

HOW TO USE “DEFINING MOMENTS” TO CHANGE DADS’ LIVES

Based on the book:

The Power of Moments
by Chip Heath and Dan Heath



**National
Fatherhood
Initiative®**

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About National Fatherhood Initiative®

Creating a world in which every child has a 24:7 Dad.SM

National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) is the nation's leading non-profit organization working to end father absence. Underlying many of society's most pressing challenges is a lack of father involvement in their children's lives.

Our Mission

NFI works to increase father involvement by equipping communities and human service organizations with the father-engagement training, programs, and resources they need to be father-inclusive.

Our Vision

NFI's vision is that all communities and human service organizations are proactively father-inclusive so that every child has an involved, responsible, and committed father in their lives.

To see more about our mission, our partners, our impact, and how we can help you engage fathers, please visit www.fatherhood.org.

For fatherhood and family resources, including programs, resources, and other helpful materials, please visit www.fathersource.org.

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Introduction

Staying on top of the latest research in the behavioral sciences and **how to apply that research in practical ways** is one of the primary contributions of National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) to building capacity in communities and organizations to more effectively engage fathers in their children’s lives.

Why?

Because increasing father engagement is, at its most basic, about helping dads to change their behavior by increasing pro-fathering awareness, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and habits.

In that vein, this guide introduces you to a book that has the potential to help you have even more impact in your work with dads. The book is called [*The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*](#). **This book has made a huge contribution to our work at NFI.** We’re confident it can contribute to your work, too.

Written by the brothers Chip Heath and Dan Heath*, the New York Times Bestseller draws on research about how to create meaningful, memorable experiences in the lives of individuals—others’ and even your own. The Heath’s point to four ways—what we like to call “levers”—to create such experiences, what they call “defining moments”:

1. Elevation
2. Insight
3. Pride
4. Connection

You can use the insight they share about each lever to create defining moments for dads that can help them become even better dads. A key concept to remember is that a defining moment can use one, two, three, or all four levers, and in any combination.

This free guide describes each of the levers and creative ways you can use them to better serve dads by creating defining moments. But, first, we want you to learn about a powerful formula the Heaths discuss in the book. It’s related to one of the most significant roles you play in serving dads. Use this formula to tap into your motivation to create positive change in dads’ lives and the lives of their children. It will also help get your creative juices flowing on how to leverage the levers!

* Chip Heath is a professor at Stanford School of Business. He teaches on strategy and organizations. Dan Heath is a senior fellow at Duke University’s CASE center, which supports social entrepreneurs. They are also the authors of the bestsellers *Switch* and *Made to Stick*.

Use This Powerful Formula to Mentor Dads

When you work with dads one of the most significant roles you fill is that of a mentor. Whether you work one-on-one with dads or facilitate a group-based fatherhood program, the fact that you mentor dads should guide every action you take.

But what, exactly, is a mentor? And what, exactly, does a mentor do?

A [mentor](#) is a “trusted counselor or guide” who uses direction and support to push his or her mentee to stretch toward self-insight—the proverbial “Aha!” moment.



That doing part of a mentor’s role is described beautifully by the Heaths. Based on a review of research conducted on mentoring in different contexts, they concluded that:

“A mentor’s push leads to a stretch, which creates a moment of self-insight [in the mentee]. What can be counterintuitive about this vision of mentorship is the part about pushing. It requires the mentor to expose the mentee to risk. That can be unnatural; our instinct with the people we care about is to *protect them from risk*. To insulate them.”

The Heaths not only share what a mentor does they also describe the environment in which he or she pushes the mentee to stretch—an environment of high standards (or expectations) and assurance.

They offer this powerful formula for how the right environment and the right action on the part of the mentor creates self-insight in the mentee.

(High Standards + Assurance) + (Direction + Support) = Enhanced Self-Insight

Here’s how to apply that formula in your work with dads.

