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THE POWER OF MOMENTS

By Chip Heath and Dan Heath

KEY CONCEPTS

1. DEFINING MOMENTS

- Created a “signing day” for students that were not athletes but were going to college to celebrate their achievement.
- Defining moments shape our lives, but we don’t have to wait for them to happen. We can be the authors of them. What if a teacher could design a lesson that students were still reflecting on years later? What if a manager knew exactly how to turn an employee’s moment of failure into a moment of growth? What if you had a better sense of how to create lasting memories for your kids? In this book, we have two goals:
- First, we want to examine defining moments and identify the traits they have in common. What, specifically, makes a particular experience memorable and meaningful? Our research shows that defining moments share a set of common elements.
- Second, we want to show you how you can create defining moments by making use of those elements. Why would you want to create them? To enrich your life. To connect with others. To make memories.
- Take a trip to Disney World.
 - A majority of the day could be a 5/10.
 - There will be a few moments that are 10/10 that you will remember forever.
 - That often overrides all the other experiences. Waiting in line, expensive food, etc.
- When people assess an experience, they tend to forget or ignore its length—a phenomenon called “duration neglect.” Instead, they seem to rate the experience based on two key moments: (1) the best or worst moment, known as the “peak”; and (2) the ending. Psychologists call it the “peak-end rule.”
- What’s indisputable is that when we assess our experiences, we don’t average our minute-by-minute sensations. Rather, we tend to remember flagship moments: the peaks, the pits, and the transitions.

- The guest reviews for the Magic Castle Hotel are rapturous. What the Magic Castle has figured out is that, to please customers, you need not obsess over every detail. Customers will forgive small swimming pools and underwhelming room décor, as long as some moments are magical. The surprise about great service experiences is that they are mostly forgettable and occasionally remarkable.
- For the sake of this book, a defining moment is a short experience that is both memorable and meaningful.
- What are these moments made of?
 - ELEVATION: Defining moments rise above the everyday. They provoke not just transient happiness, like laughing at a friend's joke, but memorable delight. (You pick up the red phone and someone says, "Popsicle Hotline, we'll be right out.") To construct elevated moments, we must boost sensory pleasures—the Popsicles must be delivered poolside on a silver tray, of course—and, if appropriate, add an element of surprise.
 - INSIGHT: Defining moments rewire our understanding of ourselves or the world. In a few seconds or minutes, we realize something that might influence our lives for decades: Now is the time for me to start this business. Or, this is the person I'm going to marry.
 - PRIDE: Defining moments capture us at our best—moments of achievement, moments of courage. To create such moments, we need to understand something about the architecture of pride—how to plan for a series of milestone moments that build on each other en route to a larger goal.
 - CONNECTION: Defining moments are social: weddings, graduations, baptisms, vacations, work triumphs, bar and bat mitzvahs, speeches, sporting events. These moments are strengthened because we share them with others.
- Defining moments possess at least one of the four elements above, but they need not have all four. Many moments of insight, for example, are private—they don't involve a connection. And a fun moment like calling the Popsicle Hotline doesn't offer much insight or pride.

2. THINKING IN MOMENTS

- What was your first day like at your current (or most recent) job? The lack of attention paid to an employee's first day is mind-boggling. What a wasted opportunity to make a new team member feel included and appreciated. Imagine if you treated a first date like a new employee: "I've got some meetings stacked up right now, so why don't you get settled in the passenger seat of the car and I'll swing back in a few hours?"

