



How to Get Rich (by getting lucky)

**MANUFACTURING LUCK
ON THE INTERNET**

In 2018, Naval wrote the famous thread.



[Link to tweet](#)

What about the counterpart - getting rich, *by getting lucky*? Can you engineer luck?

And let's be clear: people get rich by getting lucky all the time.

We dismiss their success (saying "oh they just got lucky") when we really should be asking *how* they got lucky.

It's time to stop blaming the world for being so random and start taking advantage of that randomness instead.

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Thanks to [@itsjordantop](#) for giving feedback on a draft of this ebook.

Introduction

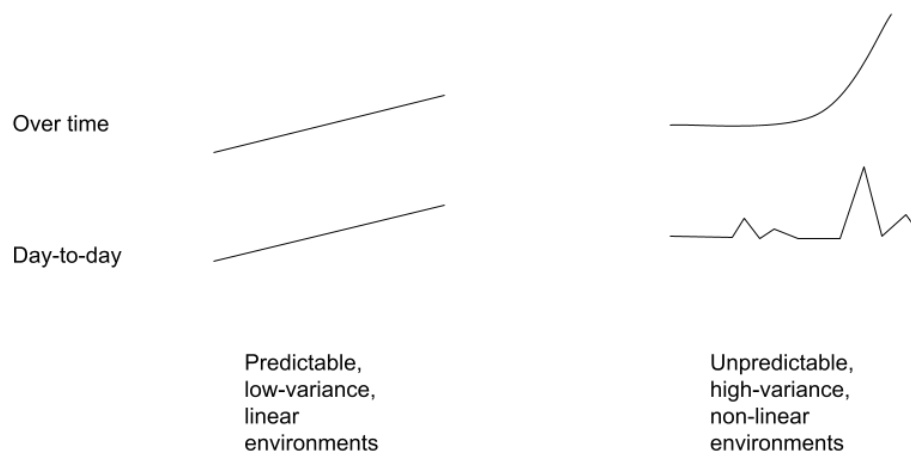
Why luck is essential

There are roughly two types of environments:

1. Predictable, low-variance, linear environments
2. Unpredictable, high-variance, non-linear environments

In linear environments, the input and output have a fairly constant, linear relationship. So if you're a chef and your salary is \$25/h, you know that one extra hour of work means \$25 extra income.

In non-linear environments, the input and output have an unpredictable, changing relationship. A tweet you spend 4 hours on could get 5 likes while a tweet you write in 2 minutes could get 5,000 likes. There's no way of knowing in advance.



The distinction between linear and non-linear is the reason why some environments are more predictable than others. In the first category of environments, the day-to-day looks much the same as the zoomed-out version. You can easily predict how you'll be doing next year (probably very similar to this year). In the second category of environments, the day-to-day looks like a porcupine - big results today, no results for the next week and so on. Optimally, the big picture looks like an exponential curve - you can't possibly know where you'll be one year from now.

Because of this unpredictability, there is high variance in outcomes in the second type of environment. One YouTuber could be a millionaire while another makes \$2 a month. Compare that to the predictable environment where variance is low - one truck driver is unlikely to earn 1,000x more than another truck driver.

It's vital to understand which environment you operate in. Most "traditional" careers fall into the first category while most "new" careers (like ebook sellers, influencers, YouTubers...) fall into the second category. Another way to put it: if you have just one "buyer" (your boss / employer), you're likely in the first category; if you have multiple buyers (the whole market), you're likely in the second category.

What makes you successful in one environment won't necessarily work in the other.

Every office worker who works hard can make a living. Every singer or YouTuber who works hard won't.

Most of us have adopted the model of the first, predictable environment. Thus, we need to relearn the way we approach things to succeed in the second, unpredictable environment. Since the second environment is characterized by randomness, the most important thing to learn is the importance of luck.

Luck is essential in an environment characterized by randomness.

The internet, in particular, is a game of luck. The reason for this is leverage. If you give a speech at your local university, you can probably get somewhere between 0 and 200 people to come and listen to it. But if you upload that speech to the internet, you could reach anywhere from 0 to 3 billion people.

The range of possibilities is unlimited because the internet has removed all limits. You're not limited by geography (if you do a speech at your local uni, someone from across the world won't come listen to it, but anyone in the world can watch the YouTube version). You're not limited by space (good luck finding a room that could fit millions of people). You're not limited by time (they can watch your speech 10 years after you gave it).

Because of leverage, when you get lucky, you tend to get *really* lucky. Assume you want to learn about sleep hygiene on YouTube. One video has 100k views and another has 100 views. Is the former video *really* 1000x better? (Is that even possible?) Or is it more likely that the person just got lucky somewhere along the way and that luck piled up?

Hard work, skills, judgment, strategy... it all still matters. Of course. But the one thing that matters even more is getting lucky; it's a multiplier to your hard work and judgment.



[Link to tweet](#)

Luck is essential for those operating in a random environment. So if you're a creator or use the internet to make money in any way, you should aim to get lucky.

Why luck can be influenced

Instead of complaining that the world is random and successful people got lucky, how about we take advantage of the randomness instead?

To see why luck can be influenced, here's a thought experiment:

Think of the internet as a lottery. The prize is traffic, followers, money... anything. Each action you do is a lottery ticket: you can tweet, upload videos on YouTube or TikTok, create blog posts... These actions could, if you get lucky, "go viral" or reach just the right person to make you successful.

You can quickly see that just like in traditional lottery, you can increase your chances by "buying" more lottery tickets. For example, an increasingly popular method of getting lucky on the internet is the "Portfolio of small bets" strategy. Instead of spending 10 months launching one product, which may easily flop, you spend 10 months launching 10 products, see which were most successful and double down on those.

But unlike traditional lottery tickets, each internet ticket has a **varying probability of success**. If you understand what influences the probability, you understand how to create luck. At a very basic level, we understand that posting a tweet at 2am has lower chances of success than posting it at 6pm - the probabilities of those lottery tickets vary. We intuitively

see that luck can be influenced, but somehow, people still don't understand that you can take advantage of it.

