LUCK IS NOT LUCK
YOU CAN INFLUENCE YOUR RETURN ON LUCK

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THESE past few weeks, with the Chinese New Year cele-
brations coming in full swing, many friends wished me “luck” many times.
Everyone was hoping for a great year with lots of “luck”.
Most believe that luck happens by chance. We believe luck is something that we cannot plan for or obtain by
design. Luck is fated, written in the stars. Or is it?
I remember a conversation I had with Datuk Seri Idris Jala (cur-
cently Minister in The Prime Minister’s Department) many years ago, and he explained the secret to his success as a
leader.
He had six key points to success in leadership, and his final point was about having good luck. He did not
term it “luck” but called it “divine intervention”.
He believed that we can only control about 40% of the things we work
on. The remaining 60% are things beyond our control, where we have
little influence.
However, Idris believed that if you are a good human being, operating
with ethics and spending time in soli-
tude and reflection, you could “influ-
ence” the divine to be on your side
and bring yourself good “luck”.
As I pondered on the conversation
with Idris, a number of questions
were triggered.
Among them: Why do some people
always have all the luck, whilst others
are plagued with bad fortune?
If luck was an entirely random
event, surely, it would even out, and
at some point, someone’s luck would
run out. Yet it doesn’t seem to even
out.
Could luck be more than a random
occurrence and something that can be
influenced?

WAS I LUCKY?

I have always felt I was extremely
lucky to get a job at General Electric earlier
on in my career.
My internship with them was a
lucky break as my resume happened to
be on the desk of the newly hired
chief recruiter on his first day at
work. He needed to fill an intern slot
and called me.
I felt even luckier when I was
selected for an interview for the pre-
tsigious high-potential entry level pro-
gramme at the end of my internship.
However, only a handful of the 45
interns interviewed would be picked, and
the interviewers were extremely
tough.
I noticed many candidates coming out of these interview rooms in tears
and some openly crying, especially
those exiting the chief interviewer’s
room. I walked into his room expect-
ing the worst.
But to my surprise, his first ques-
tion to me was, “so, you play soccer
for your university?” I noticed a smile
as he asked that question. I nodded
and quickly continued the football
conversation.
I then told him about how I had
spent part of the summer going to
watch live World Cup games (it was
1994 and the World Cup was in the
United States (US) that year), and he
shared his experiences watching foot-
ball games too.
An hour went by so quickly, and I
walked out smiling after a pleasant
conversation on the state of football
in the US.
I was one of only three interns who
got the offer. I always thought that I
was extremely lucky to have caught
my interviewer’s excitement for his
newly adopted passion.
On the contrary, in recent conversa-
tions with a number of “luck” experts,
they claimed that I might not have
been merely lucky. Was it luck?

TYPES OF LUCK

As a young boy, I frequently read
biographies of famous people. I
became a great fan of Benjamin
Franklin and US President Thomas
Jefferson.
Jefferson once declared, “I’m a great
believer in luck, and I find the harder
I work, the more I have of it.” Franklin
similarly shared Jefferson’s belief in
luck – that it had everything to do
with effort.
Yet, many people work hard
and still remain luckless all their lives.
Surely, there has to be more than
more effort that determines luck?
Researchers Anthony K. Tjan,
Richard Harrington and Tsun-yan
Hsieh postulate that there are two
types of luck – luck that you cannot
affect (like who your parents are and
your blood type, etc) and luck that you
can influence (like your business suc-
cess or your career progress).
In fact, they believe that a majority
of “business luck” can be influenced
and it is really about understanding
how. Their conclusion: “luck is about
attitude as much as it is about prob-
ability.”
They found that people who
describe themselves as lucky tend to
be lucky because of their right
attitude. They concluded that the
right attitude comprised three traits
– humility, intellectual curiosity, and
constant optimism.

Dale Carnegie is right. As Idris
accurately pointed out, if we learn to control
the things that we can, including our
attitude.

