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## PERSONAL BUSINESS

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# Winners Make Their Own Good Luck

To reap the gains and windfalls of a successful business, entrepreneurs must look to a set of attitudes they will find only within themselves

We once heard a mathematics professor state, "The parameters of luck are unknown to us." In other words, luck can't be explained by any specific factor, it's a matter of chance. We thought the statement made a lot of sense, but we were intrigued by the notion that what we call "luck" could be explained by a set of variables or elements that had not yet been studied. So we decided to carry out our own research.

What we did was relatively easy: We spoke at length with people who thought their lives had been blessed by good fortune, our goal being to try and figure out what factors they had in common. After four years of interviews and research, we could clearly identify a list of shared traits, ones we will shortly examine in greater depth.

**WHOM FORTUNE FAVORS.** But first, an additional word of explanation: When undertaking our project, we decided to study of biographies of "prosperous" personalities ("prosperous" understood in its broadest sense). We studied not only individuals enjoying good marriages or financial wealth, but also those who have made valuable contributions to society and who see their own lives as being filled with creativity, self-fulfillment, and meaning. By taking this tack, we were able to include artists, scientists, and athletes in our sample.

What our research revealed can be summarized in a single simple sentence: We make our own good luck.

What these creators of good luck have in common can be summarized in the following five main principles:

### • Responsibility

If there is a common factor that is evident among all the creators of good luck, it is that they know themselves to be responsible for their own actions. In other words, when things go wrong or the outcome of any given situation is other than intended, they never point the finger of blame at external factors or other individuals. Instead, they look to themselves and ask, "What have I done for this to occur?"

Free of any kind of "victimism," when they run into personal or professional difficulties, they ask themselves how and to what extent they are responsible for the situation in which they find themselves? Then they act accordingly to solve whatever adverse circumstance they have encountered. This is where the second principle comes in.

### • Learning from Mistakes

Creators of good luck don't see a mistake as a failure. Instead, a mistake is an opportunity for learning. Thomas Edison is the classic example. History tells us that the inventor made more than 1,000 attempts before inventing the first long-lasting electric light bulb. Until then, all his trials and experiments led to durations of no more than a few minutes before air would filter into the glass bulb, supplying the oxygen that led to the combustion of the various filaments he tried.

The story goes that one of Edison's colleagues asked him, "Mr. Edison, don't you feel you are a failure?" Lacking any sense of vanity, the great man answered, "Not at all. Now, I definitely know more than a thousand ways how NOT to make a light bulb."

Sure enough, just a few days later, the man whose brainstorms would remake the world finally turned his inspiration into a practical concept. By the way, the very first light bulb was invented by Sir Joseph Wilson Swan, who demonstrated the theoretical concept but gave up trying to develop a practical application after only three attempts. By contrast, Edison made his own good luck and designed a working light bulb. This takes us to our third principle.

### • Perseverance

Creators of good luck don't give up. They don't postpone. They don't "leave it for another day." The formula is quite simple: When a problem or situation arises that requires attention, they act immediately. And what they do is one of the following three things: they either solve it without delay, delegate, or forget about it.

In other words, they don't carry a list of "things to do" in their brain. Instead, they resolve problems and situations as quickly as possible. This enables their energy to be fully focused on their work and avoid conscious or unconscious distractions, which only generate inefficiency.

### • Confidence

This is one of the most overlooked principles, yet one of the most powerful. Confidence is divided into two parts: confidence in yourself and confidence in the others.

Confidence in yourself is essential, and those who create their own good luck are remarkable for their high degrees of assertiveness and self-esteem. These qualities allow them to keep to their purpose, to persevere, and to work to create the conditions that ultimately do so much to achieve objectives. Also, they are great visualizers. They use their imaginations -- specifically, their visualizing techniques -- to form mental images of their goals. Without the confidence to pursue this vision, visualizing would make no sense.

Furthermore, and closely linked to assertiveness and self-esteem, the people we studied exhibit both trust in others and respect for them, seeing people they know, people they work with, those who surround them as major sources of opportunity. This doesn't mean that one must be naive and trust anybody and everybody who makes a proposal. Instead, it speaks to the trait of seeing others as sources of opportunity for achievement.

Without confidence there is no way to "give yourself" to the situation. If there is no intimacy -- if it is ruled out by paranoia or rampant suspicion, for example -- there can be no opening up to others. Hence, there can be no room for dialogue or for the genuine and sincere exchange of opinions. Without this, any initiative proceeds more slowly until, eventually, it simply withers and dies. Confidence is a fundamental variable, and this takes us to the last principle.

### • Cooperation

The term "synergy" is one we heard often when interviewing those who create their own good luck. Trust in others leads to solid a network of work colleagues and friends, which, in turn, brings into play substantially more resources to carry out projects than if they were managed alone. The logic is based on cooperation rather than competitiveness. Such people are aware of the fact that, at the most basic level, any project or undertaking takes place in the context of the broader group, and that all parties must have a realistic prospect of emerging as winners if all concerned are to produce their best efforts.

As we have seen, whether or not one can create good luck basically depends on an attitude towards oneself, towards others, and towards life. It is also tied to the perception that the individual is much more of a cause than an effect. And above all, to the realization that one must make oneself the creator of the conditions that foster success and the achievement of specific, visualized goals.

**LUCK OR GOOD LUCK?** Think of luck -- the sort that wins lotteries -- as the end result of a random game of chance: It can be favorable or not, but whatever shape it takes, its presence will always be occasional, brief, and impermanent. We have found that of the people who have won big sweepstakes prizes, many lose everything they gained, typically within four years to seven years of hitting the jackpot. Furthermore, their personal relationships with family, friends, and colleagues often have been seriously affected because of problems stemming from avarice, jealousy, and greed.

On the other hand, since those who create their own good luck owe success only to themselves and their own initiatives, not just to a random roll of the dice, they are acutely aware of the origins of their good fortune. Moreover, having seen it work before, they know and understand the process that produces it, and know the same principles can be put to work again and again.

The problem is that we often seem to forget old principles based on common sense, which basically say that we must work, be aware of our actions, and take responsibility for correcting them when the need arises. The person who grasps that wisdom is lucky indeed.

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