There are many forms of luck

Luck isn't merely one thing. It has many forms. [Naval writes](#):



The *first* type of luck is the traditional lottery variant: we can't get luckier unless we buy more tickets, and each ticket has an equal chance of success. If someone gets lucky in a lottery or happens to get born into a rich family, we know it's pure randomness. There couldn't have been any meaningful way to influence the outcome. **We think (wrongly) that all luck is like this.**

The *second* type of luck is much like our earlier example about *internet lottery tickets*. You hustle - tweet, upload, write, shoot, comment - until one of those internet lottery tickets pays off big time. Later in this ebook we'll talk more about this type of luck (named as "Marathoner's luck", due to the persistence required).

The *third* type of luck is two-part: being skilled and knowledgeable enough to spot an opportunity others miss, and once an opportunity presents itself, having the time and resources to capitalize on the opportunity before others do. The opportunity may look like

luck to others, but you know there's a reason you got "lucky" and they didn't. We'll talk more about this later in the "Sprinter's luck" section.

A curious subcategory forms in between the third and fourth variant. While the third type of luck comes when you jump on opportunities and the fourth is where opportunities find you, I believe there's a type of luck that happens when you create your own opportunities. You don't need to wait for opportunities to happen or come to you - you can outright create them. More on this in *Blacksmith's luck*.

Finally, the *fourth* type of luck Naval presents is unique to you - no one else is able to receive that luck, so it becomes your destiny.

Here's the example Naval gives:

"For example, let's say you're the best person in the world at deep-sea diving. You're known to take on deep-sea dives nobody else will even dare to attempt. By sheer luck, somebody finds a sunken treasure ship off the coast they can't get to. Well, their luck just became your luck, because they're going to come to you to get to the treasure, and you're going to get paid for it."

If you're the best and people know it, that's your luck. Competent people tend to get lucky; it's their reward for being competent and public about it. "It starts becoming so deterministic, it stops being luck", says Naval.

And that's why we won't touch on this last form of luck in this ebook. The advice that would lead to this situation is "get really good at something and get known for it", which isn't exactly the kind of focus we wanted to have here.

To quickly summarize, you should try to get lucky if you want good results in a random environment. There are different varieties of luck:

1. Blind luck (you can't really influence it; we think all luck is like this)
2. Luck you can influence (focus of this ebook)
3. Luck that becomes so deterministic that it isn't luck anymore (not our focus)

The next step: redefining what you think luck is and where it comes from.

What is luck?

Let's define luck as **directional randomness**. When something random happens that takes you in the wrong direction, we say it's bad luck. When something random happens that helps you go where you want to go, we call that good luck.

Random events occur all the time, but only a small percentage of those events have a significant directional impact on your life. To get lucky, we want to maximize the chances and impact of positively directional randomness while minimizing the negative kind.

When we say that "random events occur", it's important to realize that there are many ways in which those events could emerge. Roughly divided into two:

1. A random event occurs because of a **complex system**. For example, you buy Tesla stocks, then the stars align (a Chinese company goes bankrupt, a new bill gets passed, the right Elon tweet goes viral...) and you end up tripling your investment.
2. A random event occurs because of a **person**. For example, you are a small creator and you tweet daily. One of those tweets gets retweeted by a popular account and, as a result, you triple your follower count overnight.

Note that this distinction isn't separate from the four types of luck (from Naval) we discussed earlier. The four types answer, on a high level, how to get lucky. These two points here answer where luck comes from. Later, in the strategy section, we combine the two perspectives. But first, a rough guide to dealing with the two sources of luck (if you're on your second read of this ebook, you realize how these two sources are tackled head-on by the strategies we discuss later.)

Capturing luck that is created by complex systems

When the random events occur due to complex systems, the best strategy is *positional*. We cannot easily bend the complex system to our favor; instead, we should position ourselves to benefit when random events occur.

For example, imagine you've published 50 blog posts to your own website. You have no clue why, but suddenly a post you published three years ago experienced a huge spike in readership, and as a result, you got money and career opportunities and whatnot.

What caused the spike could have been a change in Google's algorithm, or a popular news article that links to the blog post, or something else. Doesn't really matter. What matters is

that you were in a good position to get lucky, with all those posts of yours doing the hard work for you.

Capturing luck that is given by people

If with complex systems we want to be positional, with people, we want to be more proactive. This is because we *can* influence someone to act in our favor and confer luck to us.

Luck isn't some cosmic thing, granted by the universe. Luck is something that other people can give to you. But only by some people, and only if they have a reason to give it to you.

Someone out there has the power to grow your audience/project/startup just by connecting you to the right person or speaking nicely about your stuff or giving you valuable information you cannot easily get elsewhere. But you must find a way to reach them and give them a reason to confer this luck to you.

The “luck” can come in many forms:

- Information: someone has valuable information and they are willing to give it to you
- Social power: they are well-connected and willing to give you access to their connections / audience
- Hard power: they are able to directly give you what you want (for example, if you get on a CEO's nice side, they're able to hire you on the spot)

To get luck that is given by people, the process boils down to two crucial steps:

1. Get the right person to notice you
2. Get the right person to like you enough to help you out

More on all of this later. It is important to understand the high-level principles first.

By now we realize:

- Why luck is essential
- Why luck can be influenced (and we have a few rough guidelines on how to do that)
- What luck is and where it comes from

It's time to turn this initial understanding into actionable strategies for getting lucky.

Strategies

Marathoner's luck

Motto: Persist long enough to get lucky.

There are so many examples of people who have been grinding for years, then seemingly overnight, everything changes and they see success. "Slowly at first, then all at once", the saying goes.

Most successful creators and startups can be modeled by an exponential curve. The main difference is how soon the growth begins - for some, it takes weeks. For others, years.

