principle Three: Expect The Good

Lucky people’s expectations about the future help them fulfill their dreams and ambitions.

Lucky people’s dreams and ambitions often become a reality, while unlucky people rarely obtain what they want from life. Lucky and unlucky people achieve, or fail to achieve, their ambitions because of a fundamental difference in how they think about themselves and their lives.

Subprinciple 1: Lucky people expect their good luck to continue in the future.

I presented everyone in the study with questions about the chances of experiencing various positive life events in the

future. Some of the questions concerned events that were fairly general and others were far more specific, some concerned events that were largely under their control, and others related to events that were largely outside of their control.

Lucky people’s expectations of good things happening were far higher than the expectations held by unlucky people. And lucky people’s high expectations were not just confined to certain questions. Instead, they were certain that they were very likely to experience general and specific positive events that were both within and outside of their control. In fact, lucky people had amazingly high expectations for every single event listed on the questionnaire. In short, they were convinced that the future was going to be fantastic.



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Principle Three: Expect The Good

Subprinciple 1 (continued): Lucky people expect their good luck to continue in the future.

Lucky and unlucky people have amazingly different expectations about the future. And these expectations play an absolutely vital role in explaining why some people obtain their dreams with uncanny ease, while others rarely get what they want from life.

Most people tend to base their expectations about the future on what has happened in the past. Lucky people see any bad luck in their lives as being very short-lived. They simply shrug it off and don't let it affect their expectations about the future. Unlucky people are convinced that any good luck in their lives will only last for a short period of time and will quickly be followed by their regular dose of bad luck.

Our expectations have a powerful effect on the way we think, feel, and act. They can influence our health, how we behave toward others, and how others behave toward us. The unique way that lucky people think about their futures is responsible for their being more effective than most when it comes to achieving their dreams and ambitions. Likewise, the negative expectations held by the unlucky people result in their being especially ineffectual at getting what they want from life. It all comes down to the way in which their extreme expectations about the future hold the power to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

learning to be lucky

Set lucky goals

This exercise is all about setting your expectations in the correct direction by identifying your goals. See page 18 for your goals worksheet.

Affirm your luck

Simple affirmations can have a hugely beneficial effect on the way we think and feel. For the next few weeks, start each day by repeating the affirmations below out loud to yourself. At first you might feel odd, but give it a try and notice the difference.

- "I am a lucky person and today is going to be another lucky day."
- "I know that I can be even luckier in the future."
- "I deserve good luck and will receive good fortune today."



Principle Three: Expect The Good

Subprinciple 2: Lucky people attempt to achieve their goals, even if their chances of success seem slim, and persevere in the face of failure.

Unlucky people are often convinced that their lives are going to be full of failure and misery, and they believe that there is nothing that they can do to affect the bad things that are going to happen to them. These beliefs can quickly cause them to lose hope and simply give up, so they often do not make any attempt to achieve their goals, and this, in turn, transforms their expectations into reality.

Lucky people's positive expectations motivate them to take control of their lives. They attempt to achieve whatever they want from life, even if the likelihood of being successful is quite low. Often, lucky people's high expectations also motivate them to persist, even in the face of considerable adversity.

learning to be lucky

Carry out a cost-benefit analysis

By making a list of the benefits that flow from achieving your goal, and the steps you must take to attain your goal, you will be able to make a side-by-side comparison of the costs associated with the benefits. If you find the benefits far outweigh the costs, it is time for action.

See page 19 for your cost-benefit analysis worksheet to help you weigh your goals.



Principle Three: Expect The Good

Subprinciple 3: Lucky people expect their interactions with others to be lucky and successful.

Our expectations about other people influence how we behave toward them and how they respond to us. We do not just have expectations about people, but rather, our expectations can actually cause people to fulfill those expectations.

Lucky people expect to meet people who are interesting, happy and fun to be with. They expect their interactions to go well and be successful. Unlucky people believe that they are destined to meet people who are far more downbeat, sad, and boring. These very different expectations affect how others respond, and, in the long run, play a huge role in dictating how happy and successful lucky and unlucky people will be in their personal and professional lives.

In the workplace, lucky people expect those around them to be productive and competent, and they expect their meetings to be successful and profitable. In contrast, unlucky people do not expect their colleagues and clients to be especially competent or their interactions with them to be especially successful. When it comes to business, these expectations really matter.