They believe that “happenstance”
isn’t something that randomly affects
us but rather something we create
out of the chance circumstances and
counters that run through our lives.
A changed occurrence, an
unplanned meeting, or missed
appointments may sometimes lead
our lives into unexpected directions
that might alter it and our careers.
These “happenstances” may hap-
pen frequently to everyone. The key
difference between lucky people and
the “unlucky” ones is the ability to
recognise these opportunities and lev-
erage them.
TOP 10 WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR LUCK

BE A BELIEVER
There are heaps of opportunities in life. We need to be abundant thinkers who always believe that there are amazing opportunities to leverage.

A negative person generally is a scarce thinker, believing that all the best opportunities in the world have been taken. The theory called the Pygmalion Effect states that you get what you expect.

Most “lucky” people expect the best, and are confident that their future is going to be great. Somehow, these expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies. Ask around and you’ll find that “lucky” and “unlucky” people have astoundingly different expectations.

BE ACTION BIASED
Inaction is the surest path to failure. If you keep trying, you will eventually succeed and luck will be on your side. Don’t procrastinate. Don’t be afraid to fail.

MAKE THE MOST OUT OF UNPLANNED EVENTS
The unexpected will constantly bombard us. Learn to love spontaneity and enjoy it. New opportunities may unfold when we least expect it.

BE AWARE
Always ask questions and explore your surroundings. Lucky people are aware of what is happening around them and are continuously searching for opportunities.

DON’T BE AFRAID TO SAY YES
In the movie Yes Man, Jim Carrey was made to say “yes” to everything. He ended up being “lucky” by unearthing new opportunities and even met the woman of his dreams. So, say “yes” more times than you do “no”.

NEVER EAT ALONE
Building and maintaining a strong social network with other people is critical to success. If you love people, and love being with people, new opportunities will always appear.

People provide support in times of trouble, act as resources when you need information, and most importantly, they can bring you “luck” by their valuable connections to social networks.

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Bette Nesmith Graham was a poor woman in Dallas, supporting her small child as a single mom. She got a job as a secretary and learnt shorthand and typing to ensure she kept her job. Yet, she constantly made typing errors.

She was an artist and she recalled how artists would paint over their mistakes on canvas. So, she decided to put some tempera water-based paint in a bottle and took her watercolour brush to the office, using it to correct her typing mistakes.

Before long, her invention, which she named “Liquid Paper”, became a worldwide hit and she built it into a multimillion dollar corporation.

Was she lucky? Or was this the ability to recognise opportunities even in mistakes?

There were thousands of secretaries who probably went through typing error anguish just like Graham did, yet no one viewed it as an opportunity to create a solution to their nightmare.

No one can control every outcome but like Graham, leveraging our lucky breaks and taking action can increase the probability of our success.

RETURN ON LUCK (ROL)
Jim Collins and Morten Hansen completed a nine-year research study of some of the most extreme business successes of modern times. They investigated the role of “luck” in these successes.

Their conclusion: They found that both successful businesses and ineffective businesses had luck, good and bad, in comparable amounts.

Therefore, luck doesn’t cause extreme success. Apart from that, they found something more interesting in their study: The successful companies were not lucky. Rather, they had a high return on luck (ROL).

Luck has nothing to do with success. The key to success is what people do when they are hit with a lucky circumstance or situation. They take that luck and create a huge return on it. That is the key difference.

Good and bad luck happens to everyone. The constantly “lucky” people recognise this luck, seize it, and then make the most of it.

So, what is your ROL?

FINAL THOUGHTS
There is a popular saying “you make your own luck”.

When we see luck as something that is beyond our reach or something that we can’t create, we become victims and complain about others and the world.

Reframing luck as something we may influence (regardless how limited our influence may be) is a powerful way to move from being a hostage to being a leader.

Kylie Kyle concludes that “opportunity does not knock; it presents itself when you beat down the door.”

Webster’s Dictionary defines luck as “a force that brings good fortune or adversity; a force that operates for or against an individual.”

So, if luck is a force, you should be able to tap into it... at any time! May the Force be with you!