

Want To Get Lucky?

Certain behaviours can go a long way to generating good fortune

written by Christine Darragh

When legendary baseball player Lou Gehrig was stricken during the pinnacle of his career at age thirty-six with a mysterious, incurable neuromuscular disease, few would have said he was lucky. Few, that is, apart from the man himself.

In his Yankee Stadium farewell speech, he wished to make one thing clear concerning the ALS which would take his life a short two years later, emotionally saying, “Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” Those who knew him were not surprised; this was how Gehrig regarded his journey through life. Far from being unlucky, his perception of the situation reinforced his “good fortune” and invoked turning the tide to the positive.

Gehrig’s enviable character offers revealing insight. Why do some individuals always move forward on the momentous chessboard of life, seemingly jumping from chance to opportunity, seldom pausing to consider setbacks, or worse, loss of the entire game? While it might be perversely comforting to think we’re forever at the mercy of whatever twist of fate befalls us, in the perpetual scope of destiny, empowerment is key.

Being “lucky” can be all about your brain’s aptitude to develop fortuitous beliefs and traits. Think, “I’m lucky, therefore I am.” Even Plautus, a “pre-Oprah” comic playwright during the ancient Roman Empire, figured this out, writing “the prudent man really frames his own fortunes for himself.” Combine this with a desire to consciously detect the lucky events available everywhere, and life can unfold its dramatic, serendipitous influence. No dumb luck required.

“Considering oneself ‘lucky’ or ‘unlucky’ is a question of perspective,” says St. Catharines psychotherapist Dana Redekop, who specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Cognitive distortions and automatic thoughts influence an individual’s patterns of thinking, “directly relating to their behaviour.” “So, if your thought is ‘I’m unlucky’ you will respond differently in situations and have a different outcome than someone who thinks the opposite.” In short, you may inadvertently overlook free money or ignore a golden business opportunity and still continue to bemoan your lack of luck.



The individual who recognizes self-sabotaging models of thinking can gain enormous benefit from “unlearning” the thoughts, habits and behaviours that consistently limit them. You might be your own worst enemy.

Richard Wiseman, a UK psychologist from the University of Hertfordshire and author of *The Luck Factor*, couldn’t agree more. He spent a decade researching people’s perceptions of their luck, initially intrigued by the subject when a study claimed 72 per cent of the public keep at least one good luck charm close at hand. The discovery left him dismayed.

He believes this fascination with self-directed luck tokens, or superstition, in his estimation, represents a vain attempt to “control and enhance this most elusive of factors.” We feel helpless in directing luck’s random nature, its power to be either wholly “good or bad” can erratically alter things in an instant, yet we desperately grasp onto externals, when we really should be questioning our incorrect or outdated thinking. He longed for a scientific, rationalist approach to this arbitrary subject.

Placing advertisements in newspapers and magazines, he asked for people who consider themselves either exceptionally lucky or unlucky to contact him. Wiseman’s study of all ages and walks of life led to observing surprisingly consistent principles and behaviours the professed “lucky” live by. His findings are straightforward and quite illuminating. “Lucky people generate their own good fortune via four basic principles,” he discerns, and these can be embraced and utilized by everyone.

LUCKY BRAIN PRINCIPLE #1: Opportunity–Maximize Chance: *Lucky people are skilled at creating, noticing and acting upon chance opportunities.* They do this in various ways, including networking, adopting a relaxed attitude to life and by being open to new experiences. Open-mindedness increases unanticipated, serendipitous offshoots to every possibility. In stark



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contrast, personality tests reveal 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.

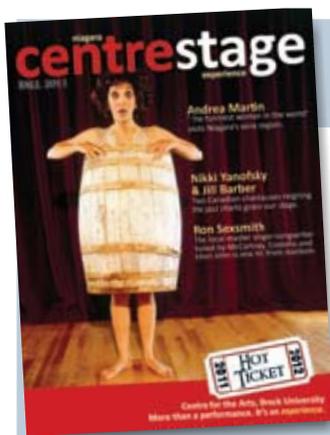
LUCKY BRAIN PRINCIPLE #2: Intuition—Listen to Lucky Hunches: *Lucky people make effective decisions by listening to their intuition and gut feelings.* In addition, they take steps to actively boost their intuitive abilities by, for example, meditating and clearing their mind of other thoughts. They are highly receptive to that "inner inkling," often citing they can only say a decision "just feels right."

Unlucky people have typically learned over the years to negate their instinctive feelings and, if one should arise, they automatically jump to "reasons x,y, and z" why they should question this early thinking, instead of responding first and confidently moving along with the details later. They are incredibly anxious about making an incorrect decision, so they hesitate to make any at all. Don't let anxiety offset intrigue.

LUCKY BRAIN PRINCIPLE #3: Optimism—Expect Good Fortune: *Lucky people are certain that the future is going to be full of good fortune.* These expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies by helping lucky people persist in the face of failure, and shape their interactions with others in a positive way. Believing outcomes will be wonderful prompts self-empowerment, leading to even greater, more rewarding risks.

LUCKY BRAIN PRINCIPLE #4: Resiliency—Turn Bad Luck to Good: *Lucky people employ various psychological techniques to cope with, and often even thrive upon, ill fortune that comes their way.* They spontaneously imagine how things could have been worse, do not dwell on ill fortune, and take control of the situation. A study of Olympic athletes showed bronze medal winners were much happier in their accomplishment than silver medalists; bronze felt fortunate to have placed at all, whereas silver winners thought they were unlucky to have missed the top prize.

The research is exciting. The concept of luck doesn't exist in a rabbit's foot, by knocking on wood, or even finding an elusive four-leaf clover. Luckily, it resides in each of us as a valuable mindset and a transformational ability; and that's just smart thinking. NM



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