

A SKILL CALLED LUCK

HOW TO BRING MORE AND BETTER
OPPORTUNITIES INTO YOUR LIFE.

Jakob Greenfeld

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Imagine two equally talented 21 year-olds, John and Sam, who have decided to become writers. Both of their parents work blue collar jobs and neither of them has any connections in the publishing industry.

Their situation and goals are exactly the same. But their strategies couldn't be any more different.

John decides to focus on reading as many books as possible about the craft of writing. At the same time, he wants to avoid any other kind of books or articles as much as possible. This will make sure he doesn't just copy other people's stuff but will actually come up with truly original thoughts. In fact, he already started writing his first book and esti-

mates that he'll finish it in around two years. Since he can read and write anywhere, it makes sense for him to keep living at parents house. Once his book is perfect, he'll start sending it to book publishers. Surely one of them will recognize his genius.

Sam's plan on the hand, is to start a newsletter and to become active on Twitter. He commits to publishing two newsletter issues every week and two tweets every day no matter how bad they might be in the beginning. To make sure he never runs out of ideas, he dedicates one hour every day to reading and notetaking. There's no strict curriculum. He will read and write down whatever sparks his interest. He plans to attract readers by republishing his newsletter issues in as many places as possible. He also wants to focus on building connections with fellow writers and people he admires. So he commits to sending at least one cold email and replying to one newsletter he's subscribed to every day. For the same reason, he decides to move to Austin. He heard on some podcast that this is the place to be in right now.

Now who would you say has better chances of becoming a successful writer?

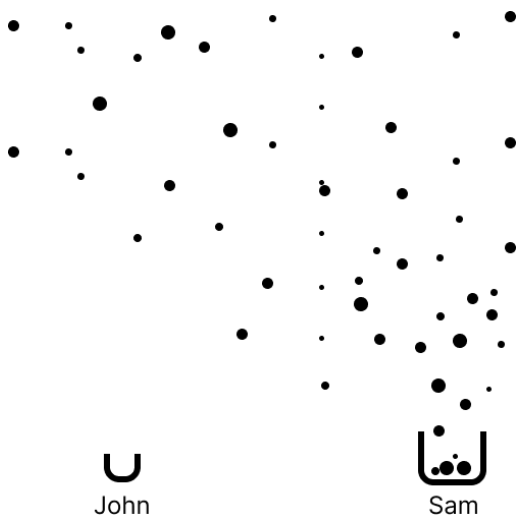
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I'd definitely bet on Sam.

The chances that luck finds John are basically zero until he starts sending out his manuscript. And even then, they remain slim as publishers get thousands of manuscripts sent their way every year and John's book will most likely be pretty boring.

In contrast, Sam does a lot to actively increase his luck surface area. He puts himself out there from day one, works hard to drive eyeballs to his words, and builds relationships. Once he built a solid email list and his name starts to spread, publishers will most likely start reaching out to him.

And by moving to Austin, he dramatically increases the odds for chance encounters with guys like David Perrell or Tim Ferriss who potentially could help his career tremendously. He also dramatically increases his odds of having good ideas through his daily, curiosity-driven reading and notetaking session.



Now you're most likely not 21 and don't aspire to become a writer. But you always have a choice to act more like John or more like Sam, no matter your age and goals.

You can wait passively and hope that the world will eventually recognize your genius. Or you can develop and execute a plan to actively increase your luck surface.

To be clear, luck is still randomly occurring. John might observe something in the local supermarket that leads to a Eureka moment that leads to a fan-

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tastic book that will get picked up by a publisher and become a bestseller. And Sam might not find any success with his newsletter and networking efforts.

There are always things outside of your control and no guarantees.

But it's always possible to stack the odds in your favor. You can actively create optimal conditions for lucky things to happen to you. And in the following chapters, I'm going to show you how.

But first, let me emphasize that this is not just about newsletter or building some kind of online presence.

For example, let's say you've decided to get into shape and do more sports. What are your options?

You could for example, start going to the gym or build a home gym.

While other factors definitely also play a role, it's important to realize that these options have very different serendipity potential.

- The odds of having a chance encounter with an interesting stranger who might end up helping your career at your home gym is zero.
- At a proper gym the odds are definitely better and you can increase them further by joining the most expensive gym in town and leaving your headphones at home. For example, Sahil Bloom ran into Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, at the local gym. They were both working out at 5am when the gym was mostly empty and started talking. Sahil followed up via email and Tim Cook became his mentor.

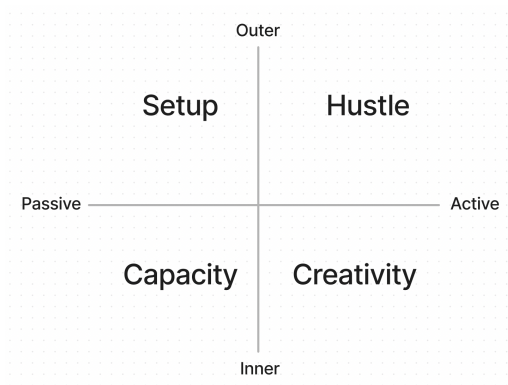
In a similar way you can assess different alternatives like joining group fitness classes, start running alone, and joining a sports club (where the choice of sports plays a major role for its serendipity potential).

Okay so now let's get a bit more systematic. What are the exact levers you can pull to increase your luck surface area?