- Every culture has its prescribed set of big moments: birthdays and weddings and graduations, of course, but also holiday celebrations and funeral rites and political traditions. They seem “natural” to us. But notice that every last one of them was invented, dreamed up by anonymous authors who wanted to give shape to time. This is what we mean by “thinking in moments”: to recognize where the prose of life needs punctuation.
- To think in moments is to be attuned to transitions and milestones as well as to a third type of experience: pits. Pits are the opposite of peaks. They are negative defining moments—moments of hardship or pain or anxiety. Pits need to be filled. Most of the time, this is simply common sense. Disney knows, for example, that people hate long lines. So Disney invests in ways to fill that pit, by creating interesting displays as a distraction, and having performers interact with guests, and setting expectations about the wait. And in our personal lives, it’s similarly obvious. You need not study a book on defining moments to understand that if your partner is suffering, you attend to them.
- What’s least commonsensical is that pits can sometimes be flipped into peaks. A study of service encounters asked customers to recall recent satisfying and dissatisfying interactions with employees of airlines, hotels, or restaurants. Almost 25% of the positive encounters cited by customers were actually employees’ responses to service failures: slow service, mistaken orders, lost reservations, delayed flights, and so on. When employees handled these situations well, they transformed a negative moment to a positive one. Every great service company is a master of service recovery.
- Transitions should be marked, milestones commemorated, and pits filled.

MOMENTS OF ELEVATION

3. BUILD PEAKS

- Jouriles and Bedford then asked themselves a question that would guide the rest of their careers: What if we could design an academic experience that was as memorable as prom?
- What’s striking, though, is that many business leaders never pivot to that second stage. Instead, having filled the pits in their service, they scramble to pave the potholes—the minor problems and annoyances. It’s as though the leaders aspire to create a complaint-free service rather than an extraordinary one.
- Take the Magic Castle Hotel as an example. If the hotel lacked hot water, that would be a pit, and until it was filled, guests would not be charmed by the Popsicles. In the hotel industry, delighting your guests is an unattainable goal until you provide the basics: reasonably quick check-in, reasonably attractive rooms, reasonably comfortable beds, and so on. But some customers are still going to complain! The lamp wasn’t bright enough. You didn’t have HBO.

There were no gluten-free Pop-Tarts on the Snack Menu.

- The Magic Castle leaders play offense. They don't try to make everything perfect. (The lobby is vaguely reminiscent of an auto service shop waiting area.) But they nail the moments that stay with you. General Manager Darren Ross is always encouraging employees to go for the moments that make a customer's jaw drop.
- In other words, the happiest people in any industry tend to spend more, so moving a 4 to a 7 generates more additional spending than moving a 1 to a 4. Furthermore, there are dramatically more people in the "feeling positive" 4–6 zone than in the "feeling negative" 1–3 zone. So, with Plan B, you're creating more financial value per person and reaching more people at the same time.
- As a result, choosing between Plan A and Plan B is not a close call. Here's the astonishing finding from the Forrester data: If you Elevate the Positives (Plan B), you'll earn about 9 times more revenue than if you Eliminate the Negatives (Plan A). (8.8 times, to be precise.) Yet most executives are pursuing Plan A. (See the footnote for more on the methodology and an anticipated quibble.)
- To elevate a moment, do three things: First, boost sensory appeal. Second, raise the stakes. Third, break the script.
- We're not trying to pop your balloon. Rather, we want to build your determination: It's going to be way harder than you think to create peaks. But once you've done it, you're going to consider every ounce of effort worth it. You will have created your own defining moments.

4. BREAK THE SCRIPT

- The other difference between "breaking the script" and generic surprise is that the former forces us to think about the script. Our lives are filled with scripts: The script for how your family spends Sundays. The script for your team's staff meetings. The script for a hotel check-in. To break the script, we've first got to understand the script.
- Imagine, for instance, that a coffee shop owner decided to give away free biscotti every Friday. On the first Friday of the giveaway, it would be a delightful surprise. But by the fourth Friday, the free biscotti would be an expectation. Easy to imagine customers (ungrateful wretches!) actually complaining about it.
- The serial entrepreneur Scott Beck believes that good surprise is a fundamental principle of retail businesses. Beck, who had top leadership positions in three enormous retail chains—Blockbuster Video, Boston Chicken, and Einstein Bros—said that the secret to growing a business is to "reduce negative variance and increase positive variance." To reduce negative variance is to prevent stores from operating differently in a way that harms the customer experience. If one Einstein Bros store toasts a bagel perfectly and another burns it half the time, that's negative variance. To manage the problem, store owners need

systems that ensure the bagels are toasted right every time.

