

Talent, luck, or a little of each?

Which would you rather have—talent or luck? A 2018 paper titled “Talent Versus Luck: The Role of Randomness in Success and Failure,” in *Advances in Complex Systems* discusses these attributes in light of the Western paradigm that success comes from an individual’s personal qualities and hard work, and luck plays a very small role. After analyzing population distributions of various factors, the authors conclude that luck plays a bigger role than most people think. But are there ways you can increase your chances of being lucky?



opportunities that you don’t hear about until it is too late. Maybe an article in a newsletter prompts you to reach out to a former coworker at just the right time, or an invitation to speak at a conference comes at a time that doesn’t work for you. While you can’t possibly know about every opportunity, there are things you can do to stay open to what’s happening in your field. Keep your network up to date, and make sure to send other people information that will be valuable to them and make sure they know what is valuable to you.

Reading newsletters and trade magazines on a regular basis will also help you stay informed on changes in your field.

Talent. Everyone is good at some things, and no one is good at everything. Sometimes, you don’t recognize your own talents—perhaps a particular task comes easily to you, so you think it must be easy for everyone. However, identifying your skills and talents can help you promote them to others and also help you identify roles you may be interested in applying to. What types of tasks do others ask for your help with? Is your reputation that of the gal who can always fix the analytical instruments or the guy who quickly identifies the best way to present data in a graphical format?

Work. While innate talent is necessary, it alone is not sufficient for success. Applying your existing skills to a new type of problem, expanding your skill set to include adjacent talents, and learning about new developments or theories in your chosen field can all help you develop your talents and increase your professional options. No matter how good you are at something or how long you have been doing it, continued practice will help you improve. Alternatively, it could show that you are bored with the activity and need to learn something new.

Luck. There will always be some things you can’t control or beneficial

Environment. Opportunities provided by your environment (such as education, income level, country, and social context) do increase the probability of success. While you can’t change where you were born, you can make sure you regularly interact with fellow professionals—maybe by volunteering with a professional society, taking a class, or attending seminars and talking to other attendees. You may be surprised at what you will learn in casual conversations with professional colleagues.

The authors conclude that while some skill is required, the most successful people are often not the most talented. Talent and effort are not enough; you also need to be lucky. However, being aware of this, finding places where you will hear about opportunities, and being prepared to take advantage of opportunities when they arise can actually increase your odds of being lucky and achieving your professional goals.

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