

Never Tell Me The Odds!

By Christopher R. Edgar

I'm not a huge Star Wars buff, but I'm very fond of one famous line from "The Empire Strikes Back." To escape from the Empire, Han Solo is considering flying the Millennium Falcon into a dangerous asteroid field. The ever-anxious C-3PO informs Han that the odds of surviving in an asteroid field are approximately 3,720 to 1. Our hero's classic response: "Never tell me the odds!" And, as most of us know, Han enters the asteroid field and makes good his escape.

I felt like I imagine Han did when my friends and former colleagues offered me their opinions on my decision to leave the legal profession and become an author and success coach. Countless times, I heard that I was being unrealistic, that I needed to do more research or get more training, that most new businesses fail, that I had no experience being an entrepreneur, how many self-help books and coaches are already out there, and so on.

Obviously, all this advice didn't make me change my decision. But why? Because statistics about how many businesses fail, how many are already doing what I'm doing, how cutthroat the competitive environment is, and so forth, leave out the most critical piece of information. They tell me nothing about the *attitudes* of the people who started those businesses. For instance, were they willing to sacrifice substantial time and money to make their business ideas work? Were they willing to persevere despite setbacks? Were they actually passionate about and interested in what they were doing, or simply fleeing the 9-to-5 world? If I had statistics that answered these questions, I'd be able to make a reliable quantitative assessment of my prospects for success in my new field. But that sort of information isn't, and probably will never be, available.

However, I have the most important kind of information for predicting my own success—my knowledge of myself. I know whether I have the perseverance, the courage, the passion and the willingness to make sacrifices necessary to succeed. If I know that I have these attributes, I know that "the odds" of succeeding are in my favor. If I feel like I'm lacking in one or more of these departments, I know where I need to make changes to ensure that I can succeed. Thus, I made the decision to enter my current field based on my assessment of myself, not statistics regarding other people who did similar things.

It used to seem amazing to me that two people with very similar family situations, economic backgrounds, educations, test scores and so forth can take completely different paths in life and achieve completely different levels of success. These people's initial life circumstances don't explain the differences between what they end up doing. Finally, I realized that, to understand why such people behave so differently from one another, one needs to know who those people are inside—their levels of motivation, creativity, passion, self-respect, and so on.

Getting hung up on "the odds" of success in a career you're thinking of entering—for instance, obsessing over the percentage of businesses in your chosen field that fail—is much like trying to predict people's future paths based on their initial circumstances. The initial circumstances of someone else who entered your field—the nature of the product they released, the amount of startup capital they had, the credentials of their people, and so on—just aren't a reliable indicator of whether your venture is likely to turn out the same way as theirs. Only learning the deepest truths about the people involved—and about yourself—can tell you that.

If you're thinking of entering a new career or starting a business, don't let other people's anxiety about "the odds" deter you from your course. Instead, if you want to know your likelihood of success, develop a comprehensive understanding of who you are as a human being and what drives you. And if you don't think some part of you is up to the task, don't despair. It is possible to change yourself on the inside, and in doing so change your outer circumstances. I, and others in my field, are devoted to helping people make such changes, and want to help you realize your true greatness.

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