- When Dull decided to scrap the 120 PowerPoint slides, he and Yu had to restart from scratch. What they realized was that they didn't need their colleagues to understand something, they needed them to feel something. And it had to happen at the leadership meeting scheduled for September 2010 in Los Angeles.
- In other words, surprise stretches time. In supporting this insight, Eagleman has embraced some rather extreme research methods. He is famous for an experiment in which he asks volunteers to leap off a 150-foot platform and free-fall into a net. Afterward, they are asked to estimate how long the fall took, and their estimates are, on average, too high by 36%. Their fear and focus make time seem to expand. (So here's one tip to live a "longer" life: Scare the hell out of yourself, regularly.)

MOMENTS OF ELEVATION

5. TRIP OVER THE TRUTH

- This three-part recipe—a (1) clear insight (2) compressed in time and (3) discovered by the audience itself—provides a blueprint for us when we want people to confront uncomfortable truths. It would have been so easy for CLTS facilitators to lecture the villagers, to show them facts and data about sanitation practices. But it's so much more powerful when the crystallizing insight happens inside them.

6. STRETCH FOR INSIGHT

- Learning who we are, and what we want, and what we're capable of—it's a lifelong process. Let's face it: Many of us became adults—with homes and jobs and spouses—long before we really understood ourselves. Why do we react the way we do? What are our blind spots? Why are we attracted to the kind of friends and lovers that we seek out? Self-understanding comes slowly. One of the few ways to accelerate it—to experience more crystallizing moments—is to stretch for insight.
- Often it's other people who prod us to stretch. You hire a personal trainer because you know she's going to push you beyond your comfort zone. And this is the same quality we value about our mentors: They bring out the best in us. You'll never hear someone say, "Yeah, the best coach I ever had was Coach Martin. He had no expectations whatsoever and let us do whatever we wanted. He was a great man." Mentors focus on improvement: Can you push a little bit further? Can you shoulder a little more responsibility? They introduce a productive

level of stress.

- In organizations, mentorship can take a stronger form. High standards + assurance is a powerful formula, but ultimately it's just a statement of expectations. What great mentors do is add two more elements: direction and support. I have high expectations for you and I know you can meet them. So try this new challenge and if you fail, I'll help you recover. That's mentorship in two sentences. It sounds simple, yet it's powerful enough to transform careers.
- High Standards + Assurance...Direction + Support...=Enhanced self insight

MOMENTS OF ELEVATION

- Moments of elevation lift us above the everyday. Moments of insight spark discoveries about our world and ourselves. And moments of pride capture us at our best—showing courage, earning recognition, conquering challenges.

7. RECOGNIZE OTHERS

- The similarities with Sloop's story are clear. First, there's a bleak period of alienation and rejection. Then a new teacher appears, offering praise and support. Which leads to a transformation: The Ugly Duckling turns into a beautiful swan.
- Carolyn Wiley of Roosevelt University reviewed four similar studies of employee motivation conducted in 1946, 1980, 1986, and 1992. In each of the studies, employees were asked to rank the factors that motivated them. Popular answers included "interesting work," "job security," "good wages," and "feeling of being in on things." Across the studies, which spanned 46 years,
- only one factor was cited every time as among the top two motivators: "full appreciation of work done."
- The recognition gap.
 - The difference between what percent of direct reports supervisors say they give positive feedback to, and the percentage of direct reports that say they received positive feedback.
- "I saw what you did and I appreciate it."

