



If you're hitting the race track, take a cue from these winners – on and off the field (clockwise from left) Nicky and Paris Hilton; Kate Waterhouse; Prince Frederik and Princess Mary; Liz Hurley and Arun Nayar.

# Good luck club

Are you one of the lucky ones? Or does nothing ever seem to go right? Beverly Hadgraft discovers there's a reason why some people seem to bathe in the glow of good fortune, while disaster follows others at every turn

**B**ill Morgan was lucky to be alive. Having survived a near-fatal heart attack, he decided to buy himself a Scratchie. To his delight, he won a new car. "That's a good story," a journalist said, and the next day Bill re-enacted his scratching prowess for the cameras at the same newsagency in Cranbourne, Victoria. He almost had another heart attack when he realised he'd won a further \$250,000.

Everyone loves a good-luck story, and no wonder. A stroke of fortune can mean the difference between despair and happiness, ruin and reward, loneliness and love. Luck has the power to change your life in seconds, at any time and without any warning.

Take media personality Belinda Green, for instance. If the girl from Sydney's western suburbs hadn't agreed to help out the organisers of Miss Australian Beach Girl and represent Tasmania, she'd never have ended up Miss World.

Or Mel Gibson. If the actor hadn't been beaten up by drunks the night before his audition for *Mad Max*, he'd never have looked battle-scarred enough for director George Miller to give him the part.

And lucky Dale Joseph from Lancefield, Victoria. If he hadn't made a last-minute decision to drink at a cheaper bar, he'd have been in the Sari nightclub at the time of the Bali bombings.

American studies have shown that around 72 per cent of people carry around some kind of lucky charm, and we'll go to the ends of the earth, or into the middle of a busy road at least, to avoid walking under a ladder. But is there really such a thing as luck? Or is it simply an illusion?

With a background as a magician, UK academic Professor Richard Wiseman has long been interested in the power of illusion. He began to ponder the issue of luck and why some people were always at the right place at the right time while others consistently experienced ill fortune.

In an effort to discover if they were blessed or cursed in some way, Wiseman advertised for study subjects who felt unusually lucky or unlucky. He selected 400 people and, after 10 years of experiments and interviews, concluded that lucky souls were indeed markedly different. But it's nothing as rare as psychic ability or the ownership of a particularly effective talisman. Wiseman discovered lucky people gain their good fortune through four basic principles.

"They're skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, they listen to their intuition, they have positive expectations and they adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good," he explains.

So what about Bill, 44, and his lucky Scratchies? Pure chance, says Wiseman. He's conducted experiments with lucky and unlucky people predicting lottery numbers, and bought hundreds of lottery tickets from newsagents reputed to be lucky. Apart from the fact that lucky people expect to win, there's no difference in who actually does. Has Bill continued buying Scratchies since his win? "Yes," he says. And has he won again? "No."

This may seem disappointing, but it's actually fantastic, because it means all of us can put Wiseman's theories on luck into practice and increase or change our own fortune.

Here's a rather neat example of someone who incorporated all four of Wiseman's principles to create her own successful business. Four years ago Ally Schultz, 38, was retrenched from her job as a project manager. "Don't worry about it," a colleague said. "You're going to do something for yourself and be the master of your own destiny."

Ally was pregnant at the time and, soon after, had a middle-of-the-night creative brainwave for a fur rug/play mat to protect her baby against the cold Melbourne winter. She had one made and, after that, whenever she took young Emery out to her local shopping centre at Chadstone, people would stop her and ask where she'd bought it.

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The interest was such that Ally decided to go commercial. She was lucky she had a friend with contacts in China who found her an agent, and had soon ordered her first container of Miniminks. She's never looked back. "I never do business plans," she says. "Opportunities just come." And so they have. Someone in Switzerland, the UK, the US, Japan or Canada will see a Minimink, check out Ally's details on the label and give her a ring asking to be her agent. Minimink now sells all over the world, and Ally has gone on to extend her range to include hats, boots, mittens and scarves.

Ally saw her opportunities and grabbed them. She was resilient and optimistic.

Unlucky people, says Wiseman, are so tense and anxious about life that they'd never do that, as he proved with one experiment in which he asked unlucky and lucky people to count the number of photographs in a newspaper. A few pages in, he placed an ad telling people how many photographs there were.

The unlucky ones didn't spot it.

Wiseman placed another ad

halfway through the newspaper which read, "Tell the experimenter you have seen this and win \$250." Once again, the unlucky people didn't spot it. They were too focused on looking for something else.

"They're the people who go to parties intent on finding a perfect partner and so miss opportunities to make good friends; or look through newspapers determined to find one type of job advertisement and miss other types of jobs," says Wiseman, who recommends meditation, relaxation and simple affirmations to improve a negative life perspective.

If you're beginning to wonder if you're bait for bad luck, consider this scenario: you're in a bank and a robber walks in and shoots you in the arm.

If you thought, "Oh, that's just my luck to be in a bank queue when there's a hold-up," you should definitely sign up for Wiseman's Luck School.

If you thought, "Wow! How brilliant! He didn't get me in the head! Now I can sell my story to a magazine and star in my own telemovie," you're the lucky type who turns bad fortune into good and is into maximising an opportunity.

Out of the four good luck principles, maximising opportunities is the easiest to take advantage of. Wiseman says his lucky subjects constantly took new routes to work, visited new supermarkets and went to supreme efforts to meet new people.

