

BOOK CLUB GUIDE



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A resource for the book **THE POWER OF MOMENTS**

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INTRODUCTION

Chapters 1 & 2: Defining Moments and Thinking in Moments

1. Start your book club by asking each person to share one positive defining moment from their lives. It need not be a big, life-shaping moment like getting married or giving birth—it could be a smaller moment that you’ve never forgotten. [Note: Be patient with this part. It might well take 15-20 minutes to share these stories, but it’s worth it!]

Do you feel these moments owe more to serendipity or to the conscious effort by you or someone else to create them?

2. On pages 6-7, the Heath brothers describe a hypothetical day at Disney. The “average” of the ratings was 6.5, but in memory, it felt more like a 8. Similarly, at the Magic Castle Hotel, many of the hotel’s amenities are unimpressive, but people look back on the experience with great fondness because of moments like the Popsicle Hotline. Have you had an experience like this, where the moment-by-moment experience may have been mixed (or even negative), but in memory you remember it fondly? Describe the experience you’re thinking about.

3. Think of a recent service experience: a flight, a customer service call, a hotel stay, a doctor visit, a restaurant meal. Was there a “peak” or a “pit” moment that stands out in your memory? What was it?

4. Talk about the “treasure chest” you keep in your house (if you do). Where is it? Tell the group about 3 particular items that are in your collection. Which of the 4 categories of defining moments (elevation, insight, pride, connection) do they reflect?

5. What do you remember about the first day at your most recent job? Was it closer to the underwhelming hypothetical example that starts the chapter—or closer to the John Deere First Day Experience?

6. In Chapter 2, in the context of the “reverse wedding” story, the Heath brothers write:

“At the point the widow went to see Doka, she was ready to begin dating again. And it’s clear that, even if she hadn’t met Doka, she would have started dating eventually on her own. Maybe it would have taken a month, maybe a year, maybe five years. And throughout that uncertain time, she would have felt anxious: Am I ready? Is it “okay” for me to be ready? What the widow in Doka’s story needed was a landmark moment to capture the transition she was making. *After that Sunday afternoon ceremony, I was ready.* We have a natural hunger for these landmarks in time.”

What did you think of Kenneth Doka’s suggestion that the widow create a landmark in time—a “ritual of transition”? Is there someone in your life who you believe would benefit from a landmark of this kind—a moment that separates “Old Me” from “New Me”? Or, alternatively, was there a time in your life when such a moment would have given you permission to turn the page more quickly and confidently than you did?

7. The Heath brothers make the case that there are many “missing moments” in our lives—that we aren’t paying enough attention to transitions, milestones, and pits. In the first Clinic, they point out all the moments that are missed by banks—for instance, a customer who closed on a new home could

be celebrated with a gift, or another who lost a job could be offered a “pause” on their mortgage. Did any “missing moments” come to mind as you reflected on this section? Are there opportunities in your organization to create new defining moments

ELEVATION

Chapters 3 & 4: Build Peaks and Break the Script

- 1.** Jeff Gilbert, the principal of Hillsdale High, said, “We run school like it is nonstop practice. You never get a game. Nobody would go out for the basketball team if you never had a game. What is the game for the students?” Do you agree with this sentiment? If you were the principal of a school, what kind of “games” could you create?
- 2.** In Chapter 3, the Heaths argue that in most service businesses, managers spend too much time “fixing potholes” and not enough time “building peaks.” If you work in a service business, does that ring true? Do you think your organization is guilty of that?
- 3.** Eugene O’Kelly discovers he has three months to live and he sets out to create as many “Perfect Moments” as he can in his remaining days. What’s one Perfect Moment you would like to create in the next year with a friend or loved one? How will you ensure that you won’t fall into this trap: “One day rolls into the next, and a year goes by, and we still haven’t had that conversation we always meant to have. Still haven’t created that peak moment for our students. Still haven’t seen the northern lights. We walk a flatland that could have been a mountain range.”
- 4.** See page 77 for the discussion of “minimizing negative variance” versus “maximizing positive variance.” The Heaths write: “In families, so often we are hustling to ‘minimize negative variance’—getting kids to school on time, managing household chaos, keeping sibling spats under control. But are we focusing as much energy on increasing positive variance from week to week?” Does this resonate with you—or do you feel like the need to ‘increase positive variance’ is just one more burden to add to the shoulders of already-busy parents?

5. What did you think of the concept of the “reminiscence bump”—that period from roughly age 15 to 30 when our life is filled with so many “firsts”? If you are 25 or older, does it bother you that, in some sense, your most memorable days are behind you? Does that idea seem natural and untroubling to you, or does it make you anxious? (Or are you determined to fight the trend and ensure that your older years are as memorable as your younger ones?)

6. Reflect on this quote: “We feel most comfortable when things are certain, but we feel most alive when they’re not.” Does this feel true for you? What’s a recent time when an uncertain experience made you feel “alive”? (It need not be something dramatic—perhaps something that was so novel that you experienced the feeling of time slowing down.)

INSIGHT

Chapters 5 & 6: Trip Over the Truth and Stretch for Insight

- 1.** Have you experienced a “crystallization of discontent” moment in your life? Share it, if you feel comfortable.
- 2.** Recall the story of Microsoft’s Scott Guthrie, who asked his colleagues to create an app using their own platform (called Azure). They struggled badly, which caused them to “trip over the truth.” Tripping over the truth is triggered by a (1) clear insight; (2) compressed in time; and (3) discovered by the audience itself. Can you think of a time when you have witnessed this happening? (For instance, an experience or demonstration that sparked an “aha!” experience.) Have you ever tried this strategy yourself?
- 3.** Consider the story of Lea Chadwell, who ultimately decided to close the bakery she had started. From a business perspective, the bakery was a failure. The Heath brothers argue that for her, it was a success, in the sense that it boosted her self-insight. Do you agree with this logic? Was there a time in your life when a failure taught you something about yourself that outweighed the “defeat”?