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Bird's Eye Overview

There are four areas you can focus on, if you want to bring more luck into your life that can be divided along two axis:



The most obvious thing you can do is hustle. The more you put out there, the more emails you send, the more events you attend, the luckier you'll get.

But you can also improve your setup by, for example, moving to a location with better odds of meeting people that can help you achieve your goals, dressing well, not wearing headphones thorough

the day, having a great personal website , and picking the right kind of third place to hang out at.

Hustle means that you go out there and hunt for opportunities, while your setup influences how many opportunities find you. That's the distinction between active and passive in the diagram above.

There are really just two core insights when it comes to hustle and your setup.

The first one is this: people direct opportunities towards 1.) people they like and 2.) whoever is top of mind right now. Once you've internalized this, coming up with strategies to increase your luck surface area is straightforward. You just have to become more visible and more likeable. That's really it. We'll talk concrete strategies in a moment.

The second core insight is that quantity is king when it comes to luck. The more you do, the luckier you get. Everything you do (and actually put out there) increases your odds of winning big. Just think about it: who's more likely to win the lottery? The guy with just one ticket or the guy with 10,000 tickets?

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A second distinction in the diagram above is between what happens in the world out there and what's going on in your mind.

You need great ideas to level up in any area of your life and having them requires luck. But you can dramatically increase the number of Eureka moments you have using proactive strategies like a healthy information diet, a notetaking system that facilitates serendipity, and training your idea muscle.

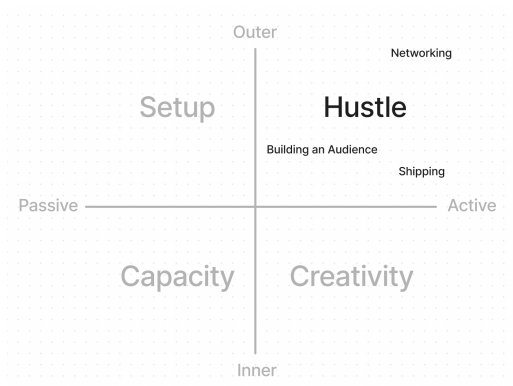
And this leaves us with the final and most important quadrant in the diagram: Capacity.

Capacity is your ability to seize opportunities that present themselves to you. It includes factors like your skills, mindset, money in the bank, and how much freedom you have over your time and choices.

Let's talk about these four pillars your luck surface area consists of one by one.

Chapter 2

HUSTLE



“I have never heard of anyone stumbling on something sitting down.” - Charles Kettering

Hustle is about proactively bringing more luck into your life. And the most important thing to keep in mind is that no matter what your goals

are, it's always about people. Doing a ton of work without ever telling anyone about it won't open any new doors for you.

Shipping

To get lucky, you have to take a ton of swings.

Real-life games have far too many degrees of freedom to allow for high-accuracy predictions. In other words, no one knows for sure what's going to work. Even huge companies like Google who have access to almost unlimited funds and talent, launched far more failures than successes.

But the good news is that unlike in sports, real-life games like business have an extremely long-tailed distribution of returns. In baseball, no matter how well you connect with the ball, the most runs you can get is four. In real-life, however, every once in a while, you can score 1,000 runs. Winners can pay for a large number of experiments.

So to get lucky, you have to keep swinging and trust the process.

But here's something most people overlook.

You have to carry full swings, not stop half-way through. Otherwise, you'll never get lucky and hit a homerun.

Most people lose their momentum near the end of the swing. It's when the resistance sets in.

"What will people say about this thing I created?"

"It's just not good enough. But surely my next try will be!"

Rinse and repeat ad infinitum. And so they never actually ship that project, never publish that essay.

The chances that the software you coded will become the next unicorn is zero as long as it only lives on your harddrive. An unpublished novel can never become a bestseller.

Every unfinished draft and project is a lottery ticket you put into the bin before ever checking the numbers on it.

Another overlooked feature of real-life games is that you have a lot of control over the number of lottery tickets you have in your pocket. It's not as

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if everyone gets handed a fixed number tickets per year. Instead, you can create them out of thin air.

So how can you increase the number of lottery tickets in your pocket?

One strategy that makes a lot of sense is to ship many small projects instead of a huge one. This allows you to take ten or even hundred swings in the same time you'd otherwise take just one. Your one big bet might have somewhat better success chances than each individual small bet, but all small bets taken together are far more likely to be successful.

It's why the idea of building minimum-viable products has become so popular in startup circles. But you can do the same no matter what area you're operating in.

For example, instead of writing a book you can write an essay. The odds that your book will become a bestseller are slim. It's one huge bet and if it fails, you're pretty much screwed.

You can also put the same time and energy into writing a series of essays that you put out there of-

ten and early. For each of them, there is a chance that it will resonate with people. If this happens, you can double down and produce more work along similar lines. This way each subsequent bet will have better and better odds.

You could go even further and write tweets instead of essays which might be the purest form to test if individual ideas resonate with people.

These are the main ingredients when it comes to getting lucky through hustle: take a ton of swings, keep swinging, do full swings instead of half swings.

Now that we've established the importance of deliverable (aka shipping stuff), let's talk about a specific kind of deliverable: content.

Building an Audience

What's awesome about content is that anyone can create it quite easily nowadays. There are tons of great tools and guides, not matter which medium you choose.

