

News

The Year of The Sheep

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In the Chinese calendar, 2015 is called the year of the sheep. Do keep this in mind when you read the rest of this article that attempts to show you how to be luckier in the New Year.

There is an interesting anecdote about Napoleon Bonaparte. During a meeting, his subordinates informed Napoleon of a new general who was turning out to be extremely capable. The new man's bravery, skill, determination and organizational capabilities were outlined for him in great detail. Napoleon waved his hand impatiently. 'That's all very well,' said Napoleon. 'But tell me... is he lucky?'

Napoleon's question may sound rather strange in our times, but he saw luck as a personal trait rather than an extraneous factor. A lucky person would succeed, even under adverse conditions. On the other hand, a capable and qualified general could prove to be disastrous on the battlefield if he wasn't inherently lucky.

Down the ages, humans have tried everything possible to improve their luck. Romans sacrificed animals before battles; Hindus used numerology, astrology and gems to improve their equation with the gods; parts of Africa used magic, witch doctors and spells to drive away bad luck; Europe used exorcisms, papal blessings and good luck charms; much of the world still resorts to prayer and rituals. The list is endless.

And that's precisely the problem. Luck is associated with a variety of incomprehensible objects, superstitions and rituals, but is rarely analyzed rationally. This gives good luck a bad rap. Thus, the world usually looks down on people who rely on luck.

But we do need to find ways to examine luck rationally if we are to be luckier in 2015, right? We all know that it's possible to train oneself to be a good communicator, to be more organized, sociable or efficient. Many traits and personal attributes that may not be part of our nature can be developed through nurture. Can luck be similarly developed? Can one train oneself to be lucky? It is my belief that one can.

The Roman philosopher Seneca had observed, 'Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.' In effect, if we can find ways to increase the number of opportunities that come our way; recognize these opportunities better; and respond more effectively to such opportunities, we could indeed increase our "luck quotient".

So let me tell you about one of the key factors that can help make you luckier in 2015. It is called 'networking'.

'Luck hates loneliness. It's almost impossible to be lucky alone,' says Philippe Gabilliet, Associate Professor in Psychology at ESCP Europe. For you to appreciate this point better, let me tell you the story of Sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar.

Ravi Shankar was a music director with All India Radio (or AIR) from 1949 to 1956. V. K. Narayana Menon, Director—AIR New Delhi, introduced him to the internationally renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

Menuhin invited Ravi Shankar to perform in America. As a result of his subsequent American tours, the sitar maestro became friends with Richard Bock, founder of World Pacific Records.

Ravi Shankar executed several recordings at Bock's studio. The American rock band 'The Byrds' also used to record at the same studio. They ended up hearing the sounds of the sitar and this led them to incorporate some of Shankar's music into their tracks.

The new sounds in The Byrds' music tracks came to the attention of George Harrison of the Beatles while he was attending a party at the house of socialite Zsa Zsa Gabor. He soon visited India for six weeks to study the sitar under Ravi Shankar in Kashmir.

The Beatles went on to use the sitar in the track 'Norwegian Wood' thus creating a 'raga rock' trend in the west. His association with The Beatles made Pandit Ravi Shankar the most famous Indian musician on the planet and in 1967 he performed at Woodstock before thousands of frenzied fans.

Ever heard about the chaos theory? More particularly, the butterfly effect? The name of the effect, coined by Edward Lorenz, is derived from the theoretical example of a hurricane's formation being determined by whether or not a distant butterfly had flapped its wings several weeks earlier! It is a perfect illustration of the extremely interconnected world that we live in. Six degrees of separation is much truer than we care to imagine.

Writer Max Gunther sums it up beautifully. 'The bigger your web of friendly contacts, the better the odds in your favour. You cannot know what thunderbolt of good fortune is being prepared for you now by some distant engine of fate. You cannot know what complex interconnection of human relationships will guide the thunderbolt in your direction. But you can know, with certainty, that the probability of your getting hit is directly proportional to the number of people who know your name.'

I started this article by telling you that 2015 is called the year of the sheep. You will notice that sheep always flock together. Staying together keeps them safe and warm. Sheep seem to have understood the fact that luck hates loneliness.

So here's wishing you better networking and bloody good luck in 2015!

Ashwin Sanghi is a New York Times bestselling author. Till date he has written five books: The Rozabal Line, Chanakya's Chant, The Krishna Key, Private India and 13 Steps to Bloody Good Luck.