To ensure this exponential growth happens to you:

1. Maximize time in the game (so you don't quit before the growth happens)
2. Maximize internet fingerprints (to make the growth happen earlier)

Maximize time in the game

There are many factors that influence how soon your growth happens - some you can control, some you can't. But the one factor that everyone can influence is how long they persist and wait for that growth.

The longer you persist, the higher your probability of success. (Obviously, on the condition that you keep on working hard and trying your best.)

So how can we maximize time in the game?

Rule #1: Avoid dying

This is the foremost rule. If you're a decent, hard-working creator, you'll get at least moderate success if you just persist long enough. Not necessarily the kind of success your role models have (that's the 0.01%), but at least the kind of success that can pay some bills and open up new opportunities you've never imagined. Your lucky break will come, but only if you persist.

The only way to lose in this game is if you die, so let's avoid the common causes of death.

1. Running out of money:

A lot of people believe the biggest reason creators or startups die is because they run out of money. Running out of energy is a bigger reason (as we'll cover soon) because there's an easy way to not run out of money:

Don't spend money.

The lower your costs are, the longer you can persist, and thus the higher your chances of success. Luckily, creating on the internet is constantly getting cheaper: you could create and market an entire business for free if you wanted to. So keep your costs low.

If you think it through, limited downside and unlimited upside is the formula for getting lucky. Random events are much more likely to benefit you than harm you because you can only lose \$200 but you could potentially gain \$200k. (Convexity and asymmetric opportunity are terms you may want to research.)

2. Running out of energy / determination

This is the legit concern.

With enough determination, you'll figure out:

- What people want
- How to create it
- How to deliver it to them
- How you can get paid for it

None of this is a secret. Anyone with enough determination can figure it all out and make money. But not everyone has the determination.

So if you run out of determination, you'll stop making something people want and stop finding ways to reach them. You'll fail.

Dying, for nearly every creator and startup, just means giving up. Running out of energy and determination. So here's how you can keep energy up:

- Give yourself credit for small wins.
- Focus on improving your skills, not on external metrics. In a random environment, you have control over the inputs, not the outputs.
- Instead of quitting, just reduce how often you post/create.

- Talk to other creators. It's comforting to realize that no one has it easy.
- Don't expect many compliments. Most people who like your work will never tell you that. If one person says they love what you do, probably a hundred people are thinking it.

Rule #2: Keep showing up

If you manage to avoid ruin, that means you're always alive. Now, stay active.

Put differently: First, make sure you don't quit your marathon run or injure yourself so you have to quit. Now, ensure you're constantly going forward.

There are many ways to stay active, and the definition of "being active" varies based on what you try to do. But generally, you'll want to ensure consistent output, whether that output be tweets, essays, art, features... Some ideas for ensuring consistent output:

- **Create in bulk, distribute individually.** For example, take a weekend to create 50 tweets, then schedule them for the next 30 days. Or if you don't like scheduling, just keep the drafts and post them when you feel like it.
- **Commit to a schedule.** Timebox a certain piece of your calendar every day / week for creating. Stick to the schedule.
- **Repurpose existing stuff.** Instead of starting from scratch, start from something you've already created and build up from there.

It's a game of persistence, not talent. Each day you persist is a day closer to exponential growth. Some days, you barely move anywhere. Other days, you leap.

Maximize your internet fingerprints

Internet fingerprints are permanent marks you leave on the internet that someone can discover years or even decades from now. So if you create a course today, someone can find it 4 years from now and you still get paid.

Not everything you create on the internet qualifies as an internet fingerprint. It's very unlikely that a tweet from 3 years ago will help you get lucky today, but a blog post from 3 years ago might. The key difference is discoverability.

Optimize for discoverability:

Optimally, what you create should be easy to discover by people who may not even be looking for it. The same applies to you as a person: make sure your face and name are presented to someone new every day. This leads to serendipity.

So you want to be in many places, all of the time. Posting on Reddit, Indie Hackers, Pinterest, Twitter... it's important that people can randomly find you. Of course, probably just one or two places lead to most results - but until you figure out which of those places are, it's a safe bet to be everywhere.

A key consideration for discoverability is the window of opportunity. If you consider your standard tweet, there's a time window of maybe 2 days for someone to see it - after that time, very few people see it. You'll want to be in places where the window is long, such as on Google Search (years long) or being interviewed on a podcast (months long).

And with the places where the window of opportunity is small, you'll want to manually make your best stuff more discoverable. For example, a lot of people do a "thread of their best threads" and pin it to their profile, or they randomly retweet their masterpiece from 2 years ago. I personally create Twitter collections of my best tweets and threads and attach those collections to my ["start here" page](#), so people new to me can quickly see the best stuff.

The main idea behind discoverability is that your internet fingerprints should constantly be networking for you, 24/7. Position yourself all over the internet, so that someone new bumps into you and your best stuff every single day.

Optimize for quantity:

What's better than having one fingerprint? Having many.

We want to optimize for quantity because it's almost impossible to predict in advance which of your fingerprints will be most permanent and make you luckier in the future. Even if you think you could predict it, you won't be as accurate as you'd think.

So it becomes a number's game. Simply having more hooks in the water helps, and that's our foremost concern. Recall the "portfolio of small bets" strategy - instead of spending 10,000 hours on something, launch 10,000 small bets.

It's easier to create the next big hit from 100 quick trials than 1 extremely intentional trial. Smart people tend to try the latter path, because they believe they are so smart that what they create must surely become the next hit - they've researched everything and optimized everything. Only after their 2-year project fails do they realize they should have 2-week projects instead.

