

Defining Moments:

What creates a successful life?

By John Kuypers

Some of us treat each moment as if it's a scarce commodity, trying to get as much crammed in as we can. Others among us casually toss away the moment, like so much excess fluff. As a former, Type A driven corporate executive, I began to search for meaning in my life ten years ago, when I was thirty-four. Five years ago, I gave up my full-time business career in order to devote myself to living and teaching how to be present when it matters.

Does the moment define the life? What is the difference between a great life and a mediocre life? Is it the vastness of the talent and the years of experience that a person possesses? Or is it the way a person handles a handful of moments that explains that person's success?

Hockey player Wayne Gretzky scored over 2800 points during his twenty year professional career. That works out to forty-six minutes worth of key moments over twenty years. One out of every thirteen hundred moments that he was on the ice, he was able to score a point. Could it be that way for the rest of us too? That just one moment out of every thirteen hundred moments will define us?

Former U.S. President Richard Nixon was interviewed late in his life about the infamous Watergate scandal. He candidly assessed that the whole event would have blown over if he and his colleagues had just admitted it at the time. Instead, they made a decision to cover up the crime, creating several new crimes in the process and ultimately bringing down his

whole presidency in shame. One moment. One decision.

When I was engaged to my soon-to-be bride, I had a powerful moment. I was terribly torn, frightened to the core of my being that I was about to make a mistake. I wrestled sleeplessly for three days. Finally, I had a conversation with myself. "Do I want to get married or be alone?" I decided that I no longer wanted to be alone at twenty-eight years of age. Then I asked myself one more question, "Am I willing to get a divorce if this isn't working out in a couple of years?" I weighed the question long and hard. "Yes, I am," I answered myself. Our marriage lasted ten years before I walked out thoroughly disillusioned and unhappy.

Everything good and everything bad that ever happened in our lives happened in a single moment. When we make school, career and life decisions that affect us for the rest of our lives, we are aware at the time of their significance, of their risk and of the consequences if we make a poor decision. And then we make the decision as best as we can, and face whatever may come thereafter.

However, the longer I live, the more I realize that it is not just the few and mighty moments that define us. It is not just who we decide to marry, what career we decide to follow, whether we have a child or not, whether we face a life-threatening illness or traumatic situation. Indeed, the moment is much bigger than that.

It is in the moment that we act and react. It is in the moment that we decide to pay attention to our children, respond to our subordinates and go home on time rather than work late at the office. It is in the moment that we decide to be honest about how we feel, or hide our truth. It is in the moment that we notice something is funny or take it as an angry and serious event. It is the moment that leaves us elated or depressed.

Do these moments also define us? Does it matter when we forget someone's name or lose track of something we value? Does it matter when we finish a conversation feeling bad about how it went, or when we snap back at somebody out of anger? Does it matter when we exaggerate our accomplishments just a little, to impress someone? Most of us would say not.

A man who heads a cancer hospice in San Francisco was recently on the Oprah Winfrey show. He spoke poignantly of the only two questions every dying patient has on their mind at the end. *Was I loved? Did I love well?* If these are the last two questions of life, then perhaps it is not the big moments that define us, but rather the little moments. Perhaps there is no such thing as a little moment. Perhaps there are only moments that matter.

Can we be prepared for the moments that matter? I argue yes! I argue that when a person is fully present, unburdened by the mistakes of yesterday and free from the worries of what might happen tomorrow, that person is ready for the moments that matter on *this* day. All of their mind, heart, body and soul is available to know and do what's right for them, with confidence and conviction.

When we are in the present, we are the best we can be, no matter how inadequate that may later prove to be. We act out of love and we make wiser choices. We know what we want, and we do not make choices designed to influence others or hurt others. We do what we do for our own reasons. We are true to who we really are. We follow our inner spirit because that's who we are, not because someone will be impressed or affected.

When we are this way, fully present, fully true to ourselves, we are capable of loving another person for who they are, not for who we want them to be. Then we can live knowing we have

loved well. Then we give ourselves the opportunity to be loved in return. And if that doesn't happen, we have done everything we could in the moments that life gave us – the moments that matter. ♣

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