

A Legacy of Good Fortune

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The saying “success begets success” implies that family, environment, and social connections can play a role in transferring success from one person to another. However, people who have achieved extraordinary wealth and fame often credit at least part of their success to luck, happenstance, serendipity, or a greater power that is operating through them.

It is their recognition that an education, a stable upbringing, financial support, mentorship, talent, hard work, and persistence may certainly increase the likelihood of success, but that these factors do not make success inevitable.

A meteoric rise seems to involve a mysterious X-factor, a “je ne sais quoi”, or lightening in a bottle that even the people that it happens to cannot fully explain or comprehend. Media icon Oprah Winfrey has said that “nothing but the hand of God has made...[my success] possible for me”¹. Mega-entrepreneur and investor Mark Cuban admits that “life is half random...[and that] being a billionaire requires a lot of luck, a lot of great timing”². Operating under a lucky star, e-commerce titan Jeff Bezos gives credit to “planetary-alignment”³ for his monumental success.

Good fortune also has unique legacy transfer implications.

The next generation

The children of an extraordinarily successful parent are said to have won the parental lottery. This luck is an impactful singular event. If it is managed well, a sizeable family fortune can provide several successive generations with the experience of exclusive lifestyle privileges. However, this luck is very different from the success energy that played a part in creating the wealth in the first place.

The originator

The wealth and fame of a success originator is the result of an ongoing external validation at a massive scale of what that person’s purpose is. In this context, Oprah Winfrey’s purpose is to be a messenger of hope, acceptance, and positive personal transformation. Mark Cuban’s purpose is to bring and enable entrepreneurial innovation to the realms of technology, sports, and entertainment. Jeff Bezos’ purpose is to be a business system disrupter who makes the acquisition of products more accessible.

While success originators may bequeath sizeable wealth to their descendants, the ability to make such extraordinary bequests was usually not their goal. Rather, the focus of originators tends to be on the impact that they are making in their industry and in the world. Their legacy vision includes but is much greater than family. They usually want to convey their good fortune at a broader level too. This is the reason why philanthropy and giving back often resonates so strongly with originators. “A first-generation fortune is the most likely to be given away, but once a fortune is inherited it’s less likely that a very high percentage will go back to society”⁴, computer technology magnate Bill Gates has said.

The 5 questions

How you perceive your good fortune will affect the decisions that you make about how to share it as part of your legacy. The 5 questions for you to contemplate are:

1. Did a lucky set of circumstances (e.g. an event, timing, a conversation, an opportunity, etc.) contribute to your success?
2. Assuming that such good fortune favoured you in support of your greater purpose, what is that purpose?
3. What benefits of your good fortune do you want others to enjoy and why?
4. What responsibilities (e.g. assistance, protection, time, guidance, influence, etc.) do you feel that you have as a result of your good fortune?
5. How do the benefits and responsibilities of your good fortune affect your expectations of your beneficiaries?

Worldwide wisdom

For centuries, wealthy individuals around the world who want to be astute benefactors of good fortune have grappled with such issues. These ponderings have resulted in various cultural proverbs and sayings about the conveyance of good fortune. Here are some that may inspire you in your decision-making:

“If you always give, you will always have” – Chinese

“What you give, you get ten times over” – West African

“A good name is a rich inheritance” – German

“Unto whom much is given, much is required” – American

“Unexpected good fortune gets more appreciation” – Sicilian

“No matter how tall your grandfather was, you have to do your own growing” – Irish

“Parents can give their children everything except good luck” – Yiddish

“Don’t travel under another’s lucky star” – Swahili

***The views in this document are those of the author.**



About the author:

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¹ “The Oprah Winfrey Show Finale” published on May 25, 2011 on Oprah.com

² “Billionaire Mark Cuban shares ‘the meaning of life’ in 4 words” by Ali Montag for CNBC Make It, May 23, 2018.

³ “Inside the Mind of Jeff Bezos” by Alan Deutschman for Fast Company, August 1, 2004.

⁴ BBC World News interview of Bill Gates that aired on May 18, 2011.

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