Success Is Predictable

“It is our duty as men and women to proceed as though the limits to our abilities do not exist.”
—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

The great question of philosophy has always been, “How shall we live in order to be happy?” The greatest minds of all time have dedicated years, often entire lifetimes, seeking the answers to this question. Your ability to ask and answer this question correctly for yourself is the key to everything that happens to you and to everything that you accomplish. The worst use of time and life is to work hard to climb the ladder of success only to find that it is leaning against the wrong building.

I did not graduate from high school. I fooled around and left school in the half of the class that makes the top half possible. Because of my limited education, the only work I could find was at laboring jobs. For years, I traveled from place to place, washing dishes, working in sawmills and on construction sites, slashing brush with a chain saw as part of a logging crew, and working on farms and ranches.

When the laboring jobs ran out, I got a job in straight commission sales, going from door to door and office to office. I wasn’t afraid to work, but hard work alone was not enough. I lived from sale to sale, barely making a living. Then, one day, I did something that changed my life.
Learn from the Experts

I went to the top salesman in my company, a man who was selling and earning at least five times as much as I was, and I asked him, in frustration, “What are you doing differently from me?”

He was selling the same product out of the same office at the same price to the same people under the same competitive conditions. Yet he was selling vastly more than me, and in less time as well. Again I asked him, “What are you doing differently from me?”

And he told me. First, he sat down with me and asked how I was selling already; what kind of results I was getting. He listened patiently and then he told me how he did it. He explained the importance of asking questions and understanding the real needs and problems of the prospect before attempting to sell anything. He showed me how to present my product as the best possible choice for a particular customer. He explained the best answers to the most common concerns that prospects ask, and he showed me how to ask for a buying decision.

It turned out that earlier in his career, he had been thoroughly trained at a large company in the process and methodology of professional selling. He had mastered the skills of the basic sales process and then adapted them to his current products. He had discovered that, like riding a bicycle or driving a car, the system of selling, once learned, could be transferred to another product, service, or industry, and it would work just as well.

This principle hit me like a thunderbolt. It changed my life. Just imagine! There were reasons for everything that happened, for success or failure in any area. If there was something I wanted, I just had to find out how other people had achieved it. Within reason, if I just did what they did, I would eventually get the same result.

Here is my first rule: If you do what other successful people do, nothing can stop you from eventually getting the same results they do. And if you don’t do what they do, nothing can help you.

I was on my way! In the years to come, I worked in many different businesses at a variety of jobs. Each time I started in a new field, I immediately buckled down and learned everything I could about the rules of success in that business, then applied what I had learned, adapting it to my current job until I got the same or better results than others had achieved.
The Great Question

As I began moving up, I started asking another question, “Why is it that some people are more successful than others?” Why is it that some people have more money, better jobs, happier families, vibrant health, and exciting lives, and others not? Why do some people drive newer cars, wear nicer clothes, and live in better homes? These people always seem to have money in their pockets and in their bank accounts. They dine in fancy restaurants, take beautiful vacations, and live more enjoyable, satisfying lives. Why was this?

The answer I got back was that these people were somehow luckier than the average, as if they had been born with a special gene or chromosome that others lacked. Even people who have achieved greatly often attribute their success to “luck.”

However, I felt that something was wrong with this explanation. Were people who started off with limited backgrounds and eventually succeeded just lucky? If people worked hard, studied continuously, and pulled themselves up into positions of prominence by their own application and effort, was this a matter of luck?

Did this explanation mean that people who had come from all over the world, arriving with no friends, no language skills, no money, and no opportunities, and who had then become successful, were just lucky? Did this mean that people who started off with nothing, who, over the course of their working lifetimes, became financially independent, self-made millionaires, or even billionaires, were just lucky? This explanation didn’t make sense to me.

The Statistics Don’t Lie

According to the IRS, there are more than five million millionaires in the United States, most of them self-made. There are almost 300 billionaires, most of whom started with little or nothing. More than 100,000 people become millionaires in the United States each year, at a rate of approximately one every five minutes. Are all these people just lucky?
The Breakthrough in Philosophy

In about 350 B.C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle propounded what has come to be recognized as the foundation law of Western philosophy and Western thought. At a time when most people believed in the various gods who lived on Mount Olympus and the causeless, chaotic influences of flowers, rocks, trees, and the elements on human life, Aristotle instead propounded his “Principle of Causality.” He said that we live in an orderly universe, governed by great unchanging laws. He insisted that there is a reason for everything that happens, whether we know the law or principle behind it or not.