- (High Standards + Assurance): Say that you expect them to become better dads and that you’re confident that they will as long as they put in the hard work required. Be encouraging and realistic without sugar coating what’s required.
- (Direction + Support): Provide clear, concise direction and support in the areas in which

they need to improve, such as in how to apply new knowledge of effective ways to discipline their children.

- Continually listen for self-insight and ask dads what they've learned so that you can determine whether they do, in fact, experience self-insight. Don't assume that they'll experience it.

Think About It

- Do you see yourself as a mentor to the dads you serve?
- In what ways do you *not apply* this powerful formula? How can you more effectively apply it?

How to Elevate Your Fatherhood Program

Every time we train a group of facilitators on how to effectively run a NFI fatherhood program, we extoll the benefit of holding a graduation ceremony for dads who complete the program.

Why?

Because it creates a meaningful, memorable experience that elevates dads' accomplishment—a time, in the words of the Heaths, to be savored. A moment that makes dads and their loved ones who attend a graduation feel engaged, joyful, amazed, and motivated.



Moments of elevation fall, broadly speaking, into three categories:

1. Social occasions (e.g. a birthday, wedding, and baby shower)
2. High-stake occasions (e.g. participation in a sporting event, being onstage in a play, and giving an important presentation)
3. Spontaneous occasions (e.g. a last-minute road trip and being a new team member “kidnapped” in the middle of the night by teammates for a late-night or early morning meal)

A fatherhood program graduation is an ideal defining moment achieved through elevation. Take a moment to [watch this video](#) of dads who graduated from Father2Child, the fatherhood program of Mental Health America in San Diego, CA. (Father2Child uses NFI's [24:7 Dad®](#) as the foundation of its fatherhood program.) It's a great example of how a graduation creates a meaningful, memorable experience for dads and their loved ones.

You don't have to wait until the end of a fatherhood program, however, to create defining moments. Use what the Heaths call “breaking the script” as dads progress through your program. Breaking the script involves “defying people's expectations of how an experience will unfold.”

How do you break the script?

Here are just a couple of ideas.

- Think of novel activities or tools (e.g. videos) that you can introduce into sessions of your program—activities that aren't part of the curriculum but that will add depth to a piece of knowledge or a skill you want dads to learn.
- Think of novel events that will surprise dads, such as an invitation to a BBQ you'll hold for them and their families or a trip to a museum for dads and their children.

Remember that effective fatherhood programs do more than implement an effective curriculum. They use creativity to create experiences that dads will remember for the rest of their lives.

Think About It

- Does your program have a defining moment for dads?
- What creative ideas can you implement to create defining moments through elevation?

Let the Curriculum Do the Work

Have you experienced a moment in your life when something suddenly came into focus—an “eye-opening” or “Aha!” moment? An experience in which you started to see things as they are, not as you’d like them to be? It’s likely you’ve had a number of such experiences.

These experiences are another kind of “defining moment”: Insight.

When you experience a moment in which you suddenly see things as they are, that’s insight. Many things can elicit insight. It might be something simple, such as a quote or book you read or something said by a mentor. It might be something momentous, such as the birth of your first child or a near-death experience. Regardless of the cause, moments of insight, in the words of the Heaths:

“...rewire our understanding of ourselves or the world. In a few seconds or minutes, we realize something that might influence our lives *for decades* [emphasis added] ... And although these moments of insight often seem serendipitous, we can engineer them—or at the very least, lay the groundwork.”

That, in a nutshell, is what a good fatherhood curriculum does. Its design and content help dads rewire their understanding of themselves as men, dads, and husbands/partners. And it not only has a decades-long impact on fathers. It impacts their children and generations to come.

[Watch this short video](#) to see the insight a dad gained after participating in the fatherhood program of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County (MD), which uses the [24:7 Dad®](#) program.