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Tweets, YouTube videos, blog posts, Instagram posts are all incredibly cheap lottery tickets. But at the same time, they can lead to spectacular returns.

Entire careers have been built on a few pieces of content that went viral.

Most people think it's cringy to start a personal blog, newsletter, podcast, or having an active Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram account.

But what these people don't realize is that putting yourself out there online is not about becoming the next Logan Paul. Instead, it's about engineering serendipity.

Each piece of content you publish is a bat signal.

Once you stop hiding and put your brain out into the world, amazing things start to happen. All of the sudden, the right kind of people and opportunities magically start appearing at your doorstep.

When you have an engaged audience, the odds of each bet you put out there significantly improve since the chances that the right kind of people take note of what you created will be a lot higher.

If you have an audience, you can often manifest opportunities simply by making your wishes known. Every time I write about the problems I'm struggling with in my personal newsletter, my inbox fills with amazing people offering help and advice.

You'll also get feedback a lot faster and strangers will start trusting you more quickly.

After all, a better term for audience building would be "earning trust at scale."

And you definitely don't need to do crazy stunts, post cringeworthy content or turn your personal brand into a full-time job to see these kinds of effects.

The specifics of how to build an audience effectively is a topic that requires at least another book in itself.

But simply publishing *something* on a regular basis will already put you far ahead. Even if your post doesn't go viral, it helps to keep your name top of mind. This is important since people usu-

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ally send opportunities to whoever is top of mind right now.

Also always keep in mind that you don't need millions of followers to reap the rewards anyways.

Here's a useful thought experiment.

Let's say you have 2000 followers that you got by posting feel-good platitudes, whereas I only have two followers called Elon Musk and Paul Graham. Would you swap accounts?

So think about what kind of people and opportunities you'd like to have in your life. Then put yourself out there in ways that attracts them (or at least doesn't repel them).

Putting things out there is by far the most effective networking strategy.

If you do interesting things and share them publicly, you'll become a magnet. Like-minded people will come to you.

But it definitely also pays off to be proactive about reaching out to people yourself. So let's talk about this next.

Networking

For most people, their personal network is the main source of luck in their life.

So expanding your network by reaching out to strangers and nurturing your network by staying in touch with people are one of those asymmetric habits that require little effort, time and resources but have unlimited upside. They are the easiest and most effective ways to make your life more serendipitous.

Unfortunately, for most people (me included) this isn't something that happens naturally.

So unless you have a solid system, chances are high that you won't reach out to people regularly and miss out on a ton of fun and opportunities.

I'm currently using a daily reminder to reach out to at least one stranger every day. I simply write a

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short comment to their newsletter or send a DM on Twitter. Often I just say thanks for something they created. Sometimes I don't get a reply and other times an interesting conversation emerges. If this happens, I invite them to grab a virtual cup of coffee.

There's no agenda. Just a natural curiosity to meet people doing interesting things.

Now meeting new people like this is a great starting point. But as everyone knows, all the magic is in the follow up.

Derek Sivers has a cool system for staying in touch with people. He divides all people he wants to stay in touch with into four categories: A, B, C, D:

- people on the A list are contacted every three weeks,
- people on the B list every two months,
- people on the C list every six,
- and people on the D list once a year.

Here's what I do.

I typically spend a few minutes researching what they've been up to recently.

I check their social profiles, personal websites, and read or watch any content they published that I missed.

Then I share a few thoughts or questions.

Most importantly, I always send the kind of messages I'd like to receive. They're short, genuine, and (ideally) helpful. I never try to sell anything and there's no agenda other than to keep in touch.

Sometimes I just share a related article or book I think they might find interesting and sometimes I offer specific help or advice with a problem they're facing right now.

Of course, not everyone publishes content or updates regularly. In that case, I usually just ask what they've been up to lately.

You'd be surprised how many people are really happy to get these kinds of messages and they often spark all kinds of deeper conversations.

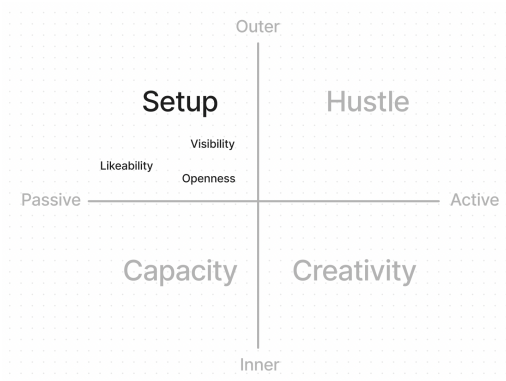
I wrote about how I implemented Derek Siever's system in Airtable a while ago in case you want to check it out.

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(As an aside: The post went viral and Derek, one of my heroes, actually reached out to me and we started chatting about our different approaches. So this is a cool example of how publishing content can bring more luck into your life.)

Chapter 3

SETUP



“The setup is strategy, the act of stacking the odds in your favor. Life is a game. Like any game, you must have a good strategy to win. The implementation of that strategy is called the setup, and it paves the road to success.” - Dan Bilzerian

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You have to let the universe (okay really just other people) know that you're receptive for opportunities and the kind of person that deserves to receive them.

Most people aren't receptive. Their email addresses are hard to find, their direct message inboxes closed, they hide their work, and never talk about their problems, their dreams and what they're looking for publicly.