Today, we call this the “Law of Cause and Effect.” We accept it as an essential way of interpreting what happens in our world. But in Aristotle’s day, it was a remarkable idea, a breakthrough in thought. It revolutionized the study of philosophy and guided the great thinkers through the centuries right up to the present age. It was commonly believed that all Western thought for 2000 years was merely a footnote to Aristotle.

Simply put, the Law of Cause and Effect says that everything happens for a reason. It says that for every effect in your life there is a cause or a series of causes, whether you know them or agree with them or not. Nothing happens by chance.

This law says that if there is anything you want in life, any effect that you desire, you can probably acquire it. You simply find others who have achieved the same result or effect that you desire. You then discipline yourself to do the same things that they did, over and over, until you eventually get the same results and rewards. It is completely predictable and largely under your control.

What Are the Odds?

In my thirties, I applied for and was accepted into an executive MBA program at a major university. For four years, including evenings and weekends, summers and winters, I invested more than 4,000 hours studying the cause and effect relationships that determined business success or failure. It was during this time that I was first exposed to an arcane subject called probability theory. What I learned in this class profoundly influenced my thinking and answered many of my questions about luck.
Probability theory teaches that there is a likelihood that any particular event will occur. This likelihood or probability can often be calculated with great accuracy, and sometimes not. The entire worldwide insurance industry, involving billions of dollars in premiums and trillions of dollars in coverage, is based on actuarial tables, which are simply applications of probability theory.

In life insurance, actuaries know that there is a likelihood that a certain person of a certain age and medical history will die in a certain time period. But because it is not possible to determine who that person might be, all persons in that class can be insured at a price that makes it possible to provide death benefits to the few people who actually die during the life of the policy. This is called pooled risk.

The Law of Probabilities

The Law of Probabilities is the critical factor in explaining luck. This law says that for every event, there is a probability of that event occurring under certain circumstances.

Where the level of probability can be established with some accuracy, the level of predictability can be dramatically increased. For example, if you flip a coin, it will come down heads 50 percent of the time and tails 50 percent of the time. The probability of a head or a tail is 50 percent, no matter how many times you flip the coin. You may flip the same coin five thousand times, and on every flip of the coin, the probabilities remain 50 percent. You can, therefore, predict the outcomes over time with complete accuracy.

You Can Improve Your Likelihood of Success

Become Brilliant on the Basics

If you want to achieve success in any field, and you have clear, written plans that you follow and work on each day, you are much more likely to attain it. If you then study thoroughly and apply yourself to developing the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in your field, you will increase your probabilities of success. If you associate with the right people, manage yourself and your time extremely well, move quickly when
opportunity presents itself, persevere in the face of obstacles, you will get the breaks.

Willingness to take intelligent risks in the pursuit of your clearly defined, intensely desired goals, puts you on the side of the angels. You will increase all the possible probabilities in your favor. You will achieve the same level of success in one or two years that other people may not achieve in 10 or 20 years of less focused, less directed behavior. You will create your own future. And it's not a matter of luck!

Look for Every Opportunity to Reduce Uncertainty

In physics, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle had a profound influence on science and eventually earned him a Nobel prize. This principle states that, even though it is scientifically possible to determine exactly how a class of particles will behave in general, it is not possible to predict exactly which of those particles will behave that way specifically. As a result, there always exists a degree of uncertainty in physics, no matter how sound the general theory.

In human terms, it is possible to predict that about 5 percent of Americans will achieve a net worth of $1 million or more in the course of their working lifetimes. But it is not possible to determine in advance exactly which ones it will be. We can only be sure about the degree of probability.

In terms of health, happiness, and longevity, a certain percentage of people are going to lead wonderful lives, raise happy, healthy children, make a real contribution to their work and their communities, and live to be 80 or 90 years old. We just don’t know for sure exactly who they will be.

Here is the key to creating your own future: Whatever you want, do everything possible to increase the probabilities of your achieving it. Even one small factor can spell the difference between success and failure.

Your primary goal should be to increase the likelihood that you will be one of those remarkable people who achieves greatly and makes a real difference with his or her life. And this is very much in your own hands.

To realize your full potential, free yourself as much as possible from randomness and uncertainty. Organize your life in such a way that the probabilities of achieving your goals are extremely high. Learn the cause and effect relationships between what you want and how to get it.
Take complete control over every part of your life and create your own future. You must leave nothing to chance.

**Chance versus Luck**

When people achieve great success faster than others, they are immediately accused of having good luck. When people make a mess of their lives, largely due to their own shortcomings, they dismiss it as bad luck. A leading politician said recently, “All of life is like a casino. Some have succeeded greatly at the gaming tables of life, others not. Those who have been successful should be forced to share their winnings with those who have not done as well.”