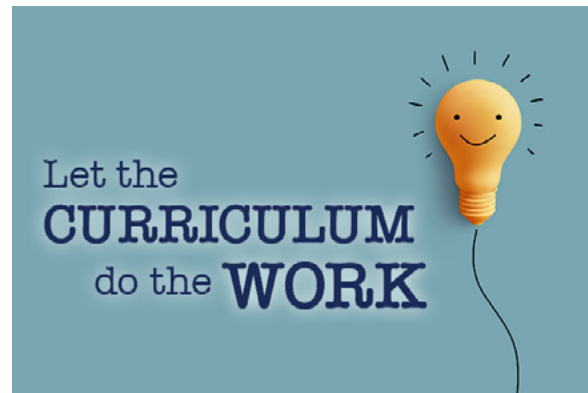
Trip Over the Truth

When we train on one of our fatherhood programs, we spend most of the time observing participants facilitate portions of the program. This part of the training includes time for them to prepare to facilitate their portion. Before we turn them loose to prepare, we give them tips on how to effectively facilitate it.

One of the most vital of these tips is:

Let the curriculum do the work!

The most effective facilitators of any NFI fatherhood program allow the curriculum to rewire dads. They understand that we “engineer” our curricula to cause dads to “trip over the truth.” They understand that when they deliver the sessions in order, cover the content in each session, and follow the procedures for each activity, the curriculum helps dads to see the hard, broad truth that they need to become better men, dads, and husbands/partners. It also helps them see other hard but more specific truths, such as how they often cause or play a major role in the communication problems they have with the mother(s) of their children.



Another tip we give training participants before they prepare to facilitate is:

The best facilitators listen a lot and talk very little.

When you apply the first tip, it's easy to apply the second tip. When you let the curriculum do the work, you'll listen a lot and talk very little!

Think About It

- Do you let your fatherhood curriculum do the work?
- How do you help dads to “trip over the truth?”

Leverage a Deadly Sin to Help Dads

Can you name the seven deadly sins?

Go ahead. Grab a piece of paper and, before you continue to read this post, write them down.

Did you list “pride” as one of them? If you didn’t, that was a huge miss. It is, after all, the sin from which all others arise.

Seriously, though. Is pride really sinful? To answer that question, let’s unpack the meaning of pride.



There are two kinds of pride or, if you prefer, sinful and virtuous kinds. On the one hand, to have pride means that a person is full of themselves, prideful. They overestimate themselves—their awareness, knowledge, skills, and accomplishments. They’re filled with hubris. They’re likely boastful. **This kind of pride often masks low self-worth.**

On the other hand, to have pride means that a person is content with themselves. They don’t overestimate themselves. They’re humble. Their pride arises from praise by others. While they recognize and cherish the awareness, knowledge, and skills they’ve acquired, as well as, their accomplishments, they realize they still have a lot to learn. **This kind of pride often reflects high self-worth.**

Creating experiences in which dads feel this latter kind of pride is how you can leverage pride in your work with dads. These experiences are another kind of “defining moment”: Pride.

Moments of pride, in the words of the Heaths:

“...capture us at our best—showing courage, earning recognition, conquering challenges.”

You can create these moments for dads by employing any or all of the following three tactics:

1. Recognize Dads

This is the easiest of the three tactics to employ. Simply recognize dads’ accomplishments as they become better dads. One of the most common ways fatherhood programs employ this tactic, for example, is to hold a graduation ceremony for dads who complete a program.

Dads might receive praise from staff, community leaders, and their own families for this accomplishment. We highlighted [this graduation ceremony](#) in the section on elevation. One of the great things about a single defining moment is that it can leverage one, two, three, or all four levers—they're not mutually exclusive but reinforcing.

You can also recognize dads at the start of a program by holding, for example, an event for the entire family that praises dads for their commitment to become a better dad. This is an increasingly common way that fatherhood programs employ this tactic.

You don't need to limit recognition to the start or end of a program. **Indeed, you shouldn't limit use of this tactic in those ways.** You should recognize dads' accomplishments along their journey through the program. And that leads me to the second tactic.

