

# Make Your Own Luck

I missed the television coverage of the Olympic marathon. I missed most of the Olympic coverage – I was busy running my own marathon: the Acting Career Marathon. Right now I'm in good stride: performing an Off-Broadway play, about to start rehearsals for a Broadway musical. Sweet. Of course, a couple years ago (2010: the Year Employment Forgot) I hit the wall, in marathon parlance. I wasn't running, I was crawling – crawling toward my pension, as I joked.

Running or crawling, I am clear that I have been unbelievably lucky. Yes, I have some skills, but my success also rests upon a number of fortuitous encounters as well as a variety of factors (my size, my coloring) for which I can take little credit. This business is a challenge. Success is so unlikely that I frequently use the metaphor of a lottery (and I sometimes wonder whether the college students investing tens of thousands of dollars in a Theater major might not get a better financial return from lottery tickets.)

The Cynic's Guide to Acting says that the two best paths to success in this business are to have a trust fund or to be the offspring of a very famous actor. If you have foolishly bypassed both these routes, I have further advice. To save yourself from an old man's tendency to repeat himself, simply re-read my columns about running your career as a business ("Earn Your MBA"), how to choose what work or "work" to target ("The Five C's" and "Work, Art and 'Work'"), how to build your future ("Three Requests"), and how to accept your current place in the business and how to acknowledge yourself for the success you already have ("Thank You" and "Mosaic.")

Although I admit that luck plays a large part in our careers, “luck is the residue of design,” as well-known stage manager Branch Rickey said. Musical comedy star Louis Pasteur said “Chance favors the prepared mind.” “Make your own luck” is a catchphrase. Psychologist Richard Wiseman has found that “lucky people generate good fortune via four basic principles. They are skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, make lucky decisions by listening to their intuition, create self-fulfilling prophecies via positive expectations, and adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good.” My columns are my effort to help you to make your own luck by designing a career, designing a life that keeps you connected with Theatre for as long as you desire to be connected.

Now the business tends to erode that desire in many actors to the point where they throw in the towel: “I’m sick of not making money, I’m sick of not getting a chance to practice my craft, I quit.” I just had lunch with a young friend who came to New York with a theater degree wanting nothing more than to do Shakespeare for a living. The business met him with total indifference, and after eight years tending bar rather than tending to the Bard, he has taken a regular 9 to 5 job. Perhaps he will come back to acting; perhaps this will be a hiatus. My wife (who is, as I am the first to tell anyone, the best actor in our family) took a hiatus after her run in Angels in America on Broadway because with three kids, we needed at least one parental presence at home. Now that all three kids are in their 20’s, she is weighing a return. I hope she does come back – if it is what she wants.

We do this business because we love it. It rarely loves us back. Stage managing and acting onstage are but a part of the mosaic of our life or of our livelihood. If this

part of your mosaic has become too frustrating and unrewarding to tolerate, consider letting it go. If you must, pack your suitcases, close the door on the business of show and, with our blessing and understanding, continue your search for fulfillment and remunerative employment elsewhere. Or perhaps pack just an overnight bag and take a hiatus – as song-and-dance man Robert Frost says, “I’d like to get away from Theater awhile/ And then come back to it and begin over.”

As cheerleader-in-chief, I want to encourage you to stay the course. As the NY Lottery says, “Hey, you never know.” And, unlike the Olympics, the medals don’t just go to the top three finishers; in a sense, each of us carries the medal we have already won: our Equity card. Run your career as best you can, and know that your elected leaders and a defined benefit pension will be there to cheer you at the finish.

Your elected leaders are doing their damndest to improve our collective and individual odds. We too are buying our tickets, checking the numbers, scratching off the symbols, hoping for success. Those lottery tickets are part of the mosaic of our lives. Let us design this mosaic with intelligence, optimism, tenacity, fortitude, and a prepared mind. Let us make our own luck. Here’s hoping you create as long and lucky a life in the theatre as I have been blessed to have.