8. MULTIPLY MILESTONES

- Couch to 5K program (C25K) makes small milestones to celebrate. Gets you motivated!
- Create level challenges like a video game. Learn Spanish
 - Level 1: Order a meal in Spanish.
 - Level 2: Have a simple conversation in Spanish with a taxi driver.
 - Level 3: Glance at a Spanish newspaper and understand at least one headline.
 - Level 4: Follow the action in a Spanish cartoon.
 - Level 5: Read a kindergarten-level book in Spanish.
 - Boss Battle: Tell a joke in Spanish!
- Similar goals cascade downward. Within the organization with the “\$20B by 2020” goal, a particular business unit might have a smaller supporting goal: Increase market share in South America to 23% by 2018. Then, after setting a goal like that, the group would make a bunch of plans to achieve it. A numerical goal plus supporting plans. Notice what that combination leaves us with: A destination that is not inherently motivating and that lacks meaningful milestones along the way. As a result, achieving the “20 by 2020” goal will require a massive human effort with much of the pride stripped out.
- Furthermore, the ultimate destination should not be “losing 10 pounds,” it should be something intrinsically motivating, such as “Fitting into my sexy black pants (without gastrointestinal distress).”
- Hitting a milestone sparks pride. It should also spark a celebration—a moment of elevation. (Don’t forget that milestones, along with pits and transitions, are three natural defining moments that deserve extra attention.) Milestones deserve peaks.
- The Boy Scouts understand this idea well. The Scouts’ Merit Badge program, active for more than 100 years, is a great example of introducing multiple milestones and celebrating each one. The Merit Badges are presented to the Scout at a “Court of Honor,” where the Scouts are recognized in front of their peers. That’s a peak. Similarly, karate students who earn belts—from the novice’s white belt to the expert’s black belt—often receive them at public award ceremonies.

9. PRACTICE COURAGE

- So we take pride in the people we love, and we take pride in our own achievements. But there’s something missing here. Consider how people describe other moments of pride: I stood up for someone. I held firm and took the heat. I made a stand that I believed in. I refused to cave. These sentiments don’t describe “achievements,” at least in the sense of plaques and certificates. Rather, they are describing moments of courage.

- Build up to courage. Small steps. Story about holding a tarantula. Start with pressing against the glass of it, holding it with a thick glove, etc.
- A crucial feature of practicing courage, then, is making sure the practice requires courage! In the Nashville rehearsals, James Lawson's confederates cursed at the student protesters. Mocked them. Shoved them. And Rabbi Penner's seminary students must confront congregants who scream and cry and break down. In the back of their minds, the students know it's not "real," but the moment feels real.
- The bad news here is that our natural instinct is to cave to the majority opinion. If everyone says the red card is orange, we think we must be wrong, and we call it orange, too. The good news is that if even one person is brave enough to defy the majority, we are emboldened. We're not alone anymore. We're not crazy. And we feel we can call red "red." In short, courage is contagious. From historic protests to everyday acts, from the civil rights movement to an employee asking a tough question, this is the lesson we've learned: It is hard to be courageous, but it's easier when you've practiced, and when you stand up, others will join you. Think of it: Your moment of courage might be a defining moment for someone else—a signal to them that red is red, that wrong is wrong, and that it can be righted if we stand, together, against it.

MOMENTS OF ELEVATION

- Moments of connection deepen our relationships with others: You've known someone for only 24 hours, but you've already told them some of your deepest secrets. You endure a grueling experience with others and emerge with bonds that will never break. Your marriage hits a rocky patch—until one day your partner does something so thoughtful, you can't imagine loving anyone else.

10. CREATE SHARED MEANING

- One consistent theme from the visits surprised them: You can't deliver a great patient experience without first delivering a great employee experience. And Sharp's "employee engagement" scores were weak compared with the likes of Ritz and Southwest. Murphy and his executives had started the investigation focused narrowly on patients, but they now expanded their mission. They agreed on a new vision statement for Sharp: To transform the healthcare experience and make Sharp:
 - The best place for employees to work
 - The best place for physicians to practice
 - The best place for patients to receive care
 - Ultimately, the best health care system in the universe
 They called this vision the Sharp Experience.