2. Multiply Milestones

To leverage this tactic, start by identifying the clear and potential markers of dads' success—the milestones—along the path to completing their work with you. To identify them, the Heaths recommend you ask questions like:

- What's inherently motivating?
- What would be worth celebrating that might take only a few weeks or months of work?
- What's a hidden accomplishment that is worth surfacing and celebrating?

Depending on the work you do with dads, there might be just a few or a lot of them. If you run a group-based fatherhood program, for example, milestones could include coming to the second session, completing one-half of the program, and completing the entire program. If you provide one-on-one case management that involves helping dads obtain a job, milestones might include completing a resume, securing a first job interview, and securing a job.

After you identify your milestones, pick enough of them so that they have a multiplying effect. **They should create enough “small wins” so that each milestone builds on the one before it in a way that deepens the sense of accomplishment.** Dads should be able to hit the milestones frequently enough to keep them motivated to continue on their journey with you.

And that—increased motivation—is the key to the effectiveness of this tactic. One way the Heaths recommend thinking about multiplying milestones so that they increase motivation, and increase excitement about hitting the next one, is to “level up.” **This approach involves increasing the effort it takes to hit the next milestone.** The Heaths use the example of learning to speak Spanish:

- Level 1: Order a meal in Spanish.
- Level 2: Have a simple conversation in Spanish with a taxi driver.
- Level 3: Glance at a Spanish newspaper and understand at least one headline.

- Level 4: Follow the action in a Spanish cartoon.
- Level 5: Read a kindergarten-level book in Spanish.

If you help dads to read more often with their children, for example, you could level up milestones as follows:

- Level 1: Spend one-half hour per week reading to my child.
- Level 2: Spend one hour per week reading to my child.
- Level 3: Spend one hour per week reading to my child and a one-half hour per week with my child reading to me.
- Level 4: Spend two hours per week reading to my child and one hour per week with my child reading to me.

You need to ensure, of course, that there aren't any barriers beyond dads' control that will affect the milestones you use (e.g. limited access to their children), but in multiplying milestones, you can, the Heaths say:

“...transform a long amorphous race into one with many intermediate ‘finish lines.’ As [dads] push through each one, [they] experience a burst of pride as well as a jolt of energy to charge toward the next one.”

3. Practice Courage

Have you ever stood up for someone when no one else did? Have you ever risked your safety—perhaps even your life—to prevent someone harm? If you have, then you know what I mean. Even if you haven't, you can certainly imagine the swell in pride you'd have experienced.

This final tactic is the most challenging of the three to employ, but it can be powerful one.

That's because of the depths of pride created when someone practices courage. The Heaths note that the difficulty in creating moments of courage is that those moments often come unexpectedly. You can't manufacture them. But you can practice them so that when they arrive, you'll be ready.

This practice is the foundation of “exposure therapy” for people who fear something that they shouldn't fear or fear to the degree that they do, such as snakes, heights, and crossing the street alone. The goal of this form of therapy is to help people manage their fear so that it's not debilitating and can even be eliminated. Therapists use a level up approach to expose patients to what they fear. As patients hit each level—each milestone—their fear is reduced.

One of the techniques that exposure therapy relies on, depending on the fear, is role-play.

That's because therapists not only want their patients to manager their fear. They also want them to learn how to act in the moment.

In using NFI's [fatherhood programs](#), one of the fears that facilitators help dads who have poor

relationships with the mothers of their children to manage is encounters with the mothers. (Despite what some these dads might say, some do indeed fear these interactions.) To help these dads learn how to act in those encounters—those moments—facilitators use role-plays that help dads learn how to communicate effectively with mothers in a calm manner and to know when to step away, if necessary, and come back at a later time to resolve an issue between them.

To employ this tactic, identify what the dads you work with fear. **Then identify ways that you can help them practice courage to face those fears.** One of the ways in which we've seen fatherhood programs employ this tactic is to help dads navigate systems that many dads fear, such as the court and child welfare systems. Programs use techniques, including role-plays, to increase dads' knowledge about how to navigate those systems successfully and how to act appropriately and effectively when they're immersed in those systems (e.g. court hearings and home visits with child welfare/protection staff).