One of the reasons for this confusion about the reasons for success and failure is that most people don’t understand the difference between chance and luck. Chance refers to *gambling*, to casinos, to blackjack, poker, slot machines, and horse racing. In games of chance, the outcome is almost completely out of your control. You have little or no influence over the result. Your level of risk in gambling is so high that your chances of winning over the long term are almost zero.

Luck, however, is something completely different from chance. What we call luck is really the Law of Probabilities in action. Whenever you see a person who has succeeded greatly, you see the result of many events that have happened in the past to achieve a particular outcome in the present moment. The lucky individual has done many things that, in combination, dramatically increased the likelihood that his or her desired goal would be achieved.

If you examine the history of any great success, and review the many actions that preceded it, you will see a definite pattern emerge. You will see that the successful individual did many little things, sometimes for years, which made the final success possible.

**The Basic Success Principle**

Here is a rule: *There is a direct relationship between the number of different things you attempt and your likelihood of eventual success.*

If a new salesperson gets up early each morning, plans his day, works steadily all day long, talks to as many prospects as possible, follows up persistently, and continually works on himself to improve his selling skills by reading, audio learning, and regular attendance at sales
courses and seminars, he is going to be far more successful than another salesperson who fails to do these things. His high earnings will not be a matter of luck but rather of design.

If you get a good education, thoughtfully match your career choice with your natural talents and abilities, and continually work to upgrade your skills and the value of your contribution to your company, your eventual success will not be the result of luck.

**Play the Averages**

An additional luck factor is the Law of Averages, which is an extension of the law of probabilities. This law says that although you cannot predict which one of a series of events will be successful, by the Law of Averages you know that by doing a certain thing a certain number of times, you will achieve your goal.

If you read more books, you are much more likely to read something that can help you in your work or personal life. If you make more sales calls, you will be much more likely to meet the prospect who has an immediate need for what you are selling. If you continually innovate and try new methods to achieve your goals or solve your key problems, you are going to be vastly more successful than someone who plays it safe and tries nothing new or different.

**What Do You Really Want?**

Everyone wants to be happier, healthier, and more prosperous, and get more out of life than they do today. No matter how much you accomplish, you always want more, and this is a good thing. Your desire for continuous self-betterment keeps you growing and developing toward the realization of your full potential.

But today, in a world of almost unlimited opportunities, only a few people, by their own admission, are really living up to what they are truly capable of in their day-to-day lives. Most people have an uneasy feeling that they could be doing far better than they are doing today, if only they knew how.

Success, however you define it, is not an accident. It is not a result of good luck versus bad luck. Even if you have not taken the time to clearly identify the steps you took or failed to take to get you from where you were to where you are today, a definite process has brought
you to where you are at this minute. And the fact is that these actions and behaviors of yours could have brought you to no other place.

You are where you are and what you are because of yourself. Your choices and decisions over the months and years have inevitably determined the condition of your life at this moment. The most wonderful part of this fact is that, at any time, you can start making different choices and decisions for your future. You can start taking different steps, and as a result, you will inevitably arrive at a different place from where you are today.

The Luck Factors

The Law of Probabilities is what enables you to create your own future with a high level of accuracy and predictability. You need only learn and practice the specific behaviors that increase your likelihood of success, however you define it, and you can take complete control of your destiny. You can achieve anything you really want in life.

These various actions, behaviors, and strategies, all of which increase your probabilities of greater success, are what I call luck factors. Over the years, in studying thousands of successful people, I have identified dozens of these factors. Any one of them, if you are not yet using it, can change your life, and sometimes it can do it overnight.

As the result of using the luck factors in your life, success becomes predictable. You will dramatically increase the amount of what others call luck in your life, if you continually do the things that other lucky people do.

Starting from Nothing

A seminar participant of mine named Ivan Strigorsky, a Russian immigrant, told me his story not long ago. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, his dream was to come to the United States. After several years of trying and failing, over and over, he finally got a visa and a plane ticket. He arrived in New York with everything he owned in a cardboard box tied up with string. He could not speak a word of English.

He found his way to the neighborhood in New York called “Little Russia,” where a large number of Russian immigrants lived. In his first year in the United States, the only job he could get was delivering
pizza out of a Russian pizza place to other Russians within the radius of a few blocks.

But Ivan had one tremendous advantage that many other people lack. He was absolutely convinced that America was a land of opportunity and that he was completely responsible for taking advantage of those opportunities. No one would do it for him. He had to make his own luck.

