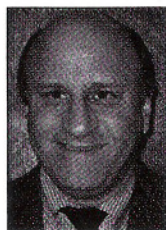


# Feeling lucky? Share your good fortune



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If you are lucky enough to be a celebrity in America today, you not only have fame and riches, you have options. One option is to realize how extremely “lucky” you are.

Never before have those in the sports and entertainment industries been so lavished

with the twin perks of wealth and celebrity. In fact, the correlation between wealth and celebrity is so pronounced that sportscaster and television personality Bob Costas recently observed that “celebrity is the No. 1 currency in America today.” We live in times when it is nearly impossible to be a celebrity without being wealthy (try to name one ... even Bill Clinton is now wealthy) and equally challenging to be wealthy without also being a celebrity (Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Ted Turner).

It wasn't always this way. As recently as the 1970s, athletes made decent money, but not much more than a successful doctor or lawyer. Team owners did not have to be billionaires and often ran teams as businesses, hoping to break even or take in a reasonable profit.

Much has been made the past few years about the status involuntarily thrust upon famous athletes as role models — individuals to look up to and try to emulate. Most intelligent people fully realize that being able to throw a baseball 100 miles an hour or dunk a basketball on a regular basis doesn't also bring with it character, moral leadership or any other worthwhile human trait.

What extraordinary athletic skill does confer is celebrity and wealth. It also confers one more important thing, opportunity. The opportunity to have a

public platform, a pulpit. Opportunity to influence others for good or for naught. Opportunity to make a difference in one's community and in the world if one is willing to apply one's celebrity and wealth in positive and meaningful ways.

Make no mistake, people listen when famous people speak, whether they have something worth saying or not. That is why companies flock to celebrity endorsers and charities crave celebrity

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spokespersons. People take notice of celebrities.

In other words, to paraphrase what American Express puts so aptly, “celebrity has its privileges.” It is a privilege to be an athlete or an entertainer in today's economy, not a right. It is a privilege, not a right, to have access to worldwide media on a daily basis. It is a privilege to have 100 times more wealth than you and your family would ever need in 10 lifetimes. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to be a role model. Not a responsibility, not an obligation, merely a privilege.

Many athletes and entertainers today have sought to “give back” to their commu-

nities through the creation of charitable foundations in their names. Almost all seek to leverage their celebrity to raise funds for those foundations. A much smaller number contribute significant dollars of their own in addition to the public's contributions, and fewer still decide to self-fund their own foundations.

Let's be both honest and blunt: Philanthropy is optional, not mandatory. But if one opts to do it, one ought to realize that it takes money.

I have never quite understood how famous wealthy people seeking to do philanthropy feel comfortable exempting themselves from contributing to a cause that carries their own name and to which they ask others to contribute — especially when the vast majority of the others they ask are much less well off than they are. A wealthy non-celebrity seeking to do philanthropy would never dream of making such a request.

The average per capita giving level of Americans today is about 2.4 percent of gross income. That average is for the vast majority of Americans who are not nearly as “lucky” as athletes or entertainers.

Here's a radical proposal: I propose that wealthy athletes and entertainers self-impose a “lucky tax” on their own earnings in celebration of how lucky they truly are! This tax would be completely voluntary. There would be no prescribed amount — whatever the lucky person feels is representative of how fortunate he or she is. It should be perceived by the lucky taxpayer as a great privilege to self-impose such a tax, because it would mean that he or she has both great wealth and great celebrity — a combination likely to produce more wealth and “luck” in the future.

I suspect that such a radical proposal may take awhile to catch on. But it really shouldn't take any longer than it takes to realize how truly lucky one is to have the good fortune to be a professional athlete or entertainer at this moment in history in America. Not sure how “lucky” that is? Check your bank account.

*Marc Pollick is president and founder of The Giving Back Fund, a national nonprofit organization with offices in Boston and Los Angeles, dedicated to increasing philanthropy in the world.*