Hence even the tiniest of bat signals you put up will make a huge difference and you'll be surprised how many opportunities suddenly find their way to you in the most unexpected ways.

Your **setup** is simply the sum of all bat signals you put out there.

The three key factors when it comes to your setup are **visibility**, **openness**, and **likeability** and you can work on all three of them in the offline and online world.

Here's how.

Visibility

If you're working from home, the odds of interesting chance encounters is zero, whereas in a coworking space or local cafe they're definitely higher than that.

And you can increase the odds even further by choosing a great spot to work in public in. Local libraries are usually great for focused work sessions but don't encourage interactions between people. Coworking spaces and cafes are usually better but there are often huge differences between different places. So it makes sense to create a list of all local places that cater to laptop workers and then test them for a day or two until you find one with the right kind of people and interactions.

Now I'm definitely not saying you should spend all your time in a noisy cafe or coworking space. Deep work is important and I spent a lot of time working at home or at the public library.

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But when it comes to types of work that require a lower level of concentration like writing emails, I like to do them in a local cafe or rooftop bar.

An hour here or there will definitely increase your luck surface area.

And it's not just where you work but also, for example, you work out. The serendipity potential in your home gym is zero, in a regular gym it's a bit higher, and in a high-priced gym it's a lot higher.

Or here's another example. The odds of a serendipitous encounter are zero if you're reading at home but non-zero if you read a physical book in a public spot like the local library or cafe.

Many factors will influence decisions like your choice of a coworking space, gym, or reading spot, but at the very least make their serendipity potential one of them.

Even more important than your choice of coworking space is the city you live in. If you're in Miami, San Francisco, New York, or Austin, the chances that you randomly meet interesting entrepreneurs are 10x higher than elsewhere. If you're really seri-

ous about increasing your luck surface area, this is arguably the most powerful lever to pull.

To summarize, it's important not just to be visible but be visible in the right places.

And exactly the same is true when it comes to the online world.

Here's an example of how a proper online setup can bring opportunities into your life.

Danny Postma is very visible online and shares the ups- and downs of his entrepreneurial journey on Twitter daily.

So when the OpenAI team recently launched their newest API DALL•E they reached out to him and gave him access.

It's not hard to understand why. There are thousands of people on their list they know nothing about, and then there are people like Danny who work in public. The OpenAI team knows exactly what they stand for and know that giving them access will lead to more exposure for the project.

And yes, getting access early is a huge advantage.

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For example, when then OpenAI team launched GPT-3, people who first got access were able to build huge businesses like Copy.ai. All they did was create a user-friendly wrapper around GPT-3 and simply being the first was enough to build a business that generates millions in revenue.

So chances are high that something similar will happen with DALL•E and guys like Danny who thanks to their setup got a headstart clearly have a huge advantage.

So the idea is exactly the same as in the offline world. You will dramatically increase your visibility by working in public. There are in fact virtual coworking spaces.

Focusmate is cool. I also like the Ultraworking Work Gym and the WIP.chat.

But there are also far more effective things you can do that than using one of these skeuomorphic solutions.

One option is to livestream your work on a platform like Twitch or YouTube. But admittedly

that's very stressful as you always have to make sure you're not sharing any secrets publicly.

So a better solution is share curated highlights on Twitter or on your personal site. It's not only much less stressful but also will attract more eyeballs as the signal-to-noise ratio is much higher.

There's really no reason to overthink it. Remember we're not hustling here.

Just share a little snapshot of what you worked on each day. It could be a screenshot, a diagram, a random observation, a problem you encountered.

It doesn't matter if anyone cares or how much likes you get. The simple act of building in public will make people aware of your existence and keep your name top of mind. And this will lead to interesting chance encounters and prompt people to send opportunities your way.

Working with the garage door up and learning in public are super cheap options to maximise your surface area for serendipity to strike.

And of course if you want to put the dial on the visibility knob to 12, you can get serious about build-

ing an audience. But this requires significant effort which is why I talked about it in the context of hustling.

Openness

Openness is all about communicating as clearly as possible that the bat signals you put up there is an invitation.

Even in the best gym or coworking space you will have zero interesting chance encounters unless you start signaling that you're open to having conversations.

Or rather, the most important thing is to avoid signaling the opposite. Unfortunately, this is what almost everyone does nowadays by wearing headphones.

Headphones are a universal signal: don't talk to me. This is of course great if you want to work uninterrupted but you should be aware that it shrinks your luck surface area a lot.

The same is true online if you hide your email address and close your direct message inboxes.

To increase your luck surface area, make it as easy as possible for people to reach you. Your email address should be displayed prominently on your website and your DMs should be open for messages from strangers. If you're afraid of spammers, write your email address like this: YourName [at] gmail.com or use an image.

You can go one step further by explicitly encouraging people to reach out to you.

You can do this by putting something like “DMs welcome” in your bio on social platforms like Twitter, and adding a corresponding invitation to your personal website.

I guess you could do something similar offline, for example, by wearing a t-shirt that says something like “Talk to me!”.

I personally encourage people on my site to send me emails. My friend Paul Millerd has a page with his Calendly link where he invites strangers to no-agenda Zoom calls. And Nick Gray actually posts

his mobile number and invites people to just call him.

There are different levels and you'll have to experiment to find out what works for you.

