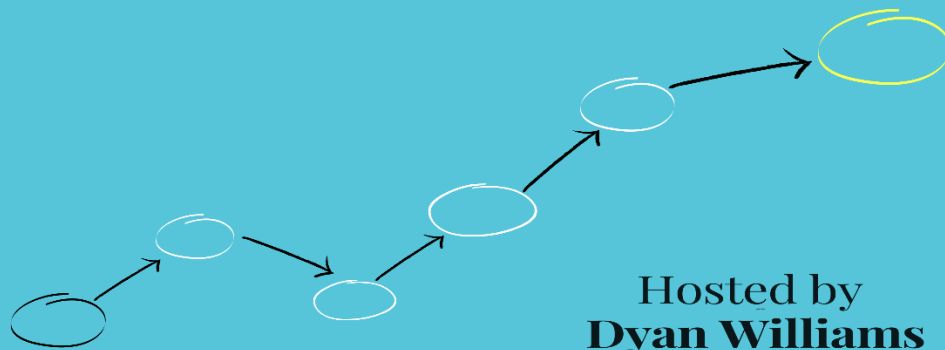


# THE INCREMENTALIST

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**A PRODUCTIVITY PODCAST ON**  
MAKING BIG CHANGES IN SMALL STEPS



## Episode 19

# Create Peak Moments for a Meaningful Life

<http://www.dyanwilliams.com/create-peak-moments/>

*Do you know how to create memorable moments in your life?*

*Are they happening by chance or are you paving the way for them?*

*Is productivity simply about maximizing output, or is it connected to a deep and deliberate life?*

## **This is Episode 19: Create Peak Moments**

Hello and welcome to *The Incrementalist*, a productivity podcast on making big changes in small steps. My name is Dyan Williams and I'm your productivity coach and host for this show.

In previous episodes, I've talked about cultivating habits, routines and skills to focus on your high priorities. I've also talked about the need for active rest.

When I use the term productivity, I don't just mean making the best use of your time, energy and attention – although this is a part of being productive.

In the competitive, industrial or post-industrial world, productivity is often defined by a simple formula: Output / Input. (Output is ideal output x efficiency). Or Value of Work / Hours Worked. You have metrics like revenue per employee, revenue per hour, and units produced per hour.

From this angle, productivity seems more fitting for machines. But there's a more positive aspect that is not easily measured. Productivity means being engaged in doing the things you really want to do and doing them really well. It means being empowered to design a well-lived life, which sparks big memories out of tiny moments.

A defining moment is a short experience that is both memorable and meaningful. It could be a month or a few seconds. They often relate to a new job, a new relationship, a relocation, or a vacation.

In their book, *The Power of Moments*, brothers Chip and Dan Heath write that peak moments have 4 elements in common, but do not always have all four every time.

If you know the elements, you can create peak moments deliberately instead of rely on chance, luck, fate, destiny, or divine intervention. You can be the author and creator of defining moments (the spice of life).

**The first element is Elevation:** Moments of elevation rise above the everyday, above the routine. They bring joy, motivation and an element of surprise.

**The second element is Insight:** Moments of insight rewire your understanding of yourself or the world. It inspires you to take action and make a change. It prompts changes in thoughts, opinions and perspectives and moves you out of limiting beliefs. It leads to realizations and transformations.

**The third element is Pride:** Moments of pride capture us at our best, such as during moments of courage or accomplishment and achievement.

**The fourth element is Connection:** Moments of connection are shared, synchronized moments with others; they have a social element.

If you shift around Insight and Pride, you get the acronym EPIC. The Heath Brothers say this will help you remember the elements, but they do not recommend you seek epic moments, but rather moments that are memorable, which might not be epic by itself. They can be small but deeply personal, or painful yet transformational.

**What are the benefits of peak moments? They:**

Make your life more memorable and meaningful

Enhance your leadership, teaching and communication skills

Create a better experience for customers, clients, patients, students, employees and others

Improve your relationships and deepen connections

**There are 4 types of Defining Moments:**

Transitions, Peaks, Pits and Milestones.

One reason for this is the Duration Neglect – we forget or ignore the length of the experience or event. We focus on the highs and lows and not the duration.

