



# Good luck charm or a proper mindset?



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

People are obsessed with good luck charms, tells, bad juju and suspicions. I had a cousin who tended goal for the Chicago Blackhawks. My cousin thought he must be the last player to leave the ice after each period, or the team would lose.

My Uncle Eddie pitched for the Chicago Cubs for a number of seasons. Eddie would never touch a ball that was handled by the opposing team's pitcher. If the ball remained on the mound after the third out, Eddie would just kick it off the mound and call for a new ball from the umpire.

Pro sports are full of these little rituals and good luck charms. As an outdoors person, I admit that I have fallen victim a few times myself. While I don't swerve away from black cats or have a fear of the number 13, I still have a few suspicious quirks. Once on an elk hunt about a dozen years ago, I admit a good luck charm saved the day.

The weather was terrible, the kind that made me wish that I were in a pool hall rather than on the side of a mountain. When it was not snowing, the wind howled as temps struggled to get out of the single digits. We had not seen an elk for four days and it was getting down to the wire. I was convinced that certain parts of my anatomy would freeze and fall off. The clothes I had were simply not cutting it.

On a lunch break, near some long abandoned corals, I looked down and saw a horseshoe from many years ago. I figured it must be an omen, so I picked it up and threw it in my pack. If I survived this hunt, I would consider myself ahead of the game.

That evening I harvested a very nice bull and made it safely back to camp. Amazing how success on a hunt makes you forget about weather conditions. I attributed the success and my survival to that lucky horseshoe.

Fast forward a few years to a similar hunt, but this time it was never ending rain and wind. After three solid days of pouring down rain, I wanted to give up the hunt and



I carried these two 'lucky' horseshoes around in my pack for years before I realized that a proper mindset will do more good than luck in the great outdoors. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

begin construction of a small ark. The rain gear I had was so cheap and ineffective, that hypothermia seemed like a welcome addition to my ever-worsening condition.

Once again, I looked down and saw a horseshoe on the ground. I remembered what happened last time, so I placed it reverently into my pack. Within hours, the rain stopped and I began to dry out. Later that evening, I harvested the biggest bear of my life.

Lucky charms, like rabbit's feet and four leaf clovers, together with rituals, like leading off with the right foot first, have been around for centuries. If there were any truth to these good luck charms, the rabbit's foot would still be attached to the poor rabbit.

When Mr. Murphy has decided that your number is up and you are faced with a full blown, three alarm, all hands on deck emergency, you need more than a good luck charm. Better make sure the all hazards insurance is paid up because a claim is forthcoming, and wearing your lucky hat won't save the day.

When those feces impact the oscillator, hoping for luck is the worst answer. Long before you think about building a fire or a survival shelter, better first develop a survival mindset. Survival mindset starts with confidence in your abilities.

Having and maintaining confidence in your abilities starts with how hard and often you train. The average outdoor person does not practice survival skills at all.

They may read an article, watch a television show or attend the lone class, but practice and hands-on training seldom occurs. Be honest with yourself about when the last time you trained for a survival situation was. Truth is, you need way more than that.

Every survival class I have seen or heard about talks about positive mental attitude being the most important element of survival. You cannot just have this positive attitude in the face of a disaster. In order for the positive attitude to work, you must be positive about everything on a daily basis. You cannot go around as the eternal pessimist all year long and expect to be Mr. Positive when suddenly faced with a crisis.

This is difficult for someone like me who is an eternal pessimist. My mantra has always been that it is always darkest, right before it turns completely black. Still, we must practice these positive attitude skills if we are to survive an emergency.

More important than being positive is to not be negative during a crisis. Once pessimism takes over, you become overwhelmed. Stay positive but keep your head out of the clouds and realize you have a serious situation to deal with.

Your biggest enemies in the wild are the fears that creep into your thoughts. This fear is accelerated by cold, heat, hunger and thirst. If you have trained, and have a proper survival pack, you know how to handle all these problems.

Spend your time keeping busy by building a fire and shelter to combat the cold,

shade for the heat, and collecting food and water for the hunger and thirst. Doing these chores keeps your mind occupied and does not allow the fear to creep back in. It also keeps your thought process positive as you accomplish these tasks.

Fear is normal but must be managed. Everyone has fears but not everyone has the same fears. Fear can lead a person to panic or lead them to putting forth a greater effort to survive. It is up to you to manage the fear to a positive direction and use the energy it gives in a positive way.

The biggest danger you face is panic. Panic is the uncontrolled urge to run away from a bad situation. Panic is triggered by your mind and imagination when you are under stress. Giving in to panic always ends in tragedy.

The way you fight off fear and panic is by keeping your cool. Relax and look at the brighter side of things. Stay in control by keeping up your positive self talk and remembering the ultimate goal of this ordeal is survival.

Spend some time learning and practicing your outdoor skills. Golfers practice, bowlers practice, hunters practice, and all outdoor people should practice. Take first aid courses, survival classes and read some books. Stay away from the television survival shows as they are staged and not something we need to focus on.

Having confidence in your training and outdoor skills will go a long way in helping you keep that positive attitude. Putting that positive

attitude in front of a bad situation will keep fear and panic in the rear view mirror where it belongs.

When you first realize you are in an emergency, stop and regain your composure. Recognize the dangers you face and take an inventory of the resources around you. Never make any hasty or rash decisions, rather, analyze your situation and plan a course of action.

Thinking about all this makes me realize that I need to give up the whole good luck charm thing and concentrate more on training and skills. Most of my bad outdoor situations have been caused either directly or indirectly by bad weather. I can combat that by being better prepared, both mentally and with proper clothing and shelter, to fight off the elements.

I can also keep the positive attitude going, realizing that the weather will break eventually, this is only a temporary situation, and that while I may be miserable, I am not in danger. Positive mental attitude goes a long way in the outdoor world. Besides, my pack was getting too heavy carrying all those horseshoes around.

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