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Lucky Goals

I once saw a cartoon that depicted a glum-looking football supporter arriving back home after the match, greeting his sympathetic wife with the words, "They won by eight lucky goals!" This amusing illustration of the capacity for self-delusion set me wondering how many times something has to happen before the idea surfaces that there is an identifiable reason for the results in a game of skill. Without a change of attitude, such a delusion can be extended indefinitely, at least until someone else, even a cartoon character, shows up the futility of it.

In a similar vein are the responses of "Well done" to someone who was successful in a particular activity, but "Bad luck" if they were not. The commiserating "Bad luck" phrase slips out without much thought and is offered in the spirit of friendly support, to make the person feel better about the failure. It is really a verbal shortcut for "I am sorry you did not succeed". But if taken literally, this phrase discounts any personal control over the matter and indeed any responsibility, and implies that skill or knowledge did not affect the outcome, and will not do so in the future either. I would be greatly discouraged if I believed that success or failure in my endeavours was entirely beyond my control. I would prefer to find out the reason for the result, so that I can do

something about it. Of course reversing the phrases would be even worse, "Badly done" if someone failed, and "How lucky" if they succeeded. Friendships might be a bit strained with those versions! My favourite replacement wording is, "Let's consider that a practice run."

Here are a few positive and constructive "luck" quotations that put this questionable commodity into a more practical perspective:

"Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect." Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The only thing that overcomes hard luck is hard work." Harry Golden

"I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it." Thomas Jefferson

"A pound of pluck is worth a ton of luck." James Garfield

"Diligence is the mother of good luck." Benjamin Franklin

"Good luck is another name for tenacity of purpose." Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." Seneca (386 words)

Dinosaurs

I recently visited a museum exhibition of dinosaurs in the Discovery Centre in Stockwood Park, Luton, England, called Dino-Mites. The models are life-size baby dinosaurs in a variety of poses, amidst their natural surroundings of plants and trees. The whole area is in darkness and the dinosaurs are lit by coloured spotlights, accompanied by a continuous soundtrack of growling and roaring. It was all very noisy and almost drowned out the squeals of delight from the excited children running around. I am not sure if delight is the right word, as I think it is probably an expression of relief when scary things have been "captured" in a safe environment.

Some time ago in another museum I did once meet an even larger dinosaur that was not so safe. Although everything was brightly lit, I did not see the creature when I entered that part of the museum. One would have to look to the side and upwards to see it was there, and I was busy looking ahead to the other smaller exhibits. It was adult size and was glowering down towards the unsuspecting visitor, with its face a little too close to the walkway. As I went past, the motion sensor switched on the growls and gave me quite a fright. It was a deep booming rumble, the source of which I could not quite pinpoint. This was very unnerving, as even at the age of 55 I was not immune to the natural reaction to a sudden confrontation with a tyrannosaurus! This exhibit broke the boundaries of the perceived "safe environment". I would imagine that some children would be holding onto adult legs and skirts but I ended up with my

rational head trying in vain to talk some sense into my fluttering stomach. I am not at all fond of being taken by surprise and I did not feel inclined to spend longer looking at the other items.

The photo shows deinonychus, the one with the tearing toe-claws. This fellow is one to avoid having in your neighbourhood, as I am sure he could outrun us without much effort. It is possible that he was one of the feathered dinosaurs. Elsewhere in Stockwood Park are some dinosaur relatives in the Dig For Victory Wartime Garden, namely four beautifully coloured chickens, obviously chosen for their smart plumage. They were very inquisitive and making friendly clucking and cooing noises, but of course if you or I were a lot smaller they would eat us as quickly as deinonychus would. Next time I see a dinosaur I will do my best to think of him as just a big chicken.

It is difficult to see the tyrannosaurus or the velociraptor without drawing an analogy with the shorthand exam, the desire and necessity for superhuman speed to enable you to leap ahead of the relentless pursuer (dictator). Your place of safety is a full five minutes away but you cannot afford to think about that at the moment. If you want to survive the encounter, you cannot let your guard drop, you must deal with and jump over all obstacles as rapidly as you know how, without getting tripped up, and you surely don't want to find out what happens if you slack off or give up. If ever there was a powerful incentive to be prepared ahead of time, this is it! (563 words)