To increase quantity, you want to lower the costs of each try. So if it takes you 1 month to publish a new blog post, you want to drop it down to 1 week, or if it takes you 1 year to launch a new product, you want to drop it down to 1 month. This allows you to get more trials, thus you become luckier as a whole. You can achieve this by:

- Time-boxing your projects - decide to work on a project for 2 weeks max, and stick to the schedule
- Setting a shipping target, like 4 blog posts each month, and sticking to it
- Lowering the scope - instead of creating a 10-week course, create a 10-page ebook. If the ebook sells well, *then* consider creating something more elaborate, not the other way around.

But quantity is not everything. What you create should optimally also be:

1. Evergreen enough that it stands the test of time
2. High enough quality that it stands the test of time

(Time is a marathoner's best friend. Take full advantage of it.)

Most products fail the first condition: many SaaS products and tools become obsolete in months if you don't add features to them. A lot of information gets stale quickly. If you want to follow the marathoner strategy to getting lucky, you should focus on **evergreen creations**, things that require very limited updating. (A sprinter can operate on the other end of the extreme: the very new. More on this later.).

Evergreen stuff is complete in itself, thus focused enough. If it's a blog post, it covers a topic that remains relatively stable, or from an angle that remains stable. If it's a tool, it fulfills the use case completely, so there is no need for further features (for example, consider a .jpg to .png converter, or an info product like this that presents timeless principles instead of short-lived tactics). We want to create new trials instead of constantly updating our old ones, with the exception of highly successful bets, which we may want to double down on.

As for the second criterion, don't confuse "high quality" with "perfection". Surely, you should aim to create amazing stuff because only that remains discoverable months and years from now. But your main consideration must be quantity.

Give yourself a constraint, such as one new blog post every 2 weeks, and within that constraint, do your best quality. Don't let one creation drag on for too long, because you cannot ensure its success in advance, no matter its quality.

Optimize for likability:

"Build in public" is kind of a cliché at this point. Everyone says you need to do it. So I'll spare you the same-old same-old.

Here's, quickly, why building in public leads to luck:

- You tell everyone that you're creating and selling homemade, premium cutting boards.
- 3 weeks later, someone's friend is looking for a premium cutting board. They remember you do that stuff, so they recommend you to their friend.
- Building in public => luck

Or you might tell people that you've launched on Product Hunt, and if they like you, they may share that announcement to their network. **But people must actually want to see you succeed.** If they don't like you, they won't help you out. Luckily, likability is something you can influence:

- Be authentic
- Be charismatic (or, maybe easier, don't be uncharismatic)
- Show your audience appreciation and do something really nice for them from time to time, no strings attached
- Be in it for the right reasons and make sure they realize it
- Have a vision people want to support and see become a reality

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A Marathoner is doing a good job when

- a lot of people discover their work,
- and the work is of high enough quality that the person gets interested in the Marathoner,
- and they like the Marathoner enough to help them out (buy from them, share their work so others can discover the Marathoner...)

Each of the steps is optimizable, as shown in this section. When a Marathoner executes these steps well, luck becomes a mere waiting game.

Sprinter's luck

Motto: When you spot an opportunity, run as fast as you can.

In many ways, the Sprinter strategy is an opposite to the Marathoner strategy:

- Marathoners want consistency. Sprinters want intensity.
- A Marathoner tries to be in many places, all the time. A sprinter tries to be in the right place at the right time. (A Marathoner wants people to discover their work, a Sprinter wants to discover something others don't.)
- Marathoners want to create evergreen things. Sprinters want to create cutting-edge things.
- Marathoners maximize duration. Sprinters maximize speed.

Marathoner strategy: Imagine an early human hunting a deer. They know that if they go in the right direction and they run long enough, the deer must get exhausted and the hunter gets their reward. The only thing that matters is that the hunter doesn't give up (of course, given that they are a decent hunter).

Sprinter strategy: Imagine a lion hunting an antelope. They must be very careful to choose the right antelope to attack and the right time + place to initiate the hunt. If they come out of their hiding too early or too late, the antelope will get away. The only thing that matters is choosing the right time and place (of course, given that they are a decently fast lion).

A sprinter's defining quality, besides their speed, is the accuracy at which they identify the right place and right time.

Opportunity + Optionality = Luck

Opportunity:

A lion sleeps 16-20 hours every day, but when an opportunity presents itself, they'll pounce.

For most people, the hard part is spotting an opportunity. When you know what to work on, it's just a matter of working on it, and any decent creator is capable of that. It's easier to sprint than to know when to sprint.

So, how do you spot opportunities before they are obvious?

- **Live on the cutting-edge:** opportunities tend to occur on the cutting-edge (if they occurred in the middle, so many people would jump on it that it would cease to be an

opportunity). So if you are familiar with the cutting-edge, you are equipped to spot opportunities. Two sub-strategies:

- **Become an expert in your field:** you'll become more sensitive to the tiny changes in conditions that others regard as nothing, but you regard as opportunity.
- **Hang out in the right corner of the internet:** someone inevitably spots an opportunity and mentions it somewhere - and you can position yourself to hear about it before 99% of other people do by being on the right Discord or following the right person.

[Relevant guide to career-planning](#) by Marc Andreessen.

Besides opportunity, there is one more thing you need: optionality.

Optionality:

With optionality, we mean a certain kind of freedom to work on opportunities.

- Freedom in your calendar (you could commit 50 hours this week on an opportunity if it's big enough)
- Freedom via your skillset (you could build a website or video course or a product MVP this weekend with little to no outside help, if the opportunity so requires)
- Freedom in your plans (if you already have decided your plans for the next 5 years, you won't jump on any opportunities that don't fit with your plan; it's okay to have long-term aspirations, as long as you don't become a prisoner to them)

Without optionality, you clearly cannot sprint on an opportunity, even if you identified one. So create optionality with the help of those points above.

Optionality is also important simply for opportunity-spotting. When you're less busy, you can reflect more and unconsciously come up with ideas that other people don't.

Redundancy and leisure are a critical foundation for intensity. You can run at a low intensity for hours at a time, but you can only sprint for a couple hundred meters. Breaks are essential for recovery, so that you are ready to sprint when you need to.