Time and time again, studies have shown that managers' expectations have a profound effect on the productivity of their staff. Managers with high expectations about their subordinates motivate the people around them to perform well, while those with poor expectations cause their staff to become despondent and unproductive. Throughout the business world, expectations have the power to become self-fulfilling prophecies.¹⁰

learning to be lucky

**Visualize good fortune**

Whenever you are faced with an important situation, try the following exercise and see what happens.

Find a quiet place and sit in a comfortable chair. Close your eyes and relax. Take a deep breath. Imagine yourself in the forthcoming situation. Try to visualize the situation in as much detail as possible. Think about how you want to behave. Try to anticipate what other people might say and how you would respond. Focus on how you expect to be lucky and achieve your goals. Then, slowly open your eyes and make your expectations a reality.

fix your luck

principle four

Lucky people are able to transform their
bad luck into good fortune.



Lucky people tend to imagine spontaneously how the bad luck they encounter could have been worse, and in doing so feel much better...

Principle Four: Fix Your Luck

Lucky people are able to transform their bad luck into good fortune.

Even lucky people encounter bad luck and negative events, but they have an uncanny way of transforming their misfortune into amazing good fortune.

Subprinciple 1: Lucky people see the positive side of their bad luck.

Research suggests that athletes who win Olympic bronze medals are happier than those who win silver medals. The silver medalists focus on the notion that if they had performed slightly better, then they would have perhaps won a gold medal. In contrast, the bronze

medalists focus on the thought that if they had performed slightly worse, then they wouldn't have won anything all.¹ Psychologists refer to our ability to imagine what might have happened, rather than what actually did happen, as "counterfactual thinking."

To find out if lucky people use counterfactual thinking to soften the emotional impact of ill fortune, I presented lucky and unlucky people with some unlucky scenarios to see how they reacted. Many unlucky people see nothing but misery and despair when they imagine themselves experiencing bad luck. Lucky people tend to imagine spontaneously how the bad luck they encounter could have been worse, and in doing so, they feel much better about themselves and their lives. This, in turn, helps keep their expectations about the future high and increases the likelihood of continuing to live a lucky life.

learning to be lucky

Find the treasure in the trash

Whenever bad luck strikes, use these techniques to make yourself feel better about the situation.

- Think of ways in which the situation could have been far worse.
- Ask yourself if the unlucky event really matters.
- Compare yourself to those who are less fortunate.



Principle Four: Fix Your Luck

Subprinciple 2: Lucky people are convinced that any ill fortune in their lives will, in the long run, work out for the best.

When lucky people look back on their lives, they often focus their attention on the benefits that flowed from their ill fortune. If bad luck happens to them, they take the long view and expect things to work out well in the end.

learning to be lucky

**Create a phoenix from the ashes**

When bad things happen, spend a few moments thinking about the good luck that might flow from your ill fortune. Have fun being creative and coming up with ways in which your bad luck is a necessary stepping stone to amazing good fortune.

Then, ask yourself two questions. What evidence is there to suggest that these positive events won't actually happen? And what evidence is there that something even more positive won't come out of your ill fortune? The answer to both questions is "none." You have no idea what the future actually holds for you.

Principle Four: Fix Your Luck

Subprinciple 3: Lucky people do not dwell on their ill fortune.

When people dwell on the negative events in their lives, they start to feel sad. When people concentrate on positive events from their past, they feel much happier. It is not just a case of memory affecting mood. Mood also affects memory.²

The two-way relationship between mood and memory explains why lucky people's reluctance to dwell on any ill fortune in their past helps maintain their lucky perspective on life. When unlucky people ruminate on the bad luck that they have encountered, they feel even more unlucky and sad. This, in turn, makes them think more about the ill fortune in their lives and, as a result, feel even more unlucky and sad. So the downward spiral continues, plunging them further and further into an unlucky worldview.

