

# CHANGE YOUR LUCK

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Company of Friends Meeting - Happy – 15<sup>TH</sup> January 2004

Some people are born lucky, or so the saying goes. Science has now shown that our good fortune may be down to more than a silver spoon or a rising star. Magician turned psychologist, Richard Wiseman was intrigued by the fact that people so often attribute their major life events, such as choosing a career or partner, to luck. His research has demonstrated that this is more than a hunch. Some people really are lucky. Others are consistently and sometimes spectacularly unlucky. And by generating CoF's biggest attendance in months, he certainly changed our luck and gave a magical presentation.

Professor Richard Wiseman arrived at Happy (formerly Happy Computers) to find no overhead projector. By a stroke of luck, someone from a neighbouring office happened to be passing through and furnished said piece of equipment. Three slides into his presentation the bulb blew and plunged the screen into darkness. Whoops, suddenly the audience is on tenterhooks. Is this going to be a spooky evening full of strange unlucky events? Had Professor Wiseman's luck finally run out? After all, he's had a spectacular run. His book **The Luck Factor** is now selling in 20 countries, his face is plastered over London buses, there's a series on Radio 4 and he was even featured on Richard and Judy, the live daytime TV show.

Nerves were calmed as a red kerchief mysteriously disappeared into the palm of Richard's hand, coins evaporated, aces flashed and the audience unanimously complied with his predictions on our choice of symbols and coloured cards. The rest of the presentation ran smoothly and anyway, as we were to discover, as a lucky person his natural response would be that it was lucky the bulb didn't explode. Let's hope the person who had booked the projector for the following day was equally able to accentuate the positive.

Even before his research on people's luck made him a media asset, Professor Wiseman had already achieved considerable acclaim, first as a teenage magician and the then youngest member of the Magic Circle, and later as Professor of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. Incidentally, his interest in magic sprang from a lucky misdirection by a librarian who sent him to wrong section to research a school project.

## **Luck is No Accident**

Professor Wiseman made his initial observation about people's attitude to luck over ten years ago and eventually converted his curiosity into a programme of scientific research. This involved over 400 subjects whose fortunes and misfortunes were closely monitored over two years. This proved that luck and its converse are measurable and predictable human traits. On the bell curve of life, some 9% of the population are unlucky while 12% are consistently lucky. Everyone in-between presumably takes life as it comes. So what distinguishes the lucky bastards from the miserable sods?

First, you need to be clear what you mean by luck. The OED definition "*a supposed tendency of chance to bring a succession of favourable events*" no longer corresponds with the new scientific conception of luck. If a bus drives over a cliff, that doesn't mean that everyone on board just happened to be members of the unlucky club (so there's no point looking around the departure lounge to see if your fellow passengers appear unduly pessimistic). According to Professor Wiseman, there's luck and there's chance. The difference is that you can influence luck but you can't influence things that happen by chance. So people who win the lottery, even twice, aren't lucky any more than those who took the fatal bus were unlucky. Hmmm....

There's no doubt that lotteries have made people think about their luck in all the wrong ways. Richard told Radio 4 listeners that research in Ireland showed that thousands of people now relegate all their life's aspirations to the dream of a lottery win. This is more than foolish, it could actually make them unlucky as they will cease to do any of the positive, outgoing things that would improve their luck. So should I resign from my lottery syndicate? I know that statistically I am more likely to receive signals from Beagle 2, but it would be just my luck if the following week one of the tickets came up trumps!

Luck is all about relative perceptions. For a lucky person the glass is half full for the unlucky it's half empty. Unlucky people are life's Eeyores who anticipate the worst and whose lives become a self-fulfilling prophesy of misfortune. When things go wrong, their dire predictions are confirmed and their unlucky self-image reinforced. Unlucky people are blind to opportunities that present themselves to the extent that they will even step over a strategically placed £5 note or ignore an advertisement placed in a newspaper announcing that they've won a prize. Maybe that's why so many lottery winners don't bother to check their tickets, which really is bad luck.

Even when good things happen to unlucky people, they see it as a bad omen and of course bad happenings always come in threes. Unlucky people gravitate towards those whom they see as equally unlucky (you'll find them in any betting shop) and they can't appreciate the positive aspects of their own lives, such as a beautiful home or family. Just before his appearance on Richard and Judy, Professor Wiseman was sitting in the green room enjoying all the buzz and anticipation of appearing on live TV. He turned to the unlucky person who had been wheeled out for the occasion and asked enthusiastically "So what do you think of all this?" to which came the gloomy reply, "It's a bit chilly in here."

Lucky people tend to look on the bright side, even in difficult situations, and thrive upon any ill fortune that comes their way. When asked whether they would regard it as lucky or unlucky to be shot in the arm during a bank robbery the lucky person would immediately say, "Lucky, because I could have been shot in the head." Their positive attitude to life is infectious, people like to be around them and they are acutely sensitive to any opportunities that present themselves. Lucky people are good networkers and good listeners, so good luck to the Company of Friends I say.

Professor Wiseman has established four principles that can improve people's luck, which I repeat here verbatim with his descriptions.

**Principle One: Maximise Chance Opportunities**

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.

**Principle Two: Listening 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.

**Principle Three: Expect Good Fortune**

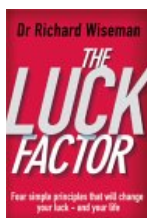
Lucky people are certain that the future is going to be full of good fortune. These expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies by helping lucky people persist in the face of failure, and shape their interactions with others in a positive way.

**Principle Four: Turn Bad Luck to Good**

Lucky people employ various psychological techniques to cope with, and even thrive upon, the ill fortune that comes their way. For example, they spontaneously imagine how things could have been worse, they don't dwell on the ill fortune, and they take control of the situation.

**Luck School**

The good news is that you can reverse engineer the qualities that make people lucky and improve your own luck. That's the idea behind Luck School which has shown that by teaching people to make simple changes to their behaviour and outlook, they can improve their luck by as much as 80%. Businesses can change their luck too. A small technology company called Technical Asset Management had had a run of bad business luck, including a very large bad debt. On hearing about Luck School, the CEO decided to put his entire staff of 38 through the course. Not long after, they were posting a 20% increase in profits month-on-month, greatly overcoming the Chairman's original scepticism. It's clearly only a matter of time before Luck will be added to the National Curriculum and head hunters and insurance companies will be selecting applicants purely on the basis of how lucky they are. Perhaps I had better dust off CV and quickly add 'Lucky Bastard' to my qualifications.



The Luck Factor: The Scientific Study of the Lucky Mind by Richard Wiseman is available on Amazon. For more information about Luck School, go to <http://luckfactor.co.uk/>.

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