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*The Defining Decade: Why your twenties matter- and how to make the most of them now*

In today’s day and age people keep saying that “thirty-is-the new-twenty” and that our twentysomething years don’t matter. Many people are settling down into their careers and relationships much later and are using their twenties as more of a trial and error period- or an extension of college. However, clinical psychologist Dr. Meg Jay argues in her book, *The Defining Decade: Why your twenties matter- and how to make the most of them now* that our twenties are actually the most impactful decade of our lives. She divides the book into three main categories: Work, Love, and The Brain & The Body and then dives deeply into each section. Dr. Jay uses research and clinical experiences to break down societal standards about the millennial lifestyle and to prove that our twenties matter.

Dr. Meg Jay first opens with “Work” and the importance of being serious about your career in your early twenties. Getting started earlier, rather than later because, “Eighty percent of life’s most defining moments take place by thirty-five.” (Jay, p. xiv). One suggestion or concept that really struck me was “The Strength of Weak Ties” and the unique value of people we do not know very well. Strong ties are people we have a lot in common with such as our family, friends, roommates or partners. These people often offer us a lot of support, but they are not the people who will help us get ahead in our careers. Strong ties are often too similar to who we are and cannot offer new insight or connections. However, weak ties are people such as former employers, professors or anyone we have connected with prior but do not know very well. Weak ties provide us with something new, something different. Weak ties can provide insight from a different prospective than our own and can also provide different personal connections. Your weak ties know different people than you do. Dr. Jay states, “weak ties are like bridges you cannot see all the way across, so there is no telling where they might lead” (p.21). Due to the nature of “weak ties” you do not know much about them or where they could lead you and according to Dr. Jay, more likely than not, “weak ties are the people who will better your life right now- and again and again in the years to come- if you know what you want.” (Jay, p. 29). I found the last part of that sentence extremely intriguing. After feeling so discouraged about my lack of close connections in the public relations industry, Dr. Jay’s insight on weak ties gave me great motivation once I began to think about the amount of “weak ties” I had and how beneficial this could be for me. However, those six words, “if you know what you want” are key. It became clear to me that it is essential if you are reaching out to “weak ties” that you need a goal in mind and a reason for contacting them. This made me sit down and think about what I really wanted, my goals and how I was going to get there. I needed to plan, I needed to organize myself, and I needed to make decisions.

The jam experiment is a psychological study done by a former Stanford University student named Sheena Iyengar. The study was done in order to understand how people make choices. In two separate scenarios at a grocery store, customers were offered samples of jam. In the first instance, customers were offered six different flavors of jam and the second time they were offered 24 different flavors. The results showed that more customers were attracted to the stand with 24 options, but customers were more likely to purchase the jam when given only six choices because they felt less overwhelmed. When planning your life, it is important to narrow down your choices, so you can eventually decide which way to go. If you attempt to wait for a career to come to you, then 24 different paths could be open, but you will never actually choose one or excel at one. Circling back to reaching out to your weak ties, once you really know what you want whether that be an information interview or a spot at in the C-suite, you must make decisions.

We must be forward thinkers. “Twentysomething plans help us think across the years and decades ahead.” (Jay, p.140) Our twenties are setting the stage for the rest of our lives. Dr. Jay talks about how aa client of hers wishes his dad told him “You can’t pull some great career out of a hat in your thirties. You’ve got to start in your twenties.” (Jay, p. 58) It is incredibly interesting that Jay convinces her readers that starting a career in your twenties is essential by backing it up with client meetings and also neuroscience. Jay explains that the brain caps off its second- and final- growth spurt in your twenties. She explains how the frontal lobe of the brain works and how we process information all to convince us to be forward thinking and proactive. She claims that

“the post-twentysomething brain is still plastic, of course, but the opportunity is that never again in our lifetime will the brain offer up countless new connections and see what we make of them. Never again will we be so quick to learn new things.” (Jay, pg. 141)

Jay continues this section of the book by talking about how our twentysomething years are a time of great risk but also of great opportunities that we need to take advantage of. Never again in our lives will it be as easy to shape and become the people we hope to be. The risky part would be that we don’t value that fact and don’t act now. Jay further explains that if we don’t act we become more and more doubtful of ourselves. Action creates confidence and courage. Action creates experience. Experience eventually leads to mastery.

Although I only mentioned a few messages and lessons taught by Dr. Meg Jay through her stories of patients, experiments, studies and personal experiences, many of them relate not only to public relations management but also career management and more importantly, life management. When contacting weak ties, you are taking *control* of your situation and potentially creating a career path for yourself. However, before contacting them you must *plan* what you want to say and *organize* yourself, your skills and your emotions to know what direction you want to go. The Jam experiment obviously touches on decision making, which is a function of planning. However, it is important to remember bounded rationality. Decision makers are limited by their values and unconscious reflexes, skill and habits. It is important to be aware of the life decisions you make, or potentially do not make, in your twentysomethings. Maybe we need those weak ties there to pull us out of bad habits or poor unconscious reflexes. And lastly, all the steps we take in our twentysomethings need to be deliberate. Many twentysomethings often settle for satisficing. We hop from job to job, or relationship to relationship saying, “this will do for now” and then all of a sudden time has flown and we are suddenly thirtysomething and feeling incredibly behind.

*The Defining Decade* was one of my favorite books I have read all year. Dr. Meg Jay is a psychologist and she impressed me by making me, as a reader, feel like I was walking through a therapy session with her the entire book. Her tone was stern yet supportive. She often made me feel confident but then also reminded me to watch myself. She pointed out things that twentysomethings often like to ignore but gave readers solutions to their issues all at the same time. It was incredibly easy to understand, never felt dry and always felt relatable. I don’t only suggest to my classmates to read this but anyone my age that is feeling confused or even incredibly on track. There is something for all twentysomethings to learn in this book.