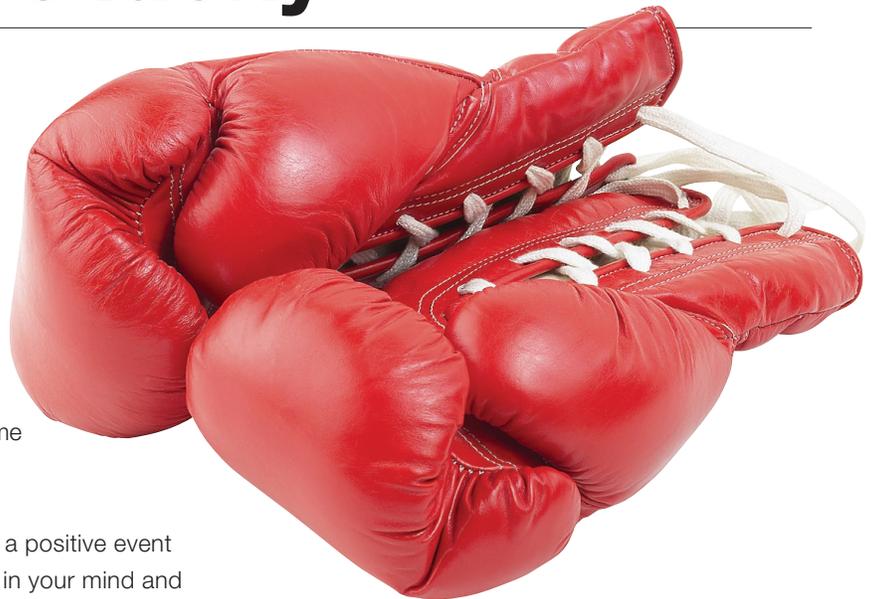
Lucky people avoid this process by forgetting about the unlucky events that have happened to them, and instead focusing on their good luck. Their positive memories then make them feel happy and lucky and this, in turn, causes them to think about other times when things worked out well for them. Instead of spiraling downward, they find their memories and moods work together to make them feel luckier and luckier.

learning to be lucky

Distract yourself

Here are some tips for distracting your thoughts away from ill fortune:

- Go to the gym — exercise is a great way to take your mind off your problems and it also lifts your mood.
- Watch a funny film — choose a film that makes you laugh, and try your best to become involved in the story.
- Spend about twenty minutes thinking about a positive event that happened in the past — relive the event in your mind and think about how you felt at the time.
- Listen to music — again, choose something that makes you feel happy, and try to become involved in the music.
- Arrange to see your friends — talk about what's happening in their lives.



Principle Four: Fix Your Luck

Subprinciple 4: Lucky people take constructive steps to prevent more bad luck in the future.

Previously, I described how lucky and unlucky people's expectations were related to how much they persevered in the face of adversity. Unlucky people were convinced that they were going to fail, and so often didn't bother to try very hard. Lucky people were sure of success and so were happy to persevere.

Exactly the same difference emerged when I asked the two groups how they would respond to ill fortune. The unlucky people often said that they would simply give up. The lucky people are far more persistent. In their minds, they are convinced that they are not destined to be unlucky. Instead, they see ill fortune as a challenge they need to overcome.

Lucky people approach unlucky situations in a far more constructive way than unlucky people. Unlucky people hardly ever spoke about trying to discover why they had not been successful in the past. They are reluctant to learn from their mistakes and so are far more likely to repeat them in the future. In contrast, lucky people often spontaneously said that they would treat their failures as an opportunity to learn and grow. When ill fortune blocks the path to their goals, they explore other ways of solving the problem.

learning to be lucky

**Take five steps to the solution**

Constructive problem solving involves five basic steps:

- First, don't assume there is nothing you can do about the situation. Make the decision to take control.
- Second, do something now.
- Third, make a list of the various options. Be creative. Brainstorm. Come up with as many potential solutions as possible.
- Fourth, decide on how you are going to move forward. Consider every possible solution.
- Finally, start to solve the problem. Be prepared to adapt your solution as the future unfolds.

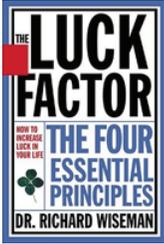
final thoughts

FIRST, take things one step at a time. Creating a lucky life will take a little time. Start off by connecting with a few more people, listening to your inner voice just a little more, having slightly higher expectations about the future, and so on. After a week or so you will probably encounter a small amount of additional good luck. These small events will help you feel, think, and behave like a luckier person. And this, in turn, will cause you to incorporate the principles and techniques of luck into your life a little more. And so the process will continue.

Second, know that the good fortune experienced by lucky people is not the result of the gods smiling on them, or their being born lucky. Instead, without realizing it, lucky people have developed ways of thinking that make them especially happy, successful, and satisfied with their lives. And now that you know the techniques they use, you can be just like them.

