O Fortuna, velut Luna, statu variabilis......

Toastmaster, my dear toastmasters

Now, now, do not look so bewildered. It is not Greek!....It is Latin.

The few lines I just uttered mean; “O Fortune, like the moon, you are changeable”. And even though you still have that incredulous look on your faces, I know that you have heard this poem before....with music nonetheless.

Some years ago this poem was used as the background music for a Gillette advertisement. What lady luck has to do with shaving your beard off is an interesting point to ponder upon. I have thought long and deep and come to the conclusion that this has the basis in the belief that you need to be extremely lucky not to cut yourself while shaving!

Coming back to the topic, If I asked you; “What is fortune?”, what would you say?

Be it shaving without cutting yourself; be it winning a lottery; be it saving your life from an accident or ... maybe meeting with the most wished for accident of all, marrying the person of your dreams;

What we call fortune, more precisely good fortune, is the occurrence of “random” events in our favour. But is it just pure chance? A random occurrence of a seemingly improbable event? Soon you shall see what is what.

We have two angles to look at the matter at hand, the very subjective viewpoint of the person involved in the matter and as a situation of cause and effect. As with most of my table topic speeches, let me explain the points with stories.

Once upon a time there lived a farmer in a distant village with his only son and a horse. One day the horse ran away to the wild...The villagers came to the farmer and said; “How unfortunate!” The farmer replied; “It is too early to say fortunate or unfortunate”. Sometime later the horse returned, not alone, but with a dozen of wild horses. The villagers came and said; “How fortunate!” The farmer replied; “It is too early to say fortunate or unfortunate”. Farmer’s son took it upon him to tame the wild horses. Alas! He fell off one and broke his leg. Obviously the villagers came with “How unfortunate!” and to their amazement got the same answer as before. Later the king’s men came and forcefully took all the able young men to war where they perished. But the farmer’s son was left behind because he was disabled. Yet again villagers came to say; “How fortunate!”. The farmer still replied; “It is too early to say fortunate or unfortunate”. The story ends here. Rather abruptly you’d say. But that exactly is the point. Fortune is what we perceive it to be, no more no less. And if life continues, our presumption towards a certain situation may change.

What of the other end? Surely the cause and effect path cannot explain fortune one would say. Here again grant me leave to tell you two stories; first the minor matter of invention of the Pacemaker and a matter of global importance; why it is hard for me to make a girl fall in love with me!

American engineer Wilson Greatbatch was building an oscillator to help record fast heart sounds. *nod at electronics people*.... But he misread the colours and got out a different resister and fixed it to his circuit. The circuit started to give a 1.8 ms pulse, followed by a one second flat interval. Mr. Greatbatch recognized the pattern, this is an exact match to the neural impulse that drives the
human heart! So Mr. Greatbatch started working on the Pacemaker and improved it to the human usable level. Now let’s ask the all important question; “Is it sheer luck on their part or the luck of Mr. Greatbatch now saving heart patients worldwide?” I would say no. What would have come to pass if someone else was doing the same thing? Would they have spotted the pattern? Would you have spotted the pattern? If Mr. Greatbatch did not know this little trivia of the pulse of a human heartbeat, he would have just missed it and put the correct resistor back and worked on the oscillator. We see that the ability of a human is needed to use the “cause” to result in the “effect”.

And is being “able” or “knowledgeable” enough?

If you remember my ice breaker, you’d remember that I am a part-time cupid. Now why would such an “expert helper” be unable to charm a girl to fall in love with him? Is it because of ill-chance? I would say no again. People that have had a conversation with me would know that I would first and foremost “call a spade a spade” and then would talk about various tools that are related to spades and then draw up a connection to playing cards which would move on the identities of the four kings which in turn would very much move on to the significance of the battle between David and Goliath to the modern-day society. Well, you might point out the fact that this way of conversation is not suitable for any form of interaction, a point with which I agree because I met only two individuals who were willing to engage and collaborate with this type of conversation a considerable time period. Coming back to the problem at hand, we can see that the source of trouble here is absence of tact rather than luck. So instead of blaming poor lady luck, I’d blame my tactlessness to push cause to into becoming effect. Action is needed to turn wheels.

We have established first, fair or ill, fortune is what we perceive it to be. Then we understood that human ability is needed to reap benefits. And thirdly we saw that we need to work on our part to get luck to spin our way. Now you’d ask what I think of all this. I’d say I agree with what Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States; “I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.”

Over to you Toastmaster....