



Nathan Notes

The Defining Decade by Meg Jay

About the Author: Meg Jay is a clinical psychologist and Associate Professor of Human Development at the University of Virginia who specializes in twentysomethings. She earned a doctorate in clinical psychology and in gender studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

Learn (Quotes and Key Takeaways)

- “If we only wanted to be happy, it would be easy; but we want to be happier than other people, which is almost always difficult, since we think them happier than they are.” - Charles de Montesquieu
- “Don’t compare yourself to other people; compare yourself to who you were yesterday.” - Jordan Peterson
- “Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward.” - Soren Kierkegaard
- “Confidence doesn't come from the inside out. It moves from the outside in. People feel less anxious--and more confident--on the inside when they can point to things they have done well on the outside. Fake confidence comes from stuffing our self-doubt. Empty confidence comes from parental platitudes on our lunch hour. Real confidence comes from mastery experiences, which are actual, lived moments of success, especially when things seem difficult. Whether we are talking about love or work, the confidence that overrides insecurity comes from experience. There is no other way.” – Meg Jay
- 80% of life’s defining moments take place by the age of 35
- Identity capital- who we are & what we have to show for how we have spent our time. Can be tangible (degrees, jobs, etc.) or intangible (values, hobbies, life experiences). Built through unique, interesting, and autobiographical consequential experiences (the jobs, choices, moves, and encounters that had the strongest influence on how life unfolded thereafter). More identity capital → more interesting person. As you build your identity capital, you need to be able to articulate your story in a cogent and interesting manner.
- Weak ties- people we have met or connected to, but currently do not know well. Reconnecting with weak ties accesses informational and network power.

- The Ben Franklin Effect- when people do something nice for someone, they tend to like them more afterwards. This can work in a lot of directions. If you want someone to like you more, put them in a position to do something nice for you. If you want someone to like you less, consciously avoid being in a position for them to do something nice for you. You can apply the same principles for yourself if you want to like someone more/less by consciously seeking out opportunities to do something nice/not do something nice for them.
- Options paralysis- when it comes to making choices, less is more. Studies show that the fewer choices we have, the more likely we are to make a decision.
- Unthought known- those things we know about ourselves but forget or consciously suppress. ex. dreams you had growing up, thoughts you have that you haven't shared publicly for whatever reason. Accessing these can give a lot of knowledge to where your heart truly lies
- Social media, if used the right way by people who are psychologically secure, can be a great tool for connection. Unfortunately, it preys on our insecurities and results in social comparison that leaves people feeling bad about themselves ex. why does this person have a better job, better partner, better vacation, or better life than me? It can leave people trying to "keep up with the Joneses" even though they haven't thought if the Jones' are even worth keeping up with.
- Find your place- where you reside will dictate so much about your life, including your friendships, relationships, work, and day-to-day feelings. It's important to know what you want out of a place and unapologetically pursue it. Don't go where you "should" be, go where you want to be.
- In many areas of life, doing something later doesn't mean doing something better
- Lock-in- the decreased likelihood to search for other options or change to another option, once an investment has been made. This can apply to careers, relationships, etc. where people feel "But I have invested so much into this..." Need to keep in mind the sunk cost fallacy and forget about past investments; think about current and future value and base a decision off that. If the returns are negative, time to move on.
- Study on relationships- people who are like each other in areas such as socioeconomic status, education, age, ethnicity, religion, attractiveness, attitudes, values, and intelligence are more likely to be satisfied with their relationships and less likely to seek divorce (current divorce rate: 50%)
- People are taught to build confidence the wrong way, believing that it's either natural or based on how others perceive you. Confidence is built from your own lived experiences, which are lived moments of success in difficult times. In all areas of life, the confidence that supercedes insecurity comes from experience.
- The mere act of having goals both in our professional and personal lives can make us a happier, more confident person.

Reflect (Questions for Extension)

- List a few pieces of your own identity capital. How are you building identity capital in your life?
- What role does social comparison play in your life? When you find yourself comparing your life to someone else's, how does it leave you feeling?
- What areas of life do you suffer from options paralysis (too many options that you can't decide)? How can you flex the decisiveness muscle in these instances?
- Who are some weak ties that you've met in your life that you could reach out to and have a powerful connection with? What's holding you back from doing so?
- How do you believe confidence is built? What are things that you can do every day to increase your self-belief and confidence?
- When it comes to careers, what might you be able to do well enough to support the life you want? What might you enjoy enough that you wouldn't mind working at it in some form or another for years to come?
- What are your goals? What role does goal setting play in aligning to the person you want to become?

Act (Personalized & Suggested Actions)

- Find the balance between living and reflecting. Without reflection, you'll lack the guidance, clarity, and direction that it can bring about. Without living, you'll lack the experiential knowledge and identity capital that living brings about.
- Forget about social comparison. Live the life that YOU want to live. If you aren't able to use social media as a means of merely connecting with people and strengthening friendships/relationships, then it's better to not use it at all.
- Seek out new and novel experiences that will facilitate your growth and contribute to the formation of identity capital. That is how you become a more confident and interesting person.
- Reconnect with weak ties. It may feel uncomfortable at first to reach out to someone who you haven't talked to in ages, but both sides will almost certainly appreciate and benefit from your courage.
- In moments with options paralysis, be decisive and make a decision. It's the only way to avoid the trap of having "too many options."
- Apply the sunk-cost fallacy line of thinking to your current personal and professional investments. Forget about what you've invested in the past; if these things seem to have negative returns in the current or future states, it's time to cut your losses.
- Set goals and plans to achieve them. This simple habit will provide you more direction in life, and help you build confidence along the way.

Source

All original content has been summarized, paraphrased, quoted from, and inspired by “The Defining Decade” by Meg Jay. Nathan Notes distills some of the most meaningful lessons and quotes from the book and extends them through reflection and suggested actions. It is intended to serve as a companion/extension of the book; therefore it is highly recommended to purchase the book and enjoy for yourself.

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