

## Is It Better to Be Diligent or Lucky?

### Description

Have you ever thanked your lucky stars after a particularly good performance? After advancing in a big audition? After an extra bag of Cheetos magically drops down in the vending machine?

Certainly, luck and chance do play a small role in success and failure (and it's certainly [better to fancy yourself a lucky person than unlucky person](#)), but attributing too much of your success to luck can cause problems.

How so?

### Locus of control

I had a client who emailed me after advancing to the finals of a big audition. He was a little freaked out, convinced that he gotten lucky, didn't deserve to make it that far, and was going to get creamed in the next round.

Have you ever achieved something that went above and beyond what you've ever done in the past? That you didn't know if you were capable of or not?

In situations like this, it can be easy to chalk up your achievements to luck, and convince yourself that you don't really deserve the results you've gotten. As in, perhaps the panel made a mistake. Or other people must have really played poorly. That somehow it was all a fluke.

Psychologists call that an external locus of control – where you attribute success (or failure) to things that are outside of your control.

The alternative is to attribute success and failure to things that you *do* control. In other words, how hard you work. How effectively and thoroughly you prepare for performances. Whether you develop not only technical skills and musicianship, but the mental skills which enable you to actually play up to your abilities when the moment of truth arrives. That because of your efforts, you really do deserve the results you've obtained.

This is called an *internal* locus of control.

The danger lies in our tendency to flip flop between an internal and external locus of control in such a way that it holds us back from growth or greater confidence in our abilities. For instance, if you credit your successes to luck (*I have no idea how I got into the finals; must have been some crazy fluke*), but failures to your own ineptitude (*I failed to advance again; I must really suck*), you continue to undermine

confidence in your own abilities.

If you dismiss failures as bad luck (*That audition wasn't really representative of how good I really am; if it wasn't for that cold warmup room it would have been way better*), you protect your ego, but fail to grow and learn from the inevitable bumps in the road.

So a rule of thumb: This is not like a t-shirt sale at Old Navy. You can't just mix and match as you please. Giving luck all the credit for your successes undermines your growth and development as much as making excuses for all your failures.

One clarification: A reader made the very good point that it's possible to play a superb audition, and still not get the job (i.e. "fail") because the committee was looking for something else. That's absolutely true, and unfortunately happens all the time. But from a sport psych perspective, that wouldn't be considered a failure because you played great, did everything you could, and therefore had a successful audition. Do that often enough, and eventually you'll find a panel and orchestra that represents a good fit for your style of playing. The most important measure of success is really the degree to which you played up to your abilities, not whether you got the most votes or not.

### **Mindset #1: Luck**

- a) When you play well or succeed, it's because you got lucky and really don't deserve the result you got.
- b) When you play poorly or fail, it's because you were unlucky and really should have gotten a better result.

### **Mindset #2: Diligence**

- a) When you play well or succeed, it's because you worked hard, smart, effectively, and played well enough to deserve the results you got.
- b) When you play poorly or fail, it's because you didn't work hard, smart, effectively enough, and didn't really deserve to get a better result.

## **Take action**

Pay attention to what you say to yourself when you play well or accomplish something positive. Are you giving yourself credit when credit is due? Or are you passing off the credit to luck or other external factors and totally neglecting all the hard work, energy, and effort you put into your work?

And when things don't go as planned, are you making excuses and neglecting to use the setback to identify potential areas of growth?

## The one-sentence summary

“Diligence is the mother of good luck.” ~Benjamin Franklin

### **Date Created**

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