The Luck Factor

Dr. Richard Wiseman



In a 10-year study of the beliefs and experiences of lucky and unlucky people, Dr. Richard Wiseman discovers that good fortune is less about supernatural forces, and more about a positive attitude. His outline of the 4 essential principles to luck offers specific strategies for cultivating a state of mind more receptive to what will bring personal and professional success.

The Luck Factor is available at barnesandnoble.com and amazon.com.

notes & resources

Principle One

1. For an accessible introduction to psychological research into nonverbal communication, see relevant sections in: Argyle, M. 1988. *Bodily Communication*. London: Routledge.

Principle Three

1. Livingston, J.S. 1988. Pygmalion in management. *Harvard Business Review* (September-October): 121-130.

Principle Four

1. Medvec, V.H., Madley, S.F., and Gilovich, T. 1995. When less is more: Counterfactual thinking and satisfaction among Olympic medalists. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69: 4, 603-610.
2. Laird, J.D., Wagner, J. J., Halal, M., and Szegda, M. 1982. Remembering what you feel: effects of emotion on memory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 42(4): 646-657.

Write down your goal below.

Then, in the 'benefit' column, write down all the benefits that would flow from achieving your goal. How might it make you feel better? Enrich your life? Improve your income? Add meaning to your life? Help people?

In the 'cost' column, write down some of the things that you will have to do to make an effort to attain your goal. Send more emails? Make more phone calls? Attend more meetings? Change your habits?

When you are finished, look at the two lists and compare the costs associated with the benefits. If you find the benefits far outweigh the costs, then it's time for action.

goal analysis worksheet

benefits

costs

4 principles of luck



Lucky people **consistently encounter chance opportunities** and meet people who have a very beneficial effect on their lives. In contrast, unlucky people rarely have these sorts of experiences, or they meet people who have a negative effect on their lives.

Lucky people **make good decisions** without knowing why. Unlucky people's decisions tend to result in failure and despair.

Lucky people's **dreams, ambitions, and goals have an uncanny knack of coming true**. Unlucky people are the exact opposite.

Lucky people **have an ability to turn their bad luck into good fortune**. Unlucky people lack this ability and their bad luck causes nothing but upset and ruin.



5 problem solving basics

First, don't assume there is nothing you can do about the situation. Make the decision to **take control**.

Second, **do something** now.

Third, make a list of the various options. **Be creative**. Brainstorm. Come up with as many potential solutions as possible.

Fourth, decide on how you are going to **move forward**. Consider every possible solution.

Finally, start to **solve the problem**. Be prepared to adapt your solution as the future unfolds.



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fold

**I'm getting
luckier every day**

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**I deserve the
good things coming
my way**

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**I'm lucky to have
_____ in my life**

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**I expect good fortune
every moment
of my life**





You know what luck is?

LUCK

**is believing you're lucky,
that's all.**



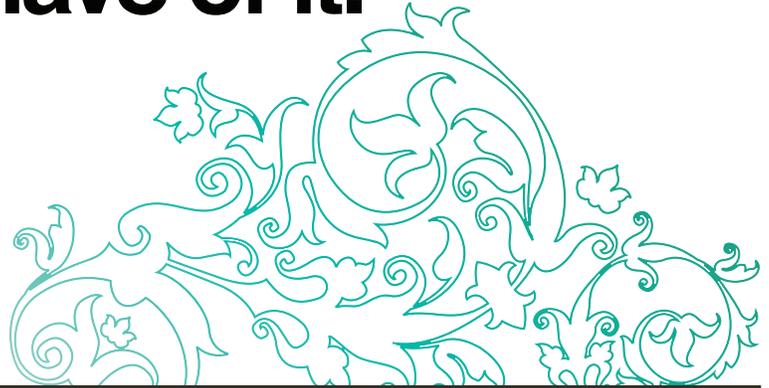
{ MARLON BRANDO (1924-2004) }

American actor

As Stanley Kowalski in "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1950)



I'm a great
BELIEVER
in luck,
and I find the harder I work,
the more I have of it.



{ THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826) }

*3rd President of the United States
principal author of the Declaration of Independence*



What we call luck,
what we call
CHANCE,
is when preparation meets opportunity.



{ WILL SMITH (1968-) }

American actor