**How to Hack the ‘Cultural Mindset’ and Get Lucky Like Forrest Gump**

Forrest Gump: the 1995 comedy/drama strikes a chord in our hearts.

Despite his mental handicap, Forrest Gump seemed to have the entire world in his favor. He became a star running back, war hero, ping-pong world champion, successful entrepreneur, and running icon. He was just in the right place at the right time, or so they say. He is the world’s luckiest man! Although the film was obviously fiction, are there lessons that can be learned by Gump’s character and actions?

**Luck in Action**

Throughout the film, we notice that Gump does things a bit differently from others. He walks funny, he talks funny, he gets made fun of by all the bullies at school. But he doesn’t pay much attention to all of them, mostThose situations you and I find awkward, he gets himself in these s because he doesn’t have the emotional intelligence to notice he’s doing anything strange or extreme. He unknowingly make a difference to push along the boundaries of what’s socially acceptable and each time it works in his favor. For instance, he gains his position as a running back by running through the football field in the middle of a big game. In Vietnam, he saves almost everyone in his platoon while on a relentless search for his friend Bubba. When he returns from Vietnam, he starts a Shrimp business and works beyond the comfort level of a normal person to grow a huge, world-renown success.

Gump acts beyond the average person’s ‘cultural mindset’, or unspoken cultural norms and rules, that govern most individuals, and pulls out ahead almost every time. He takes the risks most people are too uncomfortable to take.

**Deconstructing Culture and the Cultural Mindset**

Although most of us don’t possess Gump’s ignorance of social norms, we can all learn how to take more risks in our lives to get lucky like he did in the movie. This involves deconstructing the dynamic behind culture and cultural norms, and learning how to ‘game the cultural system’ to come out ahead.

Gaming the cultural system is about learning those things that are technically acceptable within the laws of our culture, but are deemed social strange or ‘too extreme’ by most people (not like cheating or scamming others out of their money!). Think running across the United States until TV cameras begin following you. It’s legal, but are you willing to do it tomorrow?

First, let’s examine culture. Culture is a dynamic set of beliefs, laws, and customs that govern a given civilization. The cultural dynamic decides what is acceptable to do and what isn’t. It shapes your actions, words, and thoughts. It’s the very mold through which your perspective of reality is shaped. Most of all, it governs a civilizations base-comfort-threshold for what risks are acceptable to take.

The cultural mindset is how we will – for the purpose of this article – group cultural norms, which are unspoken rules for what is acceptable and what isn’t, and the threshold that governs society. Cultural norms are those expectations and standards that are reinforced by parents, teachers, and friends. Norms can be beneficial, like not burping at the dinner table or farting in public – these things are gross and rightly unacceptable, or restrictive, like not trying too hard at school to ‘fit in’ with your peers, or not starting your own business because you don’t have an MBA. These are arbitrary limitations and restrictions that limit your potential. Imagine if Steve Jobs adhered to the latter belief, he didn’t even have a college degree!

**Crossing the Cultural Threshold to Get Lucky Like Forrest Gump**

In the early 20th century, it was thought that doing hill workouts as a runner would cause heart complications, including heart failure and heart attacks. It was also thought that the first man to break four minutes for the mile would be a dead man. Fortunately, Roger Bannister lived to celebrate his feat, and many ambitious runners, ignoring conventional wisdom, worked out on the hills and lived to achieve much more success than their more sensitive competitors. This threshold that governs a group or society can be thought of as the line-in-the-sand that people ‘probably shouldn’t cross’. These are a sum-total of restrictive norms that aren’t illegal, but are looked down upon by society because there is a perceived harm involved in crossing the boundary. These restrictive norms are often superstitions that can’t be verified or proved wrong until someone crosses the line.

When you step outside of the cultural mindset and do those things that most people find uncomfortable doing, you begin to ‘get lucky’ and achieve more success. More than anything else, you discover that most people’s superstitions are delusions, and that there’s a whole new world “behind the curtains” so to say. This is what gaming the cultural system is.

**Gaming the Cultural System**

In a video game, there is simply winning a game for completion and there’s learning the ins and outs of a video game until you reach a mastery level that most people don’t achieve. People that achieve mastery are those who are the best at thinking ‘outside the box’ and devising tricks and shortcuts to win levels and gain points. They’re also willing to work harder than anyone else. Most people wouldn’t think to devise these tricks and shortcuts themselves because to do so, they’d need to go beyond what the video game asks of them. They’d need to think and act in a radically different way.

This is how the most successful people you know act. They act radically. They don’t adhere to restrictive cultural norms and push the boundaries of what is thought to be impossible. These people live on the edge of human potential and push the cultural threshold. To become someone like this, you must be willing to run hill workouts or run across the USA if that’s what success calls for you.

**You Make Your Own Luck**

If you pay attention to Forrest Gump, it isn’t that the universe bestowed success upon him randomly throughout his life, he was just the master of exploiting opportunities and latent talents. When he found himself in the right place, he always made sure it was the right time by working hard and taking action. When one of the soldiers handed him a ping-pong paddle, he practiced until became a master. You, being a unique individual, similarly possess some latent talents and likely have tons of unknown opportunities at your disposal. When examining these opportunities and talents, and finding out how to exploit them, you simple must think outside of the cultural mindset.

For example, if you are, like me, halfway decent at writing, your run across the USA may involve copying your favorite novel, word for word, until you have mastered the authors writing style (it sucks but it’s totally worth it), and crossing the cultural threshold would be simply starting a website or blog, or sending messages to the editors of well-known magazines without any experience or an English degree. If you run, it’s training relentlessly for that race you’ve always wanted to complete. And if you’re a bodybuilder, it’s maybe going against the grain and doing drop sets every week CJ Fletcher style.

From my own reading and analysis of the most successful entrepreneurs, elite athletes, and authors, luck comes after crossing arbitrary boundaries, exploiting hidden talents, hard work, and seizing every opportunity that comes your way. If you’re not willing to do all of this, you could always hope to win the lottery, and even then, you’ve still gotta buy the tickets.