Likeability

If you see someone on the side of the road holding their thumb out, trying to get a ride because their car broke down, you're not likely to stop. But if you see someone on the side of the road pushing their car, you will get out and help push.

People like people who do stuff. The more you do, the more people will be rooting for you, and the more great opportunities will come your way.

This is why working in public is so powerful, especially online, where you can effortlessly share real glimpses behind the scenes. People will start reaching out to you with advice and suggestions. This will make them feel invested in your success and they will motivate them to help you in all kinds of different ways as well.

Another factor the car story nicely illustrates is that the way you present yourself matters a lot. The odds of getting help will be a lot higher if you're dressed well. And this is true offline just as much as online.

Offline a good rule of thumb is to stick to the "Hotel Bathroom" dress code. Always dress well enough to walk into a bathroom at a hotel you're not staying at and get away with it. This way you'll also always look sharp enough to capitalize on any serendipitous encounter.

Similarly, online professional headshots and a well-designed personal website are great starting points. Another smart thing to invest in is having a compelling origin story readily available. This could be a podcast, video, or blog post that explains your background and why you're doing what you do.

The best origin stories are luck magnets.

Think about it: every superhero comic starts with his or her origin story. Why? Because it establishes a connection between the reader and the protagonist.

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A great origin story is the fastest way to turn a stranger into someone who cares about what you do. And people are far more likely to help people they care about than some random stranger.

Once you've crafted your origin story in whatever format, make sure to link to it prominently on your site and in your social profiles.

A related thing worth thinking about is how you're going to make yourself more easily summarizable. The chances that your name comes up in a conversation is so much higher if you're "the writing guy" like David Perell or "the marketing guy" like Harry Dry or "the guy who founded Nike".

If you're not quite sure what your thing is, you can come up with a narrative aircover. This can be any kind of project, website, initiative that makes it easy to explain what you do (while you figure out what you do).

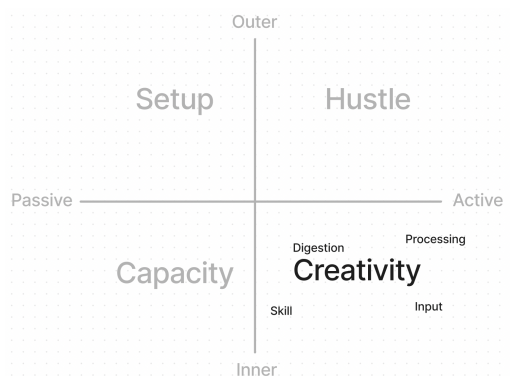
I did this with my Bootstrap MBA experiment. It was a catchy name for a personal learning experiment I came up with and my plan was simply to learn everything I could about bootstrap entrepreneurship.

But it was a perfect narrative aircover. It gave me an excuse to reach out to people and to this day people refer to me as the “Bootstrap MBA guy”.

In general thinking about how to become the kind of person people want to invite to cool stuff is a very useful exercise.

Chapter 4

CREATIVITY



Every great idea you have is a serendipitous event. But unlike everything else we just talked about, this kind of luck manifests purely in your mind.

And the good news is that there's a lot you can do to increase your inner luck surface area. And yes,

“increasing your inner luck surface area” is just a complicated way of saying “becoming more creative”

When it comes to creativity, there are three key factors: Input, digestion, processing, and skill.

Input, skill and processing require active doing. Digestion requires active non-doing.

So let’s talk about how you can use your influence over each of these factors to increase the number and quality of ideas you have.

Input

Living in a completely white room without any form of external stimulation definitely wouldn’t be healthy. We need external inputs to stay creative and productive.

However, not all external inputs are equally valuable. The quality of your thoughts largely depends on what you choose to focus on.

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Intellectual junk food like most TikTok videos, Tweets, or YouTube videos has a similarly devastating effect as regular junk food.

So small actions like regularly “marie kondoing” (aka asking: “does it spark joy?”) your inputs go a long way in improving the quality of your thoughts and ideas.

Another powerful question is “Does the person I want to be consume this kind of content?”.

I do a monthly audit where I go through the list of people I follow on Twitter, the newsletters I subscribe to, the shows and movies I watch on TV and Netflix, the apps I fire up automatically, the websites I routinely visit.

Unfortunately, it’s never been harder to keep your mind tidy and beautiful. We’re constantly bombarded with junk from all sides and it’s more important than ever to be ruthless in defending your attention.

Think of your mind as a garden. Every piece of content you consume is a seed you plant. Just in

a real garden, focus on planting beautiful flowers and crops by consuming high quality content.

The best ideas and insights, however, usually emerge in the most unexpected way. It's an idea or observation from a completely unrelated field or a combination of seemingly unrelated ideas that leads to a breakthrough.

To stick to our gardening analogy, if you want to see flowers grow that no one else has seen growing before, you have to be willing to stir things up a bit and allow for some randomness.

So it definitely can make a lot of sense to leverage tools like Twitter or TikTok that have serendipity built in as a feature to some extent. Done right (by curating the people you follow carefully), social media can actually be a very cheap option for increasing serendipitous opportunities.

Now the most obvious problem with intellectual junk food is, well, that it's junk. But there's another reason why it's problematic. Just like regular junk food, it leads to overeating. And nothing affects your ability to come up with great ideas like intellectual overeating.