The Peak End Rule is that we remember fragments of an event or experience. The fragments are the peaks, the pits, and the beginning and ending. Over time, we might forget the beginning and ending, but we remember transitions.

**Transitions** are to be marked. They are the dividing point between the old you and the new you. The new year, new month, new week, new day is a time to mark transitions. Transitions involve a move from one stage of life to another like moving to a new city or country, starting a new job, marriage, divorce, death of a loved one, birth of a child.

A therapist named Doka was counseling a client whose husband had died of ALS. Six years after his death, she wanted to date again but found it hard to remove the wedding ring. The therapist worked with the priest to have a reverse wedding in front

of friends and family members. She said the vows in the past, confirming that she had fulfilled her marriage vows while her husband was alive. She then found it easier to remove the ring as part of the ceremony. This ritual of transition signaled to her and others that this was the start of a new chapter in her life.

**Milestones** are to be commemorated. They are defining moments that are reachable. They are not just graduations, weddings, and major birthdays (18, 21, 30, 40, 50, 60, 100). There are also small milestones that often go unnoticed. In the moment, it's important to focus on the progress and not just the big goal.

**Pits** are to be filled. There are low, dark moments in life that bring hardship, anxiety, pain and heartbreak, such as the death of a loved one. You will need to mindfully move out of the pits. And then you fill them with peak moments to create a positive memory out of a negative.

In 2007, Industrial Engineer Doug Dietz from General Electric discovered a problem with the MRI machines he and his team had installed in hospitals. They had focused on the machine itself, how to make it more powerful and run faster and better. But the patients – small children – were terrified by the experience. The MRI was put in a scary and sterile environment. Many children had to be sedated to get the MRI done, which increased their health risks.

After personally observing how terrified a child was of the MRI, the designer went back to the drawing board. He and his team shifted their attention from the machine to the experience. They collaborated with design thinkers from Stanford, teachers at day care centers, children's museums and so on. They next introduced GE's Adventure Series at the children's hospitals.

One of the first redesigned MRI room was Jungle Adventure at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. In the hallway leading to the room, they had stickers on the floor that looked like rocks. Kids would playfully jump on the rocks. On the walls were jungle scenes. The rocks from the hallway led to a painted koi pond with fish, which surrounded the MRI. The MRI table looked like a hollowed-out canoe.

By brightening the experience, they got more kids to lie still in the MRI. Kids were encouraged to stay afloat through the jungle. They rose to the challenge by not rocking the canoe.

Life is filled with small moments. The power of a moment can be life-changing for yourself or for others.

## How do you create peak moments?

Let's start with Moments of Elevation.

Dan Heath tells the story of how he and his wife decided to follow the path of totality and drive for several hours to see a total solar eclipse. By the time they got there, the sky was overcast and they could not see the eclipse. It was a long drive. And they had to take the day off work. They could have watched it online.

But it still led to a peak moment. For a second, the world went completely dark – there was total silence from the birds. The insects immediately started buzzing and chirping as if were night time. And then a minute later, the birds were singing again because daytime was magically back. This is a peak moment that will not be forgotten.

Be intentional to create moments of elevation. Don't spend too much time fixing potholes; rather invest more time in building peaks. Don't just aim to do your job and fix the problem. Create peak moments (special, memorable experiences) for customers, clients, colleagues and others.

Here are three ways to build moments of elevation.

*You boost the sensory appeal to engage the senses.*

An example is the Magic Castle Hotel in Los Angeles. On TripAdvisor, the hotel ranks consistently high and gets rave customer reviews. It's right up there with well-known brands like Ritz Carlton and Four Seasons. On its face, the hotel's nothing special. It's a converted two-story apartment building probably built in the 1950s. The heated pool is moderate sized. The hotel, however, creates peak moments that lift the senses. They offer complimentary laundry- they will clean your clothes and wrap them up with a sprig of lavender. There's a red phone by the pool that you pick up and they answer Popsicle Hotline. Within minutes, free popsicles are delivered to you on a silver tray, poolside.