"Sociologists say that each of us is on first-name terms with 300 people," he says. "When we meet someone and start chatting to them, we're only one handshake away from the people they know. So you could go to a party and start chatting to a woman named Sue about how you're thinking of changing jobs. Sue might not be in a position to hire you, but she might know someone who is. By chatting to Sue, you're only a handshake away from the 300 people she knows and two handshakes away from the 300 people they each know - that's 90,000 possibilities for a chance opportunity, just by saying hello."

Wiseman cites the story of American jeweller Barnett Helzberg who was looking to sell his chain of stores and retire, when he was walking past the New York Plaza Hotel and heard a woman call out, "Mr Buffett!" Helzberg wondered if it could be

Warren Buffett, one of America's most successful investors, so decided to introduce himself. It was, and a year later, Buffett bought Helzberg's stores.

Even an apparently doomed life can be turned around by a chance meeting and a bit of hard work (another of Wiseman's maxims - lucky people are reluctant to give up). Sentenced to a total of 17 years in prison, Doug Robinson, 59, had practically resigned himself to a life behind bars when someone happened to ask what a "warm-hearted, intelligent bloke" like him was doing in a place like Barwon Prison in Victoria.

The comment made Robinson reassess his view of himself and he started to write while away evenings in his cell by writing about his life. Not long before his release, he was incarcerated next to Matthew Wales, the "society murderer" who killed his own mother and stepfather. "Will you write my story?" Wales asked. The subsequent book, *Warts and All*, catapulted Robinson into the spotlight on his release. Previously, he'd found it impossible to integrate

into society, but writing opened up a new world.

Today, Robinson is finishing the last four months of his parole in his Melbourne home and is producing books and film scripts, lecturing students on the pitfalls of prison, talking to MPs about the problems of reintegration for ex-prisoners and giving speeches. "I love life," he says. "I look for the doughnut, not the hole."

Luck has finally come his way and, with it, optimism and the expectation that he will receive more. Positive expectations are key to good luck. If you can visualise yourself being lucky before an important meeting or telephone call, there is every

chance you will be. On the flipside, negative expectations will usually result in disaster, and people who perceive themselves to be unlucky often get caught in a downward spiral, as writer and yoga instructor Katie Brown, 36, can attest.

Ten years ago, Brown was a bad-luck charm. It all began when she rang a bell in a Chinese temple that was supposed to bring seven years of good luck. Her camera broke in the middle of the bell-ringing and, a few days later, after a careless accident left her with a broken elbow, she became convinced she was cursed.

Subsequent events confirmed it. She and her husband, Alec, were endlessly sick or injured. They had problems at work. They were robbed. If it was going to rain on somebody's holiday, it would rain on theirs. "Aren't you unlucky!" people kept saying, and the more they said it, the more Brown believed it and the more things kept going wrong. She began to feel bitter and victimised, and considered seeking psychic help to lift the apparent curse.

Finally, she and Alec went to Japan where, in another temple, they rang another good luck bell to try to restore good fortune. Afterwards they felt as if a cloud had lifted. So was it really the bell?

"No," Brown admits, "it was our attitude that changed. I'd become convinced things would always go wrong for us, and so they did. It had

"Oh, that's just my luck to be in a bank queue when there's a hold-up"

"I'd become convinced that things would go wrong for us, and they did"

become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Now, I go with the flow, I have faith life will work out, that maybe things that seem negative are not. If I miss a bus, I don't think, 'I'm so unlucky.' I think, 'I wasn't meant to be on that bus for some reason.'"

In the past four years, through her Yoga Babes business, Brown has become a sought-after speaker on mothering advice and has produced two CDs and a DVD. The draft of her first book was accepted by the first publisher she showed it to. Working from home, with two pre-school children, work seems to fall into her lap. "My life is fantastic," she says. "I perceive myself to be very lucky."

"My research has revealed that the two groups have very different expectations about the future," Wiseman adds. "Unlucky people are certain their future will be bleak and there's nothing they can do about it. Lucky people are the opposite."

This can have serious implications. In regard to health, for instance, Wiseman has shown that unlucky people expect to suffer a range of medical problems but, because they believe they're unlucky, they see little point in taking steps to be healthy.

Interested in this theory, I called a man whom many would regard as one of Australia's unluckiest people. Born on the 13th, Bill Cullen, of Warner's Bay, NSW, has been struck by lightning three times, had walls fall on him, cars run him over and redback spiders bite him. Locals refer to the "Curse of Cullen", and one of his daughters has written the song "Wrong Way Willy" about him.

I didn't get to speak to Cullen. Partly because he's deaf (the result of a work accident), but also because he'd just suffered a fall. His wife, Nan, explained that it was because her 70-year-old spouse was doing building work and had set up a perilous climbing frame with stepladders and chairs. The accident led to the discovery that he'd broken his arm in a

previous fall. Cullen had also added to these injuries by accidentally hitting his arm with a hammer.

Could the Curse of Cullen change after 70 years? Wiseman believes anyone can improve their luck, and, after following some of his tips myself, I agree.

During the past month, I've called people gathering dust in my address book, gone to parties

where I would only talk to people wearing red (to meet people outside my regular crowd) and have approached every project I've attempted with more than my usual optimism. As a result, I've been asked to apply for two jobs I'd never have heard about, been asked to ghost-write an autobiography, discovered a great masseur and been given helpful and profitable advice. My partner has also benefited, as my contacts helped him find a possible sponsor for a project he's organising and a new customer for his business.

I feel unusually hopeful. Trying as many new experiences and meeting as many new people as possible has never held so much potential. Tomorrow, I'll be trying yet another new experience: I'm going to buy a Scratchie. I'm feeling that lucky, I'm quite sure I'll win. ■

*The Luck Factor, by Richard Wiseman, is published by Random House, \$27.95*