So let's talk about this next.

Digestion

Like everyone else nowadays I used to immediately put on my headphones when I left the house and started listening to some podcast or audiobook. I used the 30 seconds I was waiting for the elevator to check my emails. And of course, I always browsed Twitter or Reddit when I went to the toilet.

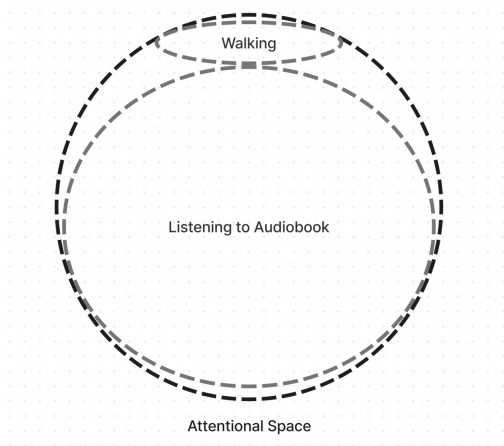
My mind craves distractions and I used to give it what it wants.

Only recently I realized just how harmful these seemingly innocent habits are.

Slowly but steadily my thoughts became muddier. I started experiencing brain fog. For the first time in my life I wasn't sure what to do next.

And all of these symptoms went away once I started taking better care of my attentional space.

Attentional space is a term used to describe the scratch pad in our brain that we use to temporarily store information as it's being processed.



If you give in to your impulses, you will constantly fill your attentional space to the brim.

The garden metaphor once again comes in handy. Just imagine what happens when you throw thousands of seeds at every square meter every single day. Nothing could ever grow.

The same is true for your mind. You need to give it space and time to digest all the inputs. Otherwise,

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none of your seeds will ever turn into a beautiful flower.

Back in the days computers came with a software called Disk Defragmenter. It was recommended that you run the program regularly to make sure the computer doesn't become too slow.

What the software did behind the scenes is dutifully rearrange the discontinuous blocks of files so they would be physically closer on the drive. This made the computer faster since when the files are properly organised on the drive, it takes less time to open them.

Something similar happens when you leave enough room in your attentional space. After some boot-up time, you mind will start dutifully rearranging the discontinuous blocks it has stored. In other words, we defragment our thoughts when we carve out space between tasks.

A lot of it happens beyond the surface but you can glimpses of what's going on by noting how seemingly random thoughts start popping into and out of your awareness.

If you leave enough room in your attentional space so that this process runs regularly, your thinking will improve significantly.

And as if this wasn't already cool enough, there's lots of other good stuff going on.

A byproduct of the defragmentation process is that your mind tries all kinds of combinations how different thoughts fit together. If there's enough room left in our attentional space, we naturally begin to connect the scattered dots we've collected.

This is where novel insights and ideas come from.

There's a reason why Bed, Bath, and Bus are called the Three B's of Creativity. These used to be the only places where people's attentional space remained empty enough. (Nowadays, waterproof smartphones that we keep using while we lay in bed kind of ruined these places.)

Processing

“Your mind is for having ideas, not holding them.”

– David Allen

There’s an incredibly powerful way to how actively support your minds defragmentation process: notetaking.

It allows you to get ideas and thoughts out of your system to make room for new ones. The more stuff we get out of our heads, the more clearly we think.

Lots of ideas are hiding in the shadows and only come to light once your fingers hit the keyboard. And once you’re able to see them in bright daylight, your relationship to them changes instantaneously once.

For many people notetaking has turned into some kind of religion. But honestly, I don’t think details matter much here. Simply by taking notes, you get 90% of the benefits. And only if you want

to squeeze out the remaining 10% you should start looking into more complex systems.

I personally like to use Roam as its bi-directional linking features facilitate serendipitous rediscoveries of old notes.

Another method to actively defragment your mind is, you probably guessed it, meditation.

Meditation is simply the process of actively leaving as much room as possible in your attentional space. Then you observe your thoughts pop into and out of your mind like an indifferent third-person observer.

As with notetaking, the details don't matter much. The most important factor is that you do it and do it regularly.

Skill

Ideation isn't something you can learn by reading about it. It's a skill that you learn by doing. You have to practice to become better.

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I really like the analogy of “training your idea muscle”. You can do this by, for example, writing down 10 ideas every day. This could be any kind of ideas.

Ideas for books, movies, parties, recipes, experiments, businesses, whatever.

While writing down 10 ideas may sound simple, I personally always found it extremely hard and was never able to do it consistently.

The mistake I made was that I tried to come up with ideas while staring at a blank piece of paper, waiting for inspiration to strike.

It’s far more effective to have at least some input.

This is why I started collecting useful prompts. These prompts not only make it so much easier to come up with ideas, but also help to direct brainstorming sessions in productive directions.

Here’s are some of my favorite prompts.

- What inefficiencies can be solved by borrowing new technology and applying it to an older space?

- What is something where you find yourself repeatedly saying “I should not have to do x”?
- What is something that everyone does that you think is crazy?
- What is something that most people do not see as being valuable? What is the potential for it to be valuable?
- What is something every household needs but doesn’t have?
- What is something that is underrated and undervalued?
- What is something that’s not broken but could be improved?
- What is something everyone knows exists but few people actually do?
- What would be a movie plot that immediately would make you want to watch it?
- What kind of social event would you love to attend? What would make it so fun?
- What is something that makes you smile? Why?
- What is an idea you have that, if made real, would change the world?

