

The key to being lucky



There's a lot to be said for luck. It can play an important role in your career and personal life.

Here's the secret: you can prepare for luck. You can increase your luck.

Detractors will scoff and say that you can't influence the amount of luck you have. However, I believe you can influence the amount of luck you have and should factor it into your thinking.

A growing body of research has found that, to a large extent, you make your own luck. It isn't all about fate and circumstance. Other than when you buy a lottery ticket!

Rather, luck is largely a product of the choices you make.

My mentor, Lily Head, always told me that, "The harder you work, the luckier you get."

I've found that to be true in my own career. However, it wasn't all about the level of effort I gave.

I found that luck was about putting myself into situations where I could succeed – and by taking a calculated risk.

Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire, in a large study on

luck, found that lucky people make the maximum of the opportunities they encounter. They choose to be open to new experiences and they listen to their guts.

This is one example Richard Wiseman shares to support his theories:

Barnett Helzberg Jr. is a lucky man. By 1994, he had built up a chain of highly successful jewellery stores with an annual revenue of around \$300 million. One day, he was walking past the Plaza Hotel in New York when he heard a woman call out, "Hey, Warren Buffett!" Helzberg wondered whether the man might be Warren Buffett – one of the most successful investors in America. Helzberg had never met Buffett but had read about the financial criteria that Buffett used when buying a company. Helzberg had recently turned 60, was thinking of selling his company, and realised that his might be the type of company that would interest Buffett. Helzberg seized the opportunity, walked over to the stranger and introduced himself. The man did indeed turn out to be Warren Buffett, and the chance meeting proved highly fortuitous

because, about a year later, Buffett agreed to buy Helzberg's chain of stores. All because Helzberg just happened to be walking by as a woman called out Buffett's name on a street corner in New York.

Lucky people are always trying new things. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make, the better." This makes perfect sense, as the more things you try, or experiments you attempt, the more opportunities you are creating where you can succeed.

Wayne Gretsky, the legendary Canadian ice hockey player, famously said, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

Lucky people are also undaunted by failure. They are optimists who are able to see the positives to be learned from a negative situation. If they try and fail, the lucky try again.

By contrast, rigid rule followers rarely get lucky.

Wiseman conducted an experiment to try to understand why some people seemed to live charmed lives, while others experienced one disappointment after another.

Wiseman gave lucky and unlucky people a newspaper and asked them to look through it and tell him how many photographs were inside. On average, the unlucky people took about two minutes to count the photographs whereas the lucky people took just seconds. Why? Because the second page of the newspaper contained the message, "Stop counting – there are 43 photographs in this newspaper." This message took up half of the page and was written in type that was over two inches high. It was staring everyone straight in the face, but the unlucky people tended to miss it and the lucky people tended to spot it.

Just for fun, Wiseman placed a second large message halfway through the newspaper. This one announced: "Stop counting, tell the experimenter you have seen this and win \$250." Again, the unlucky people missed the opportunity because they were still too busy looking for photographs. Personality tests revealed that unlucky people are generally much more tense and anxious than lucky people, and research has shown that anxiety disrupts people's ability to notice the unexpected.

What can we do to increase our luck?

Prepare ourselves: If luck involves taking advantage of unexpected opportunities, then we need to be prepared to act. In a business context, this means mastering our relationship skills and possessing the business acumen that helps us spot and take advantage of a previously unknown opportunity.

Eliminate "I can't" from our vocabulary: Give ourselves permission to experiment and experience new things. Learn from our failures and keep moving. Luck rarely hits a stationary target.

Keep learning: Try new things. This is an important way to continue learning about our craft, growing our capabilities, and expanding our opportunities.

Be consistent: Being lucky is hard work. It requires that we consistently apply the effort required to put ourselves into situations where we are given the opportunity to succeed. Make the extra call. Proactively build relationships. Look for opportunities to connect with and help other people. Expand our network. Give more than we take.

On that note, this is a good time for me to wish you, your family and colleagues the best of making your own luck in 2025. ■

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