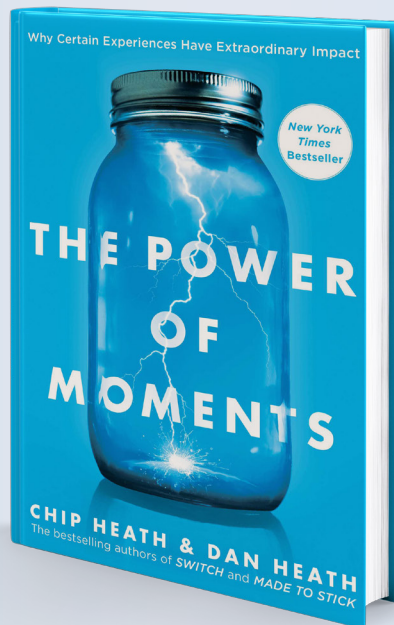


# BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



## The Power of Moments

Why Certain Experiences  
Have Extraordinary Impact

By Chip Heath and Dan Heath

Chip Heath and his brother, Dan Heath, have written four New York Times bestselling books: *Made to Stick*, *Switch*, *Decisive*, and *The Power of Moments*. Their books have sold over three million copies worldwide and have been translated into thirty-three languages including Thai, Arabic, and Lithuanian.

## Creating Your Defining Moments

Chip and Dan Heath believe that certain individual moments in a person's life have immense impact. They call these defining moments and they are "meaningful experiences that stand out in our memory." Some of these moments happen by chance, but others are created. In their book, *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*, the Heaths explore the necessary elements needed for a meaningful moment to exist, and they also explore how different individuals and organizations have been able to apply these principles in order to create memorable experiences that can change both business and lives. Their goal in writing their book is to help the reader create defining moments in their own lives and businesses.

In the first chapter, the Heaths discuss what they call duration neglect. Duration neglect refers to people's tendency to forget the actual length of an event. Instead, what people remember most are "the best or worst moment, known as the 'peak'" and the last moments. Beginnings also play an important role in a person's memory of an event. The Heaths use these ideas to prove that people do not rate their experience by averaging the emotion experienced throughout the whole duration, rather they rate their experiences based upon "the peaks, the pits, and the transitions."

There are four elements that alone or in conjunction with the other three have a tendency to create defining moments: elevation, insight, pride, and connection. The authors organize their book around these four elements. While defining moments can be either positive or negative, the authors focus on positive moments because those are the moments they want to help people create more of.

The Heaths believe that three ideal times for defining moments are pits, peaks, and transitions. Peaks are high points in life or in an experience. Some of these milestones include retirement and accomplishments within a person's career. They then discuss pits. A pit, the lowest part of an experience, can actually be turned into a peak if handled well such as when a customer complains and gets satisfactory resolution. Examples of pits are negative feedback and the loss of a loved one. Transitions happen naturally in life, and the authors advocate making them into special moments. Examples of these life transitions are the first day of school, the first day on a new job, and a promotion.

## Elevation

The first element that can help make ordinary moments memorable are moments of elevation. These are experiences that go beyond the ordinary. They are frequently joyful, and they are considered peaks. The authors believe that these moments deserve planning. Too many businesses, the posit, focus most of their time on remedying areas of weakness and not enough time on creating moments of elevation. This is counterproductive, they say, as improving the experience from good to great has a higher financial payoff than moving from negative experiences to neutral ones. The Heaths refer to a study done by the research firm, Forrester, which states that elevating the positives earns a company nine times more money than eliminating the negatives does.

The authors explain that positive moments can be created through “elevation, insight, pride, and/or connection.” To create such a moment through elevation, the Heaths recommend boosting sensory appeal, raising the stakes, and breaking the script. While all three elements are not necessary for a particular moment of elevation, most such moments have at least two of these elements. Boosting the sensory experience can involve any or all of the senses, and it involves making things beautiful. Raising the stakes can involve “productive pressure” such as making something into a performance or including a deadline. The Heaths devote an entire chapter to breaking the script. A script, “refers to our expectations of a stereotypical experience.” It can be thought of as creating a surprise; however, it is a strategic surprise that forces a person to think about the actual script itself. To exemplify this, the authors point to Southwest Airlines. They encourage their flight attendants to be cheeky when making their safety announcements. These are important because these announcements can turn into peak experiences of the trip.

## Insight

The Heaths describe moments of insight as moments that “deliver realizations and transformations.” While many of these moments happen spontaneously, there are a couple of strategies the Heaths have for artificially creating these moments. The first of these is helping people to trip over the truth, and the second is stretching for insight. Oftentimes people will not see the truth until they are forced to, but when they do finally see the truth, that moment can become a defining one in their lives. These are not long and drawn out moments. They usually take minutes or hours to happen. The key to tripping over the truth is that people have to come to the realizations themselves. The events that lead to these realizations can be manufactured, but the lessons must be learned on one’s own. A necessary ingredient, however, is that the facilitator of the moment must know what outcome they want to bring about.

Helping people trip over the truth is one way to bring about moments of insight. The other is to put people in situations where they must stretch for insight. “To stretch is to place ourselves in situations that expose us to the risk of failure.” This is important because “action leads to insight more often than insight leads to action.” Mentors can play a large part in helping people stretch because they push people to become more than they current-

ly are, but mentors also provide direction and support. This relationship gives a person assurance that if they try something new, someone will be there to help them if they fail. This pushing opens the mentee up to the possibility of failure, but it also allows them more moments for self-insight. The Heaths say, “The promise of stretching is not success, it’s learning.”