Think About It

- How do you use moments of pride in your work with dads?
- Do you use any of the three tactics in this section—recognize dads' accomplishments, multiply dads' milestones, or create moments in which dads can practice courage?

What You Can Learn from a Beatle to Better Serve Dads

“A dream you dream alone is only a dream.
A dream you dream together is reality.”

—John Lennon

Think for a moment about whether you share a dream with a group. If you’re a fan of a particular sports team, you share the dream that your team will win a championship. If you’re a member of a faith community, you share the dream that you can live according to the values of your faith.



How do we come to share a dream? **Through connections that give us shared meaning.** This is true in any endeavor, and that includes helping dads to realize the dream of becoming the best dad possible.

When you work with dads in a group, a vital ingredient in your success revolves around your ability to leverage the power of creating connections among the dads that build shared meaning around what it means to be a good dad.

In this final section, we’ll focus on how you can use connection in your work with dads.

According to the Heaths, moments of connection:

“...deepen our relationships with others...When members of groups grow closer, it’s because of moments that *create shared meaning*.”

You can create these moments for dads by employing any or all of the following three tactics:

1. Create a Synchronized Moment

This is most obvious and easiest of the tactics to employ. Simply bringing dads together on a regular basis to discuss how to become a better dad creates a synchronized moment—a series of moments, actually—in which each dad becomes part of a group of dads who work at the same time and in the same place to pursue a shared dream. It creates a shared experience that emboldens each dad to achieve more than he could on his own.

The best way in which to create a synchronized moment is to use a fatherhood program, such as NFI's [24:7 Dad®](#) program, that brings dads together long enough to create a powerful shared experience. After dads complete a fatherhood program, you can create shorter synchronized moments that build on that shared experience. You can run one-day or weekend-long workshops on topics not covered in the fatherhood program. You can hold events for dads or for dads and their families.

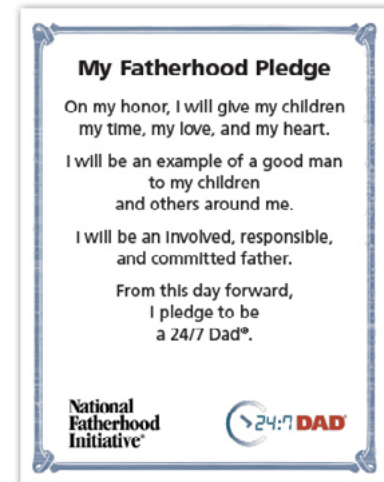
2. Invite Shared Struggle

Unless the dads you work with are good dads already, it's undoubtedly clear to you that they struggle to be good dads. This is their shared struggle. You don't have to manufacture it. **What you must do, however, is *invite them to overcome their shared struggle*.**

The beauty of a group-based fatherhood program is that, as it progresses, dads learn that they are not the only dad that struggles to be a good dad. Simply being in the same room with other dads who face this struggle drives that point home. To invite them, however, requires a specific message that binds them in overcoming the struggle.

To deliver that message, NFI's fatherhood programs use a fatherhood pledge. Dads recite the 24:7 Dad® Pledge below, for example, at the start and end of every session.

The pledge delivers a consistent message every week that focuses on the shared dream they all share—to become a 24:7 Dad—and, thus, overcome the struggle together. If you don't use a NFI fatherhood program, ensure that you have a way to deliver a specific, consistent message that delivers this invitation.