4. [Note: This is a very personal question that may not be appropriate for every group.] Michael Dinneen was shattered when his patient committed suicide, but he learned something about himself: I can endure. Have you ever lived through a difficult or traumatic experience and drawn strength from the idea that, “If I can survive that, I can survive anything?”

5. Describe the most effective mentor you’ve ever had. Did that person make you “stretch”? If so, how? The Heaths describe a kind of formula for mentorship: HIGH STANDARDS + ASSURANCE + DIRECTION + SUPPORT = ENHANCED SELF-INSIGHT. Did this spark any ideas for how you might challenge or support the people who rely on you for their growth?

6. Is there an area of life where you would like to “stretch” yourself—that is, to deliberately expose yourself to a challenge where failure is a very real possibility—in hopes of learning and growing?

PRIDE

Chapters 7, 8, & 9: Recognize Others, Multiply Milestones, and Practice Courage

1. Think of the story about Kira Sloop (the girl who was told to “mouth the words” in choir) and Gad Yair’s research on “Cinderellas and Ugly Ducklings.” Was there a teacher or a mentor who was responsible for a turning point in your life? What happened?

2. To whom would you most like to send a gratitude letter? Talk about what that person means to you. (And consider making a “group pact” to send those letters!)

3. In the “Multiply Milestones” chapter, the Heaths make fun of the milestone-free way someone might think about learning Spanish: Try to squeeze in a Spanish study session. Try to squeeze in a Spanish study session. Etc. Someday, eventually: “Know” Spanish. Do you think you’ve fallen victim to this trap? Did the chapter spark ideas about how you might create motivating milestones en route to a goal that is important to you?

(As inspiration, think of the way Scott Ettl reframed his generic interest in American history into a specific quest to read all the presidential biographies in order.)

4. If you’re willing, share a moment in your life when you had a chance to be courageous—and let the moment pass. What were the forces that led you to stay quiet? Conversely, can you think of a time when someone else’s courage was contagious for you, stiffening your backbone?

5. Did you agree with Mary Gentile’s assessment that people often know what the right thing to do is but fail to act on that judgment? Gentile argues that ethically-problematic situations are often predictable. We can foresee them. Did one of these potentially-problematic situations come to mind (perhaps something you’ve seen happen before at work)? Share with the group the situation you’re anticipating—as well as what you can do to “preload” your response.

CONNECTION

Chapters 10 & 11: Create Shared Meaning and Deepen Ties

1. Consider the transformation at Sharp HealthCare led by Sonia Rhodes. The All-Staff Assembly played a critical role in sparking the change. Yet we’ve all been part of “all hands” meetings in organizations that were not effective or inspiring. Why was the All-Staff Assembly different? What made it a defining moment for the Sharp team?

2. What did you think of the study concluding that “laughter is more about relationships than humor”? Did that seem right to you? Do you think “social laughter” has happened during this book club?

- 3.** The Heath brothers write, “If you want to be part of a group that bonds like cement, take on a really demanding task that’s deeply meaningful. All of you will remember it for the rest of your lives.” Have you been part of a group like this in your life? Share the circumstances and why the work bonded your team together.
- 4.** [Warning: Don’t do this question with your work teams unless you are really close.] If you’re currently working, where would you put yourself on Morten Hansen’s Purpose/Passion grid on page 217? Think about the book’s challenge to find the contribution you’re making with your work. How would you answer this question: “Who is the ultimate beneficiary of your work, and how are you contributing to them?”
- 5.** The parent-teacher visits at Stanton Elementary had extraordinary power. Yet they were a “drop in the bucket” compared with the hours invested by teachers, students, and parents. Why do you think they were so effective?
- 6.** Reflect on the role of “responsiveness” in your relationships. What’s something your partner did recently that you consider very responsive?
- 7.** We all have customer service horror stories. Think about a recent frustrating experience—preferably one that was pretty small in the scheme of things and yet made you furious. Do you think the root of your anger was a lack of responsiveness? If so, which element(s) were missing: understanding, validation, or caring? If not, what was the root?
- 8.** Mike Elam, in the book, described an experience where he pushed past small talk with a co-worker and said “it was like ‘peeling an onion’ where we were going just slightly deeper on each exchange and when finished, we had moved quite a bit.” Have you had a recent experience like this – i.e., one when you engaged in the kind of “turn-taking” described at the end of the chapter?

9. BONUS! Within your book club, split up into pairs and download the app called 36 Questions. (This is the app version of Art Aron’s research.) Take 15 minutes to complete the first set of 12 questions. Afterward, talk as a group about how it felt to discuss those questions. Did you learn things you didn’t know about your partner? Did you want to continue?

CONCLUSION

Chapter 12: Making Moments Matter

1. On page 257, the palliative care nurse Bronnie Ware discussed the five most common regrets of the people she had come to know. At this point in your life, which of these feel most “real” to you? Do you worry about having any of these regrets in the future?

2. Julie Kasten, sitting in her cubicle, had a sudden flash of insight that inspired her to find a new career. Later, when meeting with a career counselor, she had a second flash—*I want to do what you do*. Have you (or anyone you know) ever had one of these sudden realizations that sparks a change in jobs or careers?

3. The final story of the book is about two compassionate nurses who bring a bowl of snow to a very sick young girl. Their kindness is moving. What is the kindest thing someone outside your family has ever done for you?

4. What was the story or idea from the book that will stick with you the most?

5. Conclude the discussion by asking everyone present this question: What’s a moment you want to create for yourself or someone else in the next week?