## Pride

The next element that can help create a defining moment is pride. Part of moments of pride include working hard and gaining positive results. It is also important, however, that the person is noticed by others. People can help others experience moments of pride simply by recognizing them. The Heaths posit that “while recognition is a universal expectation, it’s not a universal practice.” The Heaths encourage people to practice recognition constantly with a preference to weekly or daily recognition rather than monthly or yearly. The Heaths are not fans of employee of the month programs because they can breed cynicism as the best employees cannot always win all the awards, so less than stellar employees eventually earn the awards, making them essentially meaningless. To get around this in a formal recognition program, the Heaths recommend using objective measures to determine recognition. Such an objective measure could be sales volume. The other problem the Heaths have with such programs is that the recognition is programmatic rather than personal. The recognition that means the most to people is frequently spontaneous and refers to specific behaviors. In short, “effective recognition makes the employee feel noticed for what they’ve done.” The Heaths refer to researchers who have shown that providing praise often benefits the person being praised just as much as it does the person they are praising.

The Heaths also believe in the importance of multiplying milestones. By this they mean celebrating numerous smaller milestones a person meets on the way to their biggest milestones. One of the benefits of this frequent recognition is that it helps make goals more tangible. For example, the goal of learning to play the guitar is not very specific, and as such, a person may give up after a short period of time. If they provide themselves with many numerous goals along the way, such as practicing a certain number of times per day for a set period of time, they will have measurable goals they can celebrate as milestones. The Heaths refer to this as a level-up strategy. The authors believe that this type of thinking is missing in many areas of life. People frequently focus on “a numerical goal plus supporting plans.” The authors do not find this particularly motivating. While goals like this provide accountability, they are not generally inspiring. To create moments of pride, it is helpful to consider what is actually motivating and what can be accomplished in weeks or months. They ask, “What’s a different accomplishment that is worth surfacing and celebrating?” For example, a weight loss milestone that might be more motivating than losing 10 pounds in two months might be to fit comfortably in a certain pair of pants. If a person meets a milestone, the authors believe it is important to celebrate, to create a peak moment. Milestones help make people successful because they encourage people to push themselves to complete tasks. These milestones “are conquerable and worth conquering.”



## Practicing acting with courage can both reduce fear and bolster confidence.”

Many moments of pride in a person’s life require courage. While it is not possible to manufacture moments of courage, it is possible to create moments in which a person can practice exercising their courage so they are ready when the moment to act arises. Practicing acting with courage can both reduce fear and bolster confidence. They state that “courage isn’t just suppressed fear. It’s also the knowledge of how to act in the moment.” People can help themselves act as they wish in moments requiring courage by making specific plans for what will happen should a treacherous situation occur. An example of this is if a person who wishes to cut down on alcohol consumption makes a plan specifically for when a waiter asks them if they would like a drink. For many people, the hard part is not knowing what to do; rather it is acting on that knowledge. This requires practice. This practice, however, must require courage itself.

### Connection

The final element that can lead to defining moments is courage. “When members of groups grow closer, it’s because of moments that create shared meaning.” Many peak moments involve these experiences of shared meaning such as weddings and graduations. They involve personal contact; therefore, big moments are shared, not via Zoom, but through in person at ceremonies in the presence of others. The Heaths explain that groups that bond together quickly often have had to struggle together. For example, when a group of research participants had to complete an activity with their hands in cold water, they bonded more with each other than when the participants completed the same activity in comfortable water. People often will choose to struggle if they deem the work important, if they are granted autonomy, and if they are allowed to choose whether or not to participate.

The Heaths differentiate between purpose and passion. Purpose refers to a person’s belief that their work is benefiting others or has a larger meaning. Passion refers to the excitement a person has about their work. People with both high passion and high purpose perform well, but purpose is actually more important than passion in regards to how well a person will perform. They say “purpose trumps passion.” Part of this is because people can share a common purpose, but passion is more individual. A takeaway for leaders then is to purposefully cultivate purpose. This can be done by determining who the final beneficiaries of a project are. For example, a hospital janitor can find purpose by remembering that the ultimate effect of his or her good work is “the health and happiness of patients.”

The Heaths also discuss responsiveness in terms of how it creates a sense of connection. They state that our relationships are strongest when we feel responded to and when we respond to others. This requires understanding, validation, and caring. In other

words, a person should feel seen, respected, and cared about. The need for responsiveness is easily understood in personal relationships, but it is also important in professional encounters. For example, when people find themselves frustrated with a commercial experience, this often happens because they do not believe people at the company have been responsive to them. People do not like being treated like a number. Moments of connection require responsiveness. Responsiveness does not always lead to intimacy. For intimacy to develop, turn taking is required where both parties share. The Heaths write that “a defining moment of connection can be both brief and extraordinary.”

Chip and Dan Heath wrote *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact* to help people create these defining moments in their own lives. These moments can be personal such as graduation ceremonies or weight loss milestones, or they can be professional such as moments of professional recognition and better customer service experiences. The Heaths do not, however, see these defining moments as simply a means to an end. They believe they are an end in and of themselves. Prioritizing putting out fires over creating moments, in the end, usually backfires. The Heaths write that “In life, we can work so hard to get the kinks out that we forget to put the peaks in.” Defining moments are moments of action, and it is the task of the individual to stay alert for these moments.

The Heaths’ book provides a clear blueprint for helping to create these moments, but it is also peppered with examples of all of these different techniques that were successfully put into place. Through these examples the authors show how people have been able to elevate the mundane to the remarkable, and in doing so, have created defining moments and memories that can last a lifetime and can help bond people together. Through the entire book, the authors prove that creating these defining moments is a noble task with outcomes that go far beyond being merely a means to an end.

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