11. DEEPEN TIES

- How could such a small intervention have such a big effect? We are accustomed to thinking about relationships in terms of time: The longer the relationship endures, the closer it must grow. But relationships don't proceed in steady, predictable increments. There's no guarantee that they will deepen with time. When you and your uncle make the same small talk every Thanksgiving, it's not a surprise that 10 years later, you don't feel any closer. Conversely, have you ever met someone and felt instantly that you liked and trusted them? What we'll see is that, if we can create the right kind of moment, relationships can change in an instant. That's what happened at Stanton, and it can happen in other relationships at work and at home. What is it about certain moments that deepens our ties to others?
- It can be captured in one sentence: Our relationships are stronger when we perceive that our partners are responsive to us. (The term used frequently is "perceived partner responsiveness.") Responsiveness encompasses three things:
 - Understanding: My partner knows how I see myself and what is important to me.
 - Validation: My partner respects who I am and what I want.
 - Caring: My partner takes active and supportive steps in helping me meet my needs.
- Stanton Elementary Questions
 - "Tell me about your child's experiences in school. Tell me about yours." (Understanding)
 - "Tell me your hopes and dreams for your child's future." (Validation)
 - "What do you want your child to be someday?" (Validation)
 - "What do I need to do to help your child learn more effectively?" (Caring)
- Remember that the Flamboyan Foundation forbade the teachers to bring documents to the visits. Now it's clear why: Generic documents are depersonalizing. Here's the same pamphlet we're handing to everyone. Responsiveness is not compatible with a canned agenda.
- Gallup discovered that the six most revealing questions are the ones below. Notice that the final three of them might as well have been penned by Reis himself:
 - 1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
 - 2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
 - 3. Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
 - 4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work? (Validation.)
 - 5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person? (Caring.)
 - 6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development? (Understanding. Caring.)
- Here's how it happens: One person reveals something and waits to see if the other person will share something back. The reciprocity, if it comes, is a sign of understanding, validation, and caring. I've heard you, I understand and accept what you're saying, and I care for you

enough to disclose something about myself. An unresponsive partner—like a seatmate on a flight who puts on his headphones shortly after you make a comment—terminates the reciprocity, freezing the relationship. This turn-taking can be incredibly simple. In one study conducted at a bus stop, a researcher approached strangers with one of two canned comments. The “low-intimacy” comment was, “Well, my day is over. How about yours?” The “high-intimacy” comment shows how easy it can be to initiate the cycle of turn-taking. All the researcher had to say was, “I’m really glad this day is over—I’ve had a really hectic day. How about you?” That’s the high-intimacy comment! On that scale, a handshake would probably be X-rated. Even so, that tiny bit of self-disclosure sparked significantly more intimate comments in return.

12. BLUE SKY WRAP UP

- That’s how we imagine you using the ideas in this book. Target a specific moment and then challenge yourself: How can I elevate it? Spark insight? Boost the sense of connection? Life is full of “form letter in an envelope” moments, waiting to be transformed into something special.
- Bronnie Ware, a palliative care nurse who served patients for the final weeks of their lives, wrote a moving article called “Regrets of the Dying.” She shared the five most common regrets of the people she had come to know:
 - 1. I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. (“Most people had not honoured even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made.”)
 - 2. I wish I hadn’t worked so hard.
 - 3. I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings. (“Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others.”)
 - 4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
 - 5. I wish that I had let myself be happier. (“Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits.”)
- It is striking how many of the principles we’ve encountered would serve as antidotes to those common regrets:
 - 1. Stretching ourselves to discover our reach;
 - 2. Being intentional about creating peaks (or Perfect Moments, in Eugene O’Kelly’s phrasing) in our personal lives;
 - 3. Practicing courage by speaking honestly—and seeking partners who are responsive to us in the first place;
 - 4. The value of connection (and the difficulty of creating peaks);
 - 5. Creating moments of elevation and breaking the script to move beyond old patterns and habits.

- When we began to read these powerful stories, we thought we were reading about epiphanies. “Eureka!” moments. But what dawned on us, as we read more of them, is that these were not stories about sudden realizations. These were stories about action.
- And that’s the charge for all of us: to defy the forgettable flatness of everyday work and life by creating a few precious moments. What if every organization in the world offered new employees an unforgettable first-day experience? What if every student had an academic experience as memorable as prom? What if every patient was asked, “What matters to you?” What if you called that old friend right now and finally made that road trip happen? What if we didn’t just remember the defining moments of our lives but made them?