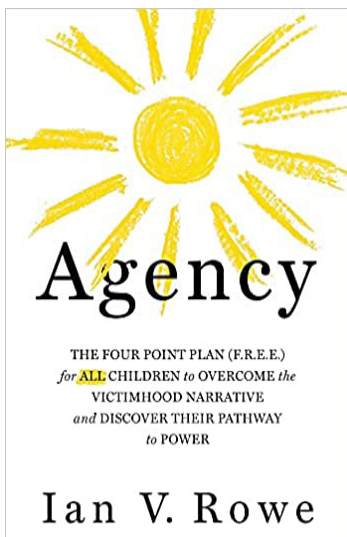


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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Agency

THE NUTSHELL

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Introduction

What is agency? My short definition is that it is the force of your free will guided by moral discernment. Agency is learning to see ourselves not as victims of our circumstances, but rather as architects of our own better futures, and do so even in the face of real obstacles.

To usher in a new era of American agency in which the rising generation becomes the master of their own fate, we must simultaneously launch a movement that encourages young people of all races to adopt a new cultural norm concerning education, entrepreneurship, hard work, faith, responsible parenthood, and the timing of strong family formation.

PART 1: WHAT IS AGENCY AND WHY DO WE NEED IT TODAY?

I run high-performing public charter schools in the heart of the South Bronx in New York City because I believe agency is not some abstract concept. I believe agency metaphorically serves as a shield and a sword to combat helplessness. It is a power that can be conferred on young people that allows them to shape their individual response to a challenging environment or circumstance.

Agency is accessible to everyone. But too often young people's efforts to develop agency are thwarted, sometimes tragically, by the very people and institutions with the power and the moral responsibility to propel their lives forward.

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PART 2: HOW MY STORY OF DISCOVERING THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE OPENED THE DOOR FOR ME TO VIEW AGENCY AS THE PATH FORWARD FOR YOUNG AMERICANS.

I am convinced that our schools are necessary, but not sufficient, to fully empower kids to reach their potential. If we truly want our students to break the cycle of poverty, we need to do more. In addition to educating our students in science, math, history, literature, and the arts, it is equally important to educate our middle- and high-school students in the proper timing, sequencing, and effects of key life events during the transition to adulthood.

Those of us who are committed to achieving better outcomes for the next generation cannot succeed unless we confront the decline in family stability. The staggering numbers of children born outside marriage—and the increased likelihood of negative consequences—are precisely why the education reform community must construct a curriculum and culture that teaches the next generation about family formation and the sequence of personal choices that give students (and their children) the best shot at life fulfillment.

PART 3: HOW FREE CAN USHER IN A NEW “AGE OF AGENCY” FOR YOUNG AMERICANS

Of course, young people do not cultivate personal agency on their own. To develop the capacity for moral discernment and their ability to create good or bad outcomes in their lives, they must engage what I call the four building blocks of agency:

F is for Family—not the family that you are *from*, but the healthy family you will *form* in the future by understanding the power of the Success Sequence. The type of family that has been found to be most beneficial for the prospects of young adults and their future children is an intact, married, two-parent household. It bears repeating that 97 percent of millennials will flourish financially if they earn at least a high school degree, find full-time work, and marry before having any children—in that order.

R is for Religion—which may be declining among young Americans, but it is still the case that a personal faith commitment can be a force for good in one’s own life and provide the support and encouragement you receive from faith-based institutions as you learn how to master your own destiny. Studies have shown that religious attendance is associated with a lower likelihood of divorce and family disruption among married couples. Embracing religion can be an important step in leading a self-determined life of human flourishing, forging stronger family bonds, and enjoying better social connectedness.

E is the Education—the education you earn—the learning you yourself are responsible for—the knowledge and skills you accrue that can never be taken away. This calls on each young person to commit to study hard and meet the highest educational expectations. It is therefore essential that these students and their families have a wide range of high-quality education options to choose from that promote the academic and character development required to empower young people to make reasoned and morally uplifting decisions in their own lives.

E is for Entrepreneurship—the entrepreneurial mind-set you cultivate to create opportunity and wealth for yourself and others as someone who owns his or her own future. Entrepreneurship is the exact opposite of learned helplessness. It is the force that enables young people to become problem solvers when obstacles arise. By embracing this concept, you can better envision yourself as an owner, a steward, a curator of your own life: someone who has the

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ability to handle temporary setbacks and who can leverage the factors within your control to reshape outcomes, even when conditions may suggest otherwise.

Individual choices do make a difference. Industriousness, self-discipline and a strong work ethic matter—and they carry with them an undeniable dignity. Imagine if, instead of the “no matter what, you are disadvantaged” message, young people of all races understood that nothing is predetermined in their lives and that they themselves have the greatest influence over their own futures.