*A second way to build moments of elevation is to raise the stakes - gamify a hard task, make a public announcement of your intentions, create a competition, or set a deadline to add an element of pressure.*

*A third way is to break the script*

Create a strategic surprise. Do something unexpected. Be spontaneous. Disrupt the norms.

Beware of the soul-sucking force of reasonableness. Novelty is memorable.

“We feel most comfortable when things are certain, but we feel most alive when they are not,” says Tania Luna, co-author of the book, *Surprise*. Too much surprise leads to anxiety, but too little leads to disengagement.

Routines, systems and habits allow you to be more productive, efficient and comfortable. They smooth out the ups and downs, the rough edges of life. But peak moments are necessary to avoid creative burnout and burnout in general.

Take the long-delayed vacation. And when you’re on vacation, skip the regular morning routine and do something different. Go for a walk on the beach instead of make your bed. Every so often, you need to reexamine your routines, break them, and redesign them.

The story about Joshie the Giraffe is about breaking the script. A kid left his stuffy Joshie at the Ritz Carlton in Amelia Island, Florida during a summer vacation. His father called the resort after they got home. The staff found Joshie and promised to return him safely. The father asked them to take a photo of Joshie so his son would know he was okay.

A few days later, a package arrived with not only Joshie, but also hotel goodies and a binder with photos of Joshie on vacation at the resort. There was a photo of Joshie lounging by the pool, relaxing at the spa, driving a golf cart on the beach, hanging out with other stuffed animals.

The hotel broke the script of what was expected with a strategic surprise.

Next is Moments of Insight. This is having a sudden realization in your gut; it’s not planned. It’s when you realize you need to shut down or close your business or start a new one, quit your job and move on to another, or break up or ask your long-term partner to marry you.

You can provide experiences and demonstrations that cause people to trip over the truth. This is triggered by clear insight, compressed in time, and discovered by the audience itself. You help others frame and reframe the problem, instead of telling them the solution. You avoid explaining and concluding with spreadsheets, graphs and data. You give the audience opportunities to reach their own insight.

For real change or action to occur, people need to be genuinely convinced, not subtly coerced with rewards or penalties.

You ask questions and, as they answer, they might have an “aha” moment.

Reflecting is not enough, you often have to take a risk and move through the experience to learn critical lessons (sometimes hard ones).

For self-insight, you place yourself in situations that involve risk so you stretch for insight. A business failure can improve your self-insight and teach you something vital.

Moments of Pride involves overcoming a fear, challenge or obstacle. You commemorate achievements and you may do so in three ways. One is recognition – this could be a specific, sincere compliment and personalized gift, which is more meaningful than a generic, employee of the month award. Next is multiply milestones - some milestones are noticed naturally, while others are shortchanged. Break down big ambiguous goal into mini, specific goals or checkpoints along the way. Instead of celebrating only graduation, a student could celebrate when she's read her 50<sup>th</sup> book. A third way is to practice courage by preloading your response in advance, so you know how to best respond when the challenge does arrive.

Then there are Moments of Connection. This is connecting and bonding with others, they are social moments. They can be bright experiences like laughing with friends They can involve a shared purpose and mission with the group. They can involve relatively small struggles and challenges – the kind you get in a spin class, a yoga workshop, or a group meditation.

Sporting events, plays, comedy clubs, cafes and restaurants are venues that trigger moments of connection.

In your relationships, be responsive to deepen the ties. Ask a sincere question and listen for at least 10 minutes to really learn about the person. Taking turns to share will strengthen the connection.

Have you ever randomly talked to a stranger for 30 minutes or so because you happened to be in the same place at the same time? You make a connection, exchange contact information, and follow up to have your first meet up. And you end up creating a real friendship.

This is why remote work and lack of in-person socializing can be very hard for some. Deep human connection is often a key part of peak moments.

When you create peak moments, you design a meaningful and memorable life.

Thank you to the listener who recommended The Power of Moments to me. I think it sums up why we need to break out of our routines every so often and mix things up.

If you have ideas or questions, you may contact me through my website at [dyanwilliams.com](http://dyanwilliams.com). And share this episode with a friend who needs to create more peak moments in life.

Thank you for joining me and stay tuned for the next episode of *The Incrementalist* podcast.