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- What would be an amazing new product?
- What is something that you want to learn more about?
- What is something that you dislike? How could it be improved?
- What is something that is impossible? What would be a way to make it possible?
- What is something that you wish everyone had?
- What is something that you wish everyone knew?
- What is something that everyone should do?
- What is something that everyone should stop doing?
- What could be the next big thing for your industry?
- What is one thing that would make you smile every day?
- What do you believe in so strongly that you would fight for it?
- What is one important thing you want to make sure happens before you die?

Now just to be clear, even with the best prompts most of your ideas will be bad.

That's simply how it works.

Before you can hope to find any high-quality ideas, you have to come up with tons of crappy ones. You need to get them out of your system.

It's useful to visualize your creativity as a backed-up pipe of water. The first mile of piping is packed with wastewater. This wastewater must be emptied before the clear water arrives.

There's no shortcut other than first emptying the wastewater.

And since our brains are hardwired for narrative, here's a story that illustrates the same idea nicely:

"A ceramics teacher announced on opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. All those on the left side of the studio, he said, would be graded solely on the quantity of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its quality. His procedure was simple: on the final day of class he would bring in his bathroom scales and weigh the work of the "quantity" group: fifty pound of pots rated

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an “A”, forty pounds a “B”, and so on. Those being graded on “quality”, however, needed to produce only one pot — albeit a perfect one — to get an “A”. Well, came grading time and a curious fact emerged: the works of highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the “quantity” group was busily churning out piles of work – and learning from their mistakes — the “quality” group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay.”

So if you want to improve your ability to come up with great ideas, you should take the daily brainstorming exercise seriously.

Write down at least 10 ideas every day.

The quality of the ideas doesn’t matter. What matters is that you actually write these ideas down somewhere and do it daily.

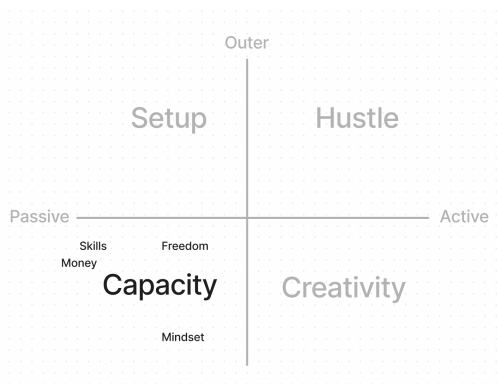
I personally use Notion to collect my ideas but any notetaking tool or an old-school notebook will do.

Trust the process. Once the bad ideas are out of your system, stronger and stronger ideas will begin to arrive.

Now it's time to talk about the fourth and final part of the luck equation.

Chapter 5

CAPACITY



“Serendipity is not a chance event alone. It is a process in which a chance event is seized upon by a creative person who chooses to pay attention to the event, unravel its mystery and find a proper application for it.” - Morton A. Meyers

It's not enough to have amazing opportunities coming your way. You also have to seize them.

While hustle, creativity, and your setup all influence the number of opportunities that come your way, your capacity determines the number and quality of opportunities you're able to take advantage of.

For example, imagine that someone invites you to join his extremely promising startup as a cofounder. But most startups don't generate enough profit to pay for their founders' living expenses for quite a while. So unless you have some savings, you won't be able to say yes no matter how great the opportunity might be. And of course, the situation is even worse if you have to, for example, a mortgage to pay off.

There are four core factors that determine the number of opportunities you're able to seize: your mindset, skills, and freedom.

Out of these, I'd rank mindset as the number most important factor.

Mindset

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right.” - Henry Ford

With a poor self-image, you will most likely sabotage yourself. When someone presents you with an amazing offer, you’ll say no since you feel like you don’t deserve it. When a great opportunity presents itself to you, you will either ignore it or wait too long since you feel like you’re not ready yet.

There is an extremely interesting interplay between your self-image and your setup.

It’s much harder to seize great opportunities if you’re wearing cheap clothes and work in your parents’ basement. The way you dress, treat yourself, and your environment has a direct effect on your self-image

And if your self-image is that you’re just a random dude sitting in his parents’ basement, you will most likely sabotage yourself.

But when the same thing happens while you're looking sharp and sitting in a nice office, it just seems completely normal that good things happen. So you say yes more often and pursue better opportunities.

Your mindset also has an influence on the number of opportunities that come your way.

Abundance

Most people feel very *quid pro quo* about things. They expect to get back right away, and will often remind whoever they did a favor for that they did a favor. And they will definitely never do anything for others unless it's obvious how they're benefiting from it.

There's no worse mindset if you want to bring more luck into your life.

It's a much smarter to simply do nice things for others without expecting anything in return. People with the a large luck surface area freely spread the good around since they know it'll catch up with them sooner or later.

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Of course, most people forget about it when you do nice things and are ungrateful. But like almost anything in life, this is a numbers game.

Even if only 1 out of 100 people changes your life in an amazing way as a result of you paying it forward, it's totally worth it.

But the crux is that you never know in advance who this person will be. Moreover, a quid pro quo mindset will turn off the most successful and interesting people.

So if you care about serendipity, it really pays off to have an abundance mindset.