Why is speed important for luck?

The defining feature of a sprinter is speed. Why is speed important?

Something is an opportunity when there's a high reward or high chances of reward. Once you find something like this, many others want it, so those rewards diminish over time. Thus, you want to find it before others, or capitalize on it before others - before the rewards are reaped dry.

A classic example: people who are keen on growing their follower count on Twitter race to comment on a big account's tweet before other accounts do. If you have 100 followers and you post your own tweet, you get maybe 50 impressions. But if you reply to a tweet by an account who has 400k followers, you can easily get thousands of impressions. If the big account's tweet becomes popular, your reply becomes popular as a side effect.

The problem is, nearly every new account keen to grow knows this. So it's a speed race to comment within minutes or even seconds after the big account tweets. No matter how good your reply is, if you're late, you'll drown in the noise.

In some instances, the more time passes, the less likely it is you'll be rewarded. Of course, the importance of speed isn't as high in all cases: sure, it's great if you're early on crypto, but you can still make good money even if you join the hype years later than the early-birds.

So, some situations are wired in a way that only the fastest sprinters are successful. In other situations, most sprinters (even the slower ones) can be successful, given that they choose the right opportunity.

Choosing the right opportunity multiplies chances of reward without multiplying risk

Some business people insist that the most important thing for starting a company is *choosing the wave*. A rising tide lifts all boats. You could be doing almost everything wrong, but as long as your boat stays afloat, you may luck out. In comparison, if you get on the wrong subway, all stops are wrong. You gotta get off the metro.

Being in the right place at the right time leads to luck, as we know from conventional wisdom. A rising tide increases your chances of success - since the environment is conspiring in your favor - without multiplying the risk, which means we are luckier. Whenever the upside increases more than the downside, we get luckier.

In summary, the two skills of a sprinter:

1. Running faster than everybody else
2. Choosing the right time and place to initiate the sprint

You can get lucky with only one of these skills, if you pick your battles right. If you have both skills, luck can't escape you.

Blacksmith's luck

Motto: Forge your own success.

Recall what we talked about in the introduction: luck isn't a cosmic thing, but something that people can give to you. Since you can influence people, you can influence how lucky you get.

So the common process behind a Blacksmith's success looks something like this:

1. Figure out what you want
2. Figure out which person / group of people can give it to you
3. Figure out how to reach them and make them like you
4. Continue until you get what you want

Below you'll find a few strategies that follow this process; you can figure out more strategies just by swapping different variables to the process above.

Turn small wins into big wins

In 2005, a Canadian blogger Kyle MacDonald had a red paperclip. By 2006, he had traded that paperclip to a house. He started by trading the paperclip to a pen, the pen to a doorknob, the doorknob to a camp stove... With each trade, he upgraded just a bit, until - by the fourteenth trade - he had a house.

You can do the same thing with success, trading one small win into a slightly bigger win.

Start with whatever small win you may have, like:

- Your education (ex: graduated from a design school)
- Your research (ex: spent 100+ hours researching great design)
- Your creations (ex: created 20 different versions of Apple's logo)

Trade this small win into a slightly bigger win, like:

- A blog post that you can promote (or a post on Indie Hackers, Reddit...)
- Twitter thread
- LinkedIn post

Now, you not only know about design, but you also share your knowledge publicly and perhaps have some engagement. You've doubled your wins. Rinse and repeat until you can leverage these small wins into something bigger, like:

- A freelancing project
- Creating design for free to an NGO
- An internship

Rinse and repeat, and you'll notice that you're trading small projects into bigger projects, small features on a small place on the internet into bigger features on podcasts or newsletters...

On the internet, there are infinite trades you can make. Success is a game you can win just by being smart about your trades. Of course, you may need a fair bit of luck for some trades to go through (luck creates luck just like money creates money), but with enough trying, you can always trade up. Sometimes a little, sometimes a lot.

If you make \$100 with a digital product, talk about it and people will perceive you as more credible. Which brings you more money, which makes you more credible, which brings you more money... You can create your own "lucky streak", your own opportunities; you can become a magnet for luck. Once you strike gold on something, leverage it like hell.

Do the same thing over and over again until you get your win

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results" goes the saying. But it only applies to situations where luck doesn't play a role, like trying to walk through walls.

When luck plays a central role, as it does in most success on the internet, you can do the same thing over and over until you get what you want. A blacksmith pounds the metal repeatedly until something great comes of it. You can't just quit after the first try.

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9. ▲ I sold \$104,754 worth of videos and PDFs in 4 months ([medium.com/dvassallo](#))
8 points by DVassallo on May 4, 2020 | past | 3 comments
10. ▲ I sold \$104,754 worth of videos and PDFs in 4 months ([medium.com/dvassallo](#))
6 points by DVassallo on April 27, 2020 | past | 1 comment
11. ▲ I sold \$104,754 worth of videos and PDFs in 4 months ([medium.com/dvassallo](#))
2 points by DVassallo on April 27, 2020 | past
12. ▲ Tell HN: I recorded a short presentation, and sold \$14,379 in the first day
48 points by DVassallo on April 23, 2020 | past | 18 comments

This is what Daniel Vassallo (more on him later) did on Hacker News. For each of his information products and major blog posts, he promoted them continuously until they took off. Most of the posts never did, but it only takes one to generate outsized results.

For many creators and startups, getting on the frontpage of Hacker News or perhaps a certain subreddit would bring them their greatest first win that would make everything else easier. Knowing this, why would they stop after a few tries? It makes a lot more sense to pound your head on that wall than to quit and try to do something else where the potential payoff is significantly smaller.

Obviously, don't repeat something to the point of insanity. You can learn from previous iterations. But at the same time, don't give up if there's nothing to learn from your failures. If we cannot learn why something was successful because it may be completely due to luck, we cannot learn why something was unsuccessful, because that, too, may be completely due to bad luck.

