

Tuesday, July 18. 2006

Life At The Margins

The elevator in my office building hasn't been working since last week. I meant to do this yesterday but today I finally called building management to report it. It turned out nobody else had done so. I overheard a lot of people in the halls complaining about it, but none of them actually did anything about it, even if it only required the most innocuous of actions to set a remedy in motion. So eventually, I did something about it. What's the difference between me and everybody else? About $\pm 10\%$ I figure.

That means most of the time I'll go an extra 10% over the crowd, one extra mile out of ten, or maybe my exasperation threshold is 10% lower than everyone else's.

Over a lifetime, this not only adds up, it compounds. The Daily Reckoning crew often point out that "Life is won or lost at the margins". What separates successful people from the mob isn't one or two mind blowing qualities nobody can compete with, like an IQ of 192 or a trust fund the size of a third-world GDP. It's the margins, consistently going just a little bit further, being a little bit more thorough, acting just a little bit sooner, most of the time, over time.

These little differences feedback into each other and as I said, compound. After a few years you notice the person who goes the extra 10% is a little ahead of his peers. He may be self-employed while the others are working up the corporate ladder. She may own her condo outright while the rest are chisling away at 10% down mortgages. At this point it still looks like little things and subtle differences.

Fast forward a decade, or more. The picture changes dramatically and the consistent margin player (not to be confused with the consistently marginal player) seems light-years ahead of the pack. "Why are they so lucky?" People around them wonder. "Goddamn horseshoe shoved up his ass I tell ya. What's on TV? Pass me the cheesies, why is the remote way over there?"

I probably didn't invent this expression, so I apologize to whomever I picked it up from

Overnight Sensations are often 20 years in the making.

What makes it seem "overnight" are those margin plays, compounding for decades, 5% more dilligence here, 10% more elbow grease there, 7% more perserverance over there and a dash of extra tenacity all got together and exploded past critical mass at some point.

And the nice thing about it is anybody can put in an extra 10% anytime, anywhere. Do it all the time and you will come out ahead of the pack.

So the next time you ask you yourself "Why are they so lucky?", the answer is "Because you haven't built up a big balance of 'luck' in your own life".

But you can start now. The sooner you realize that you are the "somebody" in "somebody should...", your luck in life will abound.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 11:42