

## Fortune Favors the Bold

It is one of the oldest and most universal proverbs of the ancient world: *audentis Fortuna iuvat* in the *Aeneid*; *fortis Fortuna adiuvat* in one of Terence's plays; *τοῖς τολμῶσιν ἡ τύχη ζύμφορος* from Thucydides. To Pliny, the Roman admiral and author, *Fortes fortuna iuvat*.

Fortune favors the bold. Fortune favors the brave.

It favors the big plans. It favors the risk-taking.

The decision to lead the charge. The decision to break ranks. The decision to try something new. The decision to accept the crazy challenge. To ask them to marry you, to take that trip, to raise your hand, to throw that long ball because with the game on the line you're no longer worried about interceptions. While the odds are often against these choices, know that the momentum of history is secretly with you. The crowd is with you, ready to cheer when you win. The more you put yourself out there, the more luck seems to come your way.

The architect Daniel Burnham is said to have advised his students to *make no little plans*. He was telling them to think big.

To tackle big problems. Not to get stuck on the onesie-twosies of life, but to try to *reach*. To do something so new and different that it scared them.

All the great commanders and entrepreneurs of history were successful because of the risks they took. Because while they may have been scared, they weren't afraid. Because they *dared greatly*. They entered the arena. They rolled the dice. They had *guis*.

And more often than not, they got lucky. If they hadn't, we wouldn't be talking about them.

"It is my experience that bold decisions give the best promise of success," General Erwin Rommel would write in one of his letters. "But one must differentiate between strategic or tactical boldness and a military gamble. A bold operation is one in which success is not a certainty but which in case of failure leaves one with sufficient forces in hand to cope with whatever situation may arise. A gamble, on the other hand, is an operation which can lead either to victory or to the complete destruction of one's force. Situations can arise where even a gamble may be justified as, for instance, when in the normal course of events defeat is merely a matter of time, when the gaining of time is therefore pointless and the only chance lies in an operation of great risk."

It was Rommel's tactical and strategic boldness on the battlefield that made him such a wily opponent in North Africa at the beginning of World War II. Still, we cannot avoid condemning his lack of boldness against Hitler before the war broke out.

Indeed, it was a lack of courage by almost all the German generals, many of whom found Hitler deranged and repugnant but could not bring themselves to break military protocol and challenge him as he hijacked their country. These were some of the bravest men in the world, men who had faced fire and death many times, yet in conference meetings they fearfully fretted and hoped someone *else* would do something. Waiting, hoping, cowering, they were complicit in heinous crimes. We'll never fully understand their wrassling, but inaction sealed their fate.

In the end, all that was left to Rommel, having missed the moment where a little boldness would have gone a long way, was a gamble. But by 1944, the gamble was more justified. Defeat was merely a matter of time, so why not try? So he did. Fortune didn't quite favor the conspirators who tried to depose and kill Hitler in the July 20 plot, but history at least respects the attempt.

A little boldness now is worth a lot more than death-defying courage later. The former needs a lot less of fortune's favor to succeed than the latter.

Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, has talked about how he doesn't do "bet the company bets." Because he doesn't have to—it's complacency that puts you in a position to have to take huge risks. It's the company that, after years of ignoring the trends, finally has to change or die. It's when you're making up for earlier deficiencies that you have to gamble everything.

Better, he says, to consistently make good bets every day. Calculated instead of careless. Incremental instead of incredibly dangerous.

Do the hard thing now.

Be steady and courageous today, in everything that counts. You'll have to trust that it's not as risky as you think. That you are not as alone as you think.

There is something behind you on this, even if it doesn't feel that way. Fortune is here. Fate is smiling upon you. But she tires quickly. She will resent you if you make her wait.

Better risk now than gamble later.

In either case, boldly proceed.