We tend to think that there's always something grand to learn from failures, but perhaps the most common learning is: "I just haven't gotten lucky yet. Let's continue trying." Post again with a slightly different headline, at a slightly different time, and you might get enormously different results.

Don't stop until you know it's because of something other than bad luck. You can really have "better luck next time". Try and see for yourself.

Cold message to create your own opportunities

What's stopping you from sending a message to someone who could really help you out? Maybe a top Twitter account in your niche, or a manager at a company you wish to work for.

There's quite the asymmetry: you lose maybe 2 hours of your time crafting a really nice outreach message, but you could gain so much. The percentage of success is low, but the success, if it occurs, is phenomenal.

While some things are a numbers game, cold messaging isn't. This is a quality game. One well-crafted, made-with-effort type of email is worth way more than 100 copy-paste emails.

Of course, if they receive loads of cold messages, you need to wow them if you are to be successful. Cold messages work if they come from interesting people (imagine Barack Obama cold messaging someone). So the more interesting you are (the better stuff you've built, or the bigger your following etc), the better chances you have at forging your own luck.

There's a compound effect here: once you've gotten lucky, you become more interesting, so you have an easier time getting lucky again and again. Turning small wins into bigger wins. Similarly, you may want to cold message "smaller" people first, then move to "bigger" people. Or ask for smaller things first, later ask bigger things.

DMs and emails are hidden, so when they work, we think (looking from the outside) that the success was due to luck. But the person sending DMs knows it was something else entirely.

Help people out permissionlessly

People, especially successful people, may be too busy to give you something before you give something to them. So when you're reaching out, you don't just need to ask something - help them out instead.



[Link to tweet](#)

There's this idea of [permissionless apprenticeships](#): you don't need anyone's permission to give value to people who are able to make you lucky.

- Someone compiled [all content](#) Balaji Srinivasan has put out. Surely enough, Balaji promoted it to his Twitter audience (300k+ strong at the time).
- Someone created a Wikipedia page for Steven Bartlett. Surely enough, that got [Steven's attention](#), and the creator got an internship under Steve as a result.

- Someone decided to collect all of Naval's wisdom into one place. Surely enough, Naval helped him out, and the result is [The Almanack of Naval Ravikant](#), an international hit.

A lot of examples like this exist.

There are many ways to provide permissionless help, some easier (like spotting issues on their website or app, or curating their ideas), some a bit harder (like figuring out an opportunity for partnership or solving a real problem they have).

But if you do figure out how to help, it is the law of reciprocity that they will help you back. Maybe not immediately, but at some point. And there is asymmetry at play. What they can give you, with their domain power or riches or social reputation, is likely much more valuable than what you can give them.

So if you'd like to create your own opportunities (and luck) permissionlessly, do this:

1. Figure out what you want
2. Figure out who can give it to you
3. Figure out the most valuable thing you can do for them
4. Do it for them
5. Expect nothing in return (they'll make you luckier, just wait and see)

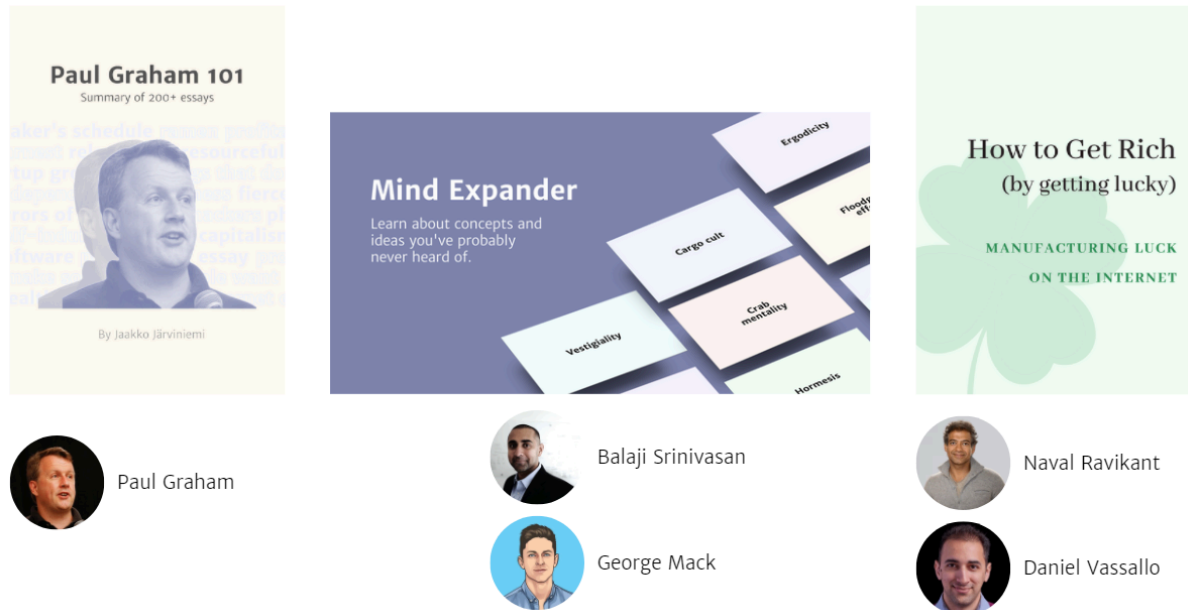
Now I want to share an unknown strategy that I consider relevant to "helping people out permissionlessly". I call it "**product-influencer fit**".

It goes something like this:

- Just like you'd have a buyer persona, have an influencer persona: who is the perfect influencer for this product? Who fairly known person is most likely to promote this (ideally without me paying for it)?
- When you're doing user research for your product, also do influencer research. Why should they share my product? What would make them more likely to enjoy it? User research helps you answer product questions. Influencer research helps you answer promotion questions.

You'll optimally want the influencer to become a user of your product, find great value from it and organically promote it to their audience.