He also knew that the key to success in the United States was the ability to speak English fluently. To master this new language, he began listening to my audio programs on success and achievement, on sales and personal management. He listened to those of other success authors and narrators, as well. He read our books and articles on personal and business effectiveness. He learned English and learned basic success principles at the same time. All these ideas were new to him and he absorbed them like a sponge. He had never heard them growing up in the Soviet Union.

At the end of his first year in the United States, his English was good enough for him to get a job in sales with a printing company. At the end of his second year, he was doing so well selling printing services for others that he decided to start his own company as a printing broker. In his third year, he sold $2 million worth of printing services and made more than $400,000 in personal income. And his success had nothing whatever to do with luck.

You Make Your Own Luck

There are millions of men and women in the United States who have come from difficult backgrounds, with every conceivable type of handicap and liability, but who have gone on to build wonderful lives for themselves. Often, people around them ascribe their good fortunes to luck. But if you talk to these people and you trace their stories from where they began to where they are now, you will find that luck had little to do with their success. And, it has little to do with yours.

The Law of Cause and Effect cuts in both directions. It also says that if there is an effect in your life, such as lack of money, overweight, problems in your relationships, an unsatisfying job or career, or any other difficulty, you can trace that effect back to the things that you did to cause it, and by removing the causes, you can begin to remove the effects, sometimes immediately.
Practice the Proven Principles of Success

In its simplest terms, successful, happy, healthy, prosperous people are those who have discovered the principles that govern our lives and have designed their lives so that they live in harmony with those principles. As a result, they experience far more joy and satisfaction in life. They accomplish far more in a few years than the average person does in a lifetime.

You’ve heard it said, in Poker, “The winners laugh and tell jokes while the losers say, ‘shut up and deal!’ ” In the world around you, the winners are busy and actively working toward achieving their goals while average people are putting in as little work and contribution as they can and hoping for a lucky break. Winners always ascribe their success to hard work and application. Mediocre people always ascribe their failures to bad luck.

Actions Have Consequences

Another version of the Law of Cause and Effect is the Law of Action and Reaction. First propounded and explained by Sir Isaac Newton, this law states that, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Put another way, actions have consequences.

This is important. At the beginning of any project, you can decide on your action. You can control what you do. But once you have launched a particular action, the consequences are often out of your hands. Once you have done or said a particular thing, the consequences take on a power and a force of their own. This is why successful people are more thoughtful about the potential consequences of what they say and do than the average person. Unsuccessful people, on the other hand, tend to be thoughtless, even careless, about their statements or behaviors, and what might happen as a result of them.

The key to enjoying more of what people call luck is for you to engage in more of the actions that are more likely to bring about the consequences that you desire. At the same time, you must consciously decide to avoid those actions that will not bring about the consequences you desire or, even worse, will bring about consequences that you don’t want.
If you are in sales, the daily actions of prospecting, presenting, following up, and working continuously to cultivate leads and referrals will ultimately bring about the consequences of sales success, higher income, personal pride, and greater satisfaction from your career. The more of these actions you engage in, the more pleasurable consequences you will enjoy. Your success will be largely under your control. It will not be a matter of luck at all.

If you are in management, the daily actions of careful planning, organizing your work before you begin, selecting the right people for the job, delegating properly, supervising intelligently, and vigorously executing your required tasks will bring about success in your work. It will have nothing to do with luck.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

Another version of the Law of Cause and Effect comes from the Old Testament: the Law of Sowing and Reaping. This law says, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap.” This law says that whatever you put in, you get out. It also says that whatever you are reaping today is a result of what you have sown in the past. Your life today, in every respect, is the result of your past decisions and behaviors.

The Laws of Cause and Effect, Action and Reaction, Sowing and Reaping, are timeless truths, universal principles that have existed since the beginning of history. They are often referred to as the iron laws of human destiny. All lasting success, happiness, and high achievement comes from organizing your life in harmony with these timeless principles. When you do, you will achieve satisfaction and enjoyment at levels seldom experienced by the average person. You will take complete charge of creating your own future. And of course, people will start to refer to you as lucky.

ACTION EXERCISES

What You Can Do Now

1. Develop your own personal definition of happiness. What sort of activities or conditions do you enjoy more than anything else?

2. Go to one of the top people in your field and ask that person for advice that will help you to be more successful.
3. Identify the *luckiest* events that have happened in your life and then trace back the various actions you took that contributed to them.

4. Determine the cause and effect relationships between something you want and the best way of getting it. What are they?

5. Take one specific action immediately that can increase the likelihood that you will achieve one of your goals. Do it now!