

## IDENTITY CAPITAL

Life looks different right now from anything any of us have experienced. We are in a time of confusion, but also a time of great opportunity. For many, this time has created a desire to self-reflect. When we really look at the things we care about, and understand what those things are, we can create plans to invest in them and move ourselves towards our goals. By pursuing our goals and becoming more fully who we want to be, we become more resilient, especially in confusing or difficult times. This pursuit towards a goal is investing in your identity; investing in who you are and who you want to be. The following guide describes how to invest in yourself through a concept called *identity capital*.

### DEFINING IDENTITY CAPITAL

**Who am I? Where am I heading? How do I get there? These are questions we all ask ourselves. Understanding your identity capital helps you answer these questions for yourself.**

In her book *The Defining Decade*, Meg Jay, Ph.D. posits that who we are is built over time, piece-by-piece, by the things in our personal and professional lives that we choose to develop. She describes these as “investments that we make in ourselves, the things we do well enough, or long enough, that they become a part of who we are.” **Identity capital is what we metaphorically use to purchase jobs and relationships.** Everyone adds to their identity capital in their own unique way. Some choose carefully and focus on the skills and traits that they want to develop in themselves. Others take a wider approach and just try everything that they can, adding identity capital in wide strokes.

#### **Identity**

Your identity is the way in which you understand yourself and describe who you are to yourself and others.

**Your identity capital is your story.**

### BUILDING IDENTITY CAPITAL

When you can find the through-line between the personal and professional development choices that you’ve made, you can clearly see your *why*. You will be able to better follow the story of your own experiences and make intentional choices

on how you take your next steps. Meg Jay also writes that “those who can tell a good story about who they are and what they want lead over those who can’t.”

**When you understand your story and the elements that have formed who you are, you will be able to intentionally make choices that progress you further along on your career path.**

It’s the story you put out into the world, and that story is something that you get to write. You get to choose what you invest in and how your story reads both to yourself and to the world around you. If you have not thought about your story before, or have questions about how you would start to do so, try [writing your story](#) to craft your understanding of your *why* and your *identity*.

The things listed below are some of, but definitely not all of, the ways in which our identity capital is built. The more of this capital that we build, in say, a degree you might get, and a hobby you pursue, the more doors will likely open for you.



The things that we put our time and energy into (**identity capital**) become what we are known for (**our identity**). We

*create* the story we believe about ourselves *and* the story that others see in us.

## INVESTING IN YOUR WHY

What you spend your time doing, what you choose to invest in, is your why so make sure that you choose intentionally.

If you're saying to yourself "I don't invest in my why" then let us first of all, ask ourselves what the reason is for that, and then second, how we can change that.

Once you start to invest in that thing that motivates you, it will put you on a path towards it.

*He (or she) who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how.*

*-Frederick Nietzsche*

This is true personally *and* professionally. If you KNOW that you want to be something, if you KNOW your why is to do a particular job, invest in that thing! Let's say you believe in your heart your why is to be a researcher. You really want to make the world a better place through science. Yet, you found yourself on a life track and you're a copy editor. You can ALWAYS invest in your why. Take online classes, take EEP classes. Spend time with scientists, go to science events. Volunteer! If you know this is your why, and you invest in it, you will inevitably put yourself on a path towards making that happen for yourself.

ACTIVITY: Navigate to this article **51 Ways to Build Identity Capital** (<https://gentwenty.com/51-ways-to-build-identity-capital/>). Write down your top five. Make a plan to start working towards those 5 ideas.

## FURTHER READING

For methods on how to write your story, read the [Keep Growing: Story Development](#) document.