Be friendly, giving, and helpful and don't expect anything in return. You're not looking to get paid back when you do something nice for someone. Rather it's like, do a lot of nice things, and good karma will catch up with you sooner or later.

Here's a useful mantra I keep at the top of my daily todo list: *"I'm doing it because it brings into existence the kind of world I want to live in."*

Positivity, energy, and a bias for action

No one likes being around negative people.

So being a positive, energetic person goes a long way if you want to increase your odds of being invited to cool events and being introduced to interesting people.

And yes, this is a choice. With a bit of training you can direct your emotions in healthy directions rather than being directed by them.

Before you enter a room or store, you can make a conscious decision to have a good time, to have this experience in its fullest, even if it's something mundane like getting your driver's licence renewed.

You can always force the good time out of the average.

And there are also far too many people that talk about doing stuff but never follow through. Most are, rightfully, hesitant to help these kinds of people. Hence developing a bias for action and being a high agency person are key traits if you want to bring more luck into your life.

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And you can develop these traits simply by choosing to do so. Never leave the scene of a decision without taking some action. Instead of just creating a long list of contacts, send the first email right away. Don't waste time to create fancy business plan. Set up a simple landing page and start talking to potential customers. The more you do this, the easier it gets and the more opportunities will find their way to you.

Always remember: People like people who do stuff. The more you do, the more people will be rooting for you, and the more great opportunities will come your way.

Skills and Money

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." - Seneca

Your skills directly determine the number of opportunities you're able to take advantage of.

For example, if you're able to code, design, and launch micro projects in a single weekend, you'll

be able to capitalize on all kinds of short-term trends.

Here's one of my favorite examples.

In September 2020 Apple announced that it's now possible for users to customise their home screens with custom app icons.

Traf, a designer with strong tech skills who had started to build a personal brand, noticed that many people were sharing screenshots of their customised screens on Twitter. He already had experience designing iOS icons, so he decided to put together a pack for himself. Traf posted his screenshot on Twitter and his tweet went viral.

People wanted to know where they could get Traf's icon pack. So he decided to capitalize on the opportunity by selling a pack of 60 icons and made \$100,000 in just 6 days.

Lots of people noticed this opportunity after Apple announced the changes but only Traf was able to take full advantage of it thanks to his design skills and his ability to set up a sales page in just a few hours.

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The lesson to take away here is that it makes sense to invest in learning skills that open new doors. As Traf's example illustrates being able to quickly launch and get attention for projects entirely on your own is an extremely high leverage skill since it allows you to move much faster than anyone else.

As Naval Ravikant put it succinctly: *"Learn to sell, learn to build, if you can do both, you will be unstoppable."*

And you definitely don't have to become an expert programmer to 10x the number of opportunities you're able to pounce on. Basic skills are enough to validate most project ideas and there are now also amazing no-code tools like Bubble you can use.

Writing (that is copywriting, not the stuff you learn in universities) is another extremely valuable skill to learn. Being able to craft great cold emails or write blog posts that go viral is a superpower and will bring tons of luck into your life.

Another interesting factor besides your skills is money. Money definitely also allows you to take advantage of bigger and better opportunities. If

you're lacking the necessary skills or time, you can simply hire someone.

So having more money definitely also increases your luck surface area even though you probably didn't need yet another reasons to care about it.

Freedom

"The secret to doing good research is always to be a little underemployed. You waste years by not being able to waste hours." - Amos Tversky

If you're calendar is always fully booked and you're working a job that requires 100% of your time and energy, you won't be able to explore and seize any new opportunities. Most likely, you simply won't recognize opportunities no matter how opportunities since you're so busy.

So if you want to bring more luck into your life, it's key to allow for some slack.

One of my favorite metaphors is that creative, ambitious people should work like lions not like cows.

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Lions will sit and they'll wait. They observe the surroundings. They wait until they see their prey appear. And they won't just run around the aimlessly, you know, fake hunting. They wait until there's actually prey. Then they sprint and they sprint until they catch their prey and they hunt it down. Then they eat and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Afterward they go back to resting and waiting again.

But it's not what most people do. What they do instead is working like a cow. They just stand out there in the field with their neck down and they graze on grass all day, eight hours a day, just slowly chomping up the grass and they don't really make much progress.

Now in an ideal world, you'd be able to explore whatever sparks your interest and go immediately all-in when you spot a high-value opportunity. This in turn, would increase your luck surface area even further, since people will happily tell about further opportunities since you're the kind of guy who's actually able to do something with it.

For most people this is of course not a realistic option and the main reason why is money.

Money equals freedom, at least to some extent. If you have savings you can afford, for example, to take off a year to explore new opportunities or to take a risky bet like joining your friend's startup.

But there are really two factors at play here: how much money you have saved and how much you spend. If you live frugally, even moderate savings can go a long way.

Regardless how much money you currently have in your account, it's worth thinking about how to bring a bit more slack into your life and. Already an hour here and there with zero plans and obligations is a great starting point.

Chapter 6

THE NEXT STEP: WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

If you enjoyed this guide, then you'll probably love my weekly newsletter. It's totally free and I share proven frameworks and strategies for living a better life.

You can sign up here:

<https://jakobgreenfeld.com/newsletter>

I don't have it all figured out, but I'm doing my best to walk the slow march toward greatness with you.

Jakob Greenfeld