3. Connect to Meaning

To connect dads to what it means to be good dad, you must connect them with their purpose in being a good dad. Purpose, in the words of the Heaths, is defined as:

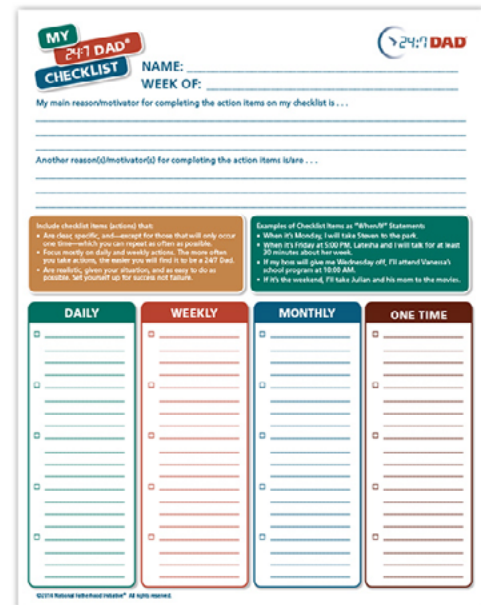
“...the sense that you are contributing to others, that your work has broader meaning.”

In this context, the “others” and the “work” are children and fathering, respectively. (“Others” could also include the mother and the other dads in the group.)

It's not enough for dads to develop a passion for their fatherhood role. It's even more important that they connect to a higher purpose. Your role is to cultivate their purpose. How? **By employing the other three levers!** As mentioned in a previous section, a single event can leverage any one or all of the levers.

The fatherhood pledges in NFI programs certainly contribute to cultivating a higher purpose. But each dad must connect to his own purpose. NFI's programs include other tools that help facilitators to cultivate each dad's purpose. NFI's [24:7 Dad®](#) program, for example, uses the 24:7 Dad® Checklist shown here.

This checklist helps dads customize how they will become a better dad. At the top of the checklist, dads identify what motivates them to overcome their struggle, which cultivates their purpose. Then, based on what they learned during each session, they identify specific ways (e.g. activities) to be a better dad. They can experiment between sessions to identify ways that are realistic given their situation. As they share what worked and didn't work at the start of subsequent sessions, they can get feedback from the facilitator and other dads, input that also cultivates their purpose. They can also change their purpose as they learn more about themselves as men, dads, and husbands/partners.



The image shows a '24:7 Dad Checklist' form. At the top, it says 'MY 24:7 DAD® CHECKLIST' and 'NAME: WEEK OF:'. Below this, there are two lines for 'My main reason/motivator for completing the action items on my checklist is...' and 'Another reason(motivator) for completing the action items is/are...'. There are two boxes with instructions: 'Include checklist items (things) that: 1. Are clear, specific, and-avoid the ones that will only occur once (something you can repeat as often as possible). 2. Focus mostly on daily and weekly actions. The more often you take actions, the easier you will find it to be a 24:7 Dad. 3. Are realistic given your situation, and as easy to do as possible. Set yourself up for success, not failure.' and 'Examples of Checklist Items as "When/If" Statements: 1. When it's Monday, I will take a shower in the park. 2. When it's Friday at 5:00 PM, Latasha and I will talk for at least 20 minutes about homework. 3. If my boy will give me Blackboard off, I'll attend Vanessa's school program at 10:00 AM. 4. If it's the weekend, I'll take Julian and his mom to the movies.' Below these are four columns: 'DAILY', 'WEEKLY', 'MONTHLY', and 'ONE TIME', each with a list of checkboxes and lines for writing.

If you don't use an NFI program, ensure that the program you use has a specific way to cultivate each dad's purpose. If it doesn't, create an activity that connects them to it and that reinforces it throughout the program.

Think About It

- How do you use moments of connection in your work with dads?
- Do you use any of the three tactics in this section—created a synchronized moment, invite shared struggle, or connect to meaning?

Conclusion

We hope that this free guide has gotten your creative juices flowing on how to use Elevation, Insight, Pride, and Connection to create defining moments for dads.

Please share this guide with your co-workers, colleagues, and anyone who is interested in helping dads to become more involved, responsible, and committed in the lives of their children. And don't hesitate to access our other free guides and resources in our Free Learning Center at fatherhood.org/free-resources-main.

All of us at NFI wish you the very best in your work with dads.