For example, this is what I try to do with my digital products:



For each product, I have identified certain influencers who I believe fit the product. Naturally, Paul Graham is likely to care about my summary of his essays. Balaji and George are known to discuss intellectual concepts and mental models, so they might be interested in my tool about intellectual concepts. Daniel talks a lot about getting lucky on the internet, and Naval wrote the inspiration for this product (his thread on getting rich without getting lucky), so there's some fit there.

Once you've created your thing, try your best to get your chosen influencer(s) to notice it. If there's a good product-influencer fit, and they understand what your product is about and/or have access to see it, they may promote it, granting you access to a big, targeted audience organically.

That's what happened when I mentioned my tool Mind Expander in a relevant tweet by @balajis. He checked it out and decided to give a shoutout to his audience:



Balaji Srinivasan
@balajis

The floodgate effect is often a better mental model than the slippery slope. If you open up even a little bit, the waters rush in.

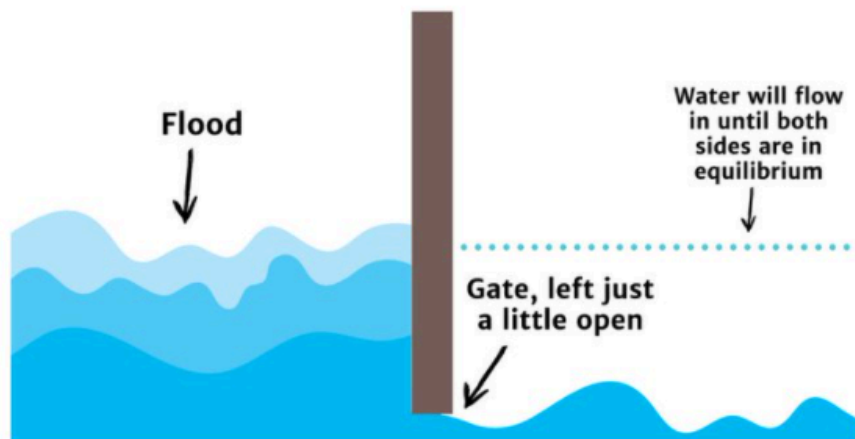
From this cool site by @jaakkojar:
jaakkoj.com/mind-expander#...

Floodgate effect

LAW, UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

A floodgate effect occurs when you permit a small thing, which then leads to the permission of many more things.

The name comes from the way a floodgate works: If you open the gate even a little bit, water will flow in until both sides of the gate are in equilibrium. Even the tiniest permission will lead to total permission.



Examples of the floodgate effect:

- If you do a favor to a certain type of person, they'll be always asking for more favors. In Finnish, we say "I gave my pinky, they took the whole arm" (I believe the English equivalent is "give them an inch, they'll take a mile")
- A drop of alcohol to a recovering addict can lead to total relapse
- If you allow one citizen to [burn the American flag](#), you'll allow all of them to do that.

As you can see from the examples, the small permission creates a precedent, which is then exploited/leveraged repeatedly, leading to a flood of such events.

[Link to tweet](#)

Within 24 hours of that shoutout, I had received 400 followers (4x increase), 16,000 Twitter profile visits, 4,000 new people reading my blog posts, \$150 from Mind Expander premium and a job offer in a new startup from the founder of a \$200m company (I declined).

If there was poor product-influencer fit, none of this would have happened. But because there was a good fit, my chances of getting lucky were big enough for things to go this way.

As you saw on the image before, there are still many more influencers I think would be likely to share my products, if only I succeed in letting them know about their existence. I won't always be as lucky as I was with Balaji, but the rewards for each time I do get lucky are tremendously big. And I'm much more likely to get lucky in the first place when I've consciously thought about product-influencer fit because now I have a focused area to monitor and influence (for example, I turn on notifications for the influencers' tweets and reply with a mention of my product immediately if it's highly relevant to the tweet).

This idea is an application of the "other people's audiences" principle I talk about in [my marketing guide](#). The basic premise is that you should try to figure out where your audience already hangs out, then figure out a way to reach that audience wherever they may be. An influencer has made this easy for you - they've got an audience you want to reach, and it's relatively easy to gain exposure to that audience (just make something the influencer wants to use and share).

Naturally, it's too risky to create a product with the single focus of getting an influencer to promote it for you - they might not. So you want to create a product that is still worth it even if no influencer acknowledges it. But create the product with a target influencer in mind, and once you have a product, try to get your chosen influencer(s) to notice it, then watch magic happen.

Conclusion

Choose your fighter

Now you realize that “luck” is used as an umbrella term for a whole host of phenomena, most of which we can influence. (This is why we must be careful with words, they constrain our thinking.) What someone calls luck, you can call asymmetry. You can call it the rewards of survival. Or the product of expert knowledge and redundancy. Or leverage. Or the first-takes-all effect. Or the result of asking and helping.

In this ebook, I’ve outlined loads of strategies. Now it’s up to you to mix and match those you think are a good fit for you. Create your own system for getting lucky and get rich / successful / famous as a result. I used the Marathoner, Sprinter and Blacksmith as archetypes, but it may not be ideal to focus on one of these fighters alone.

Yet, it’s helpful to understand that there are different archetypes. Some people give you advice that may work for them, but not for you, simply because they follow a different strategy to getting lucky. You’d be better off understanding the general principles of luck and deriving your own actions from those principles. (It may be a good idea to read the introduction again, now that you’ve seen the strategies - the strategies are, after all, derived from the principles.)

I believe that if you apply some of the ideas from this ebook, and you keep on doing your best and working your hardest, you’re going to get lucky. Maybe not next week, but eventually. I’m rooting for you.

Thank you for reading.

Further reading

A lot has been written about “luck surface area” and increasing serendipity in your life. But, generally, once you’ve read one of those posts, you’ve read all of them. I feel this ebook has given you more depth and more actionability than those other luck posts on the internet - but feel free to verify this for yourself ;).

Since luck is very related to randomness, the best thing you can read is Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s “*Incerto*” series. While all of the books explore randomness, *Antifragile* in particular gives tangible examples of how you can harness randomness to your advantage. This is the foremost thing I recommend you read if you’re interested in getting lucky.

You may find these treatments of [convexity](#) and [ergodicity](#) interesting.

[Daniel Vassallo](#) (we’ve talked about him quite a bit) applies Taleb’s ideas and thinking into practice. He also shares good tweets about luck, randomness and creating on the internet.

Appendix: Real-life examples

We shouldn't study the cereal successful people eat in the morning. But we shouldn't dismiss their success right off the bat either. I believe there are general principles you can learn if you look for them.

Here are short stories of three creators and how they've manufactured luck on the internet.

Nat Eliason: from Marathoner to Sprinter

Nat Eliason has been writing blog posts for years, and with such consistency that it takes a while to scroll through his [blog posts archive](#). Clearly, he is a Marathoner, playing for the long term.

But if you consider Nat's monetization strategy... that's a different story.

When Roam Research was on everyone's lips, Nat wrote a [thorough article](#) on the note-taking tool. It went viral (currently at over 32,000 shares), so he quickly jumped on the opportunity and created the hugely popular [Effortless Output in Roam](#) course. [Making enough money to buy a house](#) and still have some left.

More recently, cryptocurrency has been on everyone's lips. Nat got into the topic, started writing about it and created a [hugely popular course](#) on it.

It's worth noting that out of hundreds and hundreds of things Nat has written about, he's only created four courses (as far as I know; the two other courses are on technical marketing and SEO). So he's been patient enough to keep on posting and executing the Marathoner strategy, but when opportunity and his personal interests align, he's shifted to Sprinter strategy and made crazy sums of money from it. Plus, the brand and readership he's developed from the Marathoner strategy have ensured that when he sprints, he succeeds.

Daniel Vassallo: from Blacksmith to Marathoner to Sprinter

Early growth: Blacksmith

Recall how Daniel posted on Hacker News repeatedly until he got attention, then did the same thing on Indie Hackers, Reddit and so on. He didn't stop until he got his first big win, which allowed him to jumpstart a Twitter audience, from which all else follows.

The reason Daniel could start with the Blacksmith strategy is because he had a unique story to share and get attention with. He quit a \$500k/year job to work for himself. How many other people can say that? That's instant credibility.

Most other creators who start out aren't like that, so it's tougher to make people care specifically about you - most often, they begin to care about you after they've started caring about what you create. And for them to care about what you create, you need to create something good, which takes time and learning and iterating. So most early-stage creators fall closer to the Marathoner description, with spots of Blacksmith or Sprinter strategy sprinkled in.

Monetization: Marathoner / Sprinter

Here comes the classic "portfolio of small bets" - the strategy of launching multiple products and seeing what sticks. By posting consistently on Twitter, Daniel had an idea of what ideas and topics could be turned into digital products, which he created many of. Then he could sell those products to the very same audience.

Now: Sprinter

These days, from what I understand, Daniel looks like a sprinter. He often tweets how he follows inspiration and doesn't have tight plans or schedules. But when inspiration and opportunity meet, he gets to work intensely.

A big reason why Daniel now has this freedom and optionality to choose when to sprint is because of his earlier success. He now earns a lot of money "passively" from his portfolio of digital products, so he can act out of opportunity + inspiration, not out of need.

Jaakko Järvinemi: Marathoner-Sprinter

Yup, that's me!

The reason I include myself isn't to self-promote or gloat. It's because I can share everything.

When you study other people, you mostly see stuff that worked (they may delete or hide stuff that failed) so you get a false sense of their luck. And you don't see all the emails and messages and hustle that got them where they are. (My understanding of Nat's and Daniel's stories may be biased for this reason)

In this small section, I want to give an overview of how I, an early-stage creator, am trying to manufacture luck. It's mostly a certain mix of the Marathoner and Sprinter strategies.

There are certain kinds of marathoners who choose a topic, create two Twitter threads a week about it for 10 months, getting a lot of followers in the process. But I can't help but think how boring it must be, posting and thinking about the same thing, day in, day out. At least for me it would be boring. I want variety in my life, breadth instead of too much depth, generalist vs specialist.

That's why I consider myself at least partially a sprinter - I only write posts and create digital products that I'm truly interested in. I only explore topics where I want to personally know the answers, instead of sharing what I already know.

A tangible example: I'm a marketer. It would be easy for me to create yet another marketing blueprint or "copywriting secrets" product, or your standard Twitter threads. I believe if I branded myself as a marketing guy, I could see results much faster than I currently do. But I'd be extremely bored, and I wouldn't be proud of myself. (I have created a marketing product, but not one where I share common answers and tactics, but one where I ask uncommon questions because I was interested in them.)

So I am a sprinter in the sense that I only create stuff for myself. This is a harder way to grow than picking a niche, but it's more rewarding. And it does take more time than growth-hacking your way to the known; hence why I also consider myself a marathoner.

I don't feel like a blacksmith though. I know I could try to DM Paul Graham and get him to notice my summary about his essays. I could be more aggressive in promoting my content and digital products. I could probably do what many other Twitter accounts do, which is trying to form relationships with other accounts in your niche and together sort of lifting each other up.

But a lot of this stuff just feels unnatural to me. I feel like the less marketing I do for my personal projects, the more high-integrity it feels. Perhaps I'll change my ways at some point, but again, I want to follow my inspiration and what feels right to me. This may put me at a disadvantage in some ways, hence delaying the results I could gain; again, why I consider myself a marathoner.

I think my motto is: I'm in no rush anywhere. I'm just trying to do stuff that interests me, let people know about what I do, but not trying to cram anything down people's throats. If success happens, it happens, I'm not too worried about it. I'll just focus on the inputs and remember to enjoy the journey.