



Made to Stick

Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die

By Chip Heath & Dan Heath, Random House, 2008

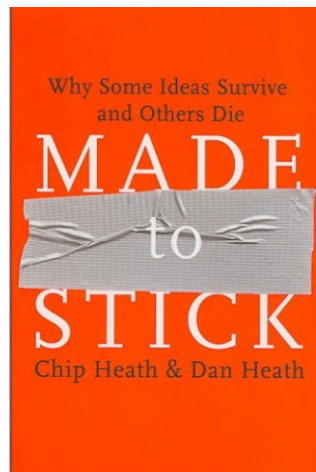
What sticks?

Whether you're a CEO or a full-time mom, you've got ideas that you need to communicate: a new product coming to market, a strategy you want to sell your boss, values you are trying to instil in your children. But it's hard – fiendishly so – to transform the way people think and act.

Mark Twain once observed, "A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on." His observation rings true: Urban legends, conspiracy theories, and bogus public-health scares circulate effortlessly.

Meanwhile, people with

important ideas – businesspeople, teachers, politicians, journalists, and others – struggle to make their ideas "stick."



About Chip and Dan



Chip Heath is a Professor of Organization al Behavior in the Graduate School of

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Why You Need This Book

"Made to Stick" is a book that will transform the way you communicate ideas. It's a fast-paced tour of success stories (and failures): the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who drank a glass of bacteria to prove a point about stomach ulcers; the charities who make use of the "Mother Teresa Effect"; the elementary-school teacher whose simulation actually prevented racial prejudice. Provocative, eye-opening, and often surprisingly funny, "Made to Stick" shows us how we can apply these rules to making our own messages stick.

In this book, you'll learn the six key qualities of an idea that is made to stick: Simplicity, Unexpectedness, Concreteness, Credibility, Emotional, and Stores – the SUCCES framework.

Principle 1: Simplicity

How do we find the essential core of our ideas? A successful defense lawyer says, "If you argue ten points, even if each is a good point, when they get back to the jury room they won't remember any."

To strip an idea down to its core, we must be masters of exclusion. We must relentlessly

prioritize. Saying something short is not the mission – sound bites are not the ideal.

Proverbs are the ideal. We must create ideas that are both simple and profound. The Golden Rule is the ultimate model of simplicity: a one-sentence statement so profound that an individual could spend a lifetime learning to follow it.

"Finding the core" means stripping an idea down to its most critical essence. To get to the core, we've got to weed out superfluous and tangential elements.

But that's the easy part. The hard part is weeding out ideas that may be really important but just aren't the most important idea.

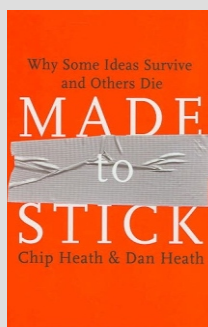
The Army Commander's Intent forces its officers to highlight the most important goal of an operation. The value of the Intent comes from its singularity. You can't have five North Stars, you can't have five "most important goals," and you can't have five Commander's Intents.

Finding the core is analogous to writing the Commander's Intent – it's about discarding a lot of great insights in order to let the most important insight shine.

The French aviator and author Antoine de Saint-Exupery once offered a definition of engineering elegance: "A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

A designer of simple ideas should aspire to the same goal: knowing how much can be wrung out of an idea before it begins to lose its essence.

About the Book



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Principle 2: Unexpectedness

How do we get our audience to pay attention to our ideas, and how do we maintain their interest when we need time to get the ideas across?

We can use surprise – an emotion whose function is to increase alertness and cause focus – to grab people’s attention. And for our idea to endure, we must generate interest and curiosity.

Nordstrom is a department store known for outstanding customer service. That extra service comes at a price: Nordstrom can be an expensive place to shop. Yet many people are willing to pay higher prices precisely because Nordstrom makes shopping so much more pleasant.

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, in their book “Built to Last”, describe stories told at Nordstrom about unexpected service by employees, who are known within the firm as “Nordies”:

- The Nordie who ironed a new shirt for a customer who needed it for a meeting that afternoon;
- The Nordie who cheerfully gift wrapped products a customer bought at Macy’s;
- The Nordie who warmed customers’ cars in winter while they finished shopping;
- The Nordie who made a last-minute delivery of party clothes to a frantic hostess;
- And even the Nordie who refunded money for a set of tire chains – although Nordstrom doesn’t sell tire chains.

Principle 3: Concreteness

Jane Elliot, an elementary-school teacher in Iowa, found herself trying to explain Martin Luther King, Jr.’s death to her classroom of third-graders. She aimed to make prejudice tangible to her students. At the start of class, she divided the students into two groups: brown-eyed kids and blue-eyed kids. The groups were separated. She made a shocking announcement that the brown-eyed kids were superior to blue-eyed kids.

Elliot was shocked at how quickly the class was transformed. She watched those kids turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating third-graders. Even their performance on academic tasks changed.

Elliot’s simulation made prejudice concrete – brutally concrete. It also had an enduring impact on the students’ lives. She turned prejudice into an experience.

How do we make our ideas clear? We must explain our ideas in terms of human actions, in terms of sensory information. This is where so much business communication goes awry. Mission statements, synergies, strategies, visions – they are often ambiguous to the point of being meaningless. Naturally sticky ideas are full of concrete images, because our brains are wired to remember concrete data.

Speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our idea will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience.

Principle 4: Credibility

How do we get people to believe our ideas? We’ve got to find a source of credibility to draw on. Sometimes the wellsprings are dry, Barry



Marshall discovered in his quest to cure the ulcer. Drawing on external credibility didn't work. The endorsement of his supervisors and his institution in Perth didn't seem to be enough.

Drawing on internal credibility didn't work either – his careful marshalling of data and detail still didn't help him clear the bar. In the end, what he did was draw on the audience's credibility – he essentially "modelled" a testable credential by gulping a glass of bacteria. The implicit challenge was: See for yourself – if you drink this gunk, you'll get an ulcer, just like I did.

It's not always obvious which wellspring of credibility we should draw from. What Marshall showed so brilliantly was perseverance – knowing when it was time to draw on a different well.

It's inspirational to know that a medical genius like Marshall had to climb over the same hurdles with his idea as we often have to climb with ours – and to see that he eventually prevailed, to the benefit of us all.

Principle 5: Emotional

Dan Syrek is the nation's leading researcher on litter. In the 1980s, Syrek and his Sacramento-based organization were hired by the state of Texas. Syrek knew that what Texas needed to do was reach people who weren't inclined to shed tears over roadside trash. Designing an antilitter campaign based on self-interest wasn't likely to work with this group. They called their target market Bubba. Syrek knew that the best way to change Bubba's behaviour was to convince him that people like him did not litter. Based on his

research, the Texas Department of Transportation approved a campaign built around the slogan "Don't Mess with Texas."

The campaign was an instant success. Within a few months of the launch, an astonishing 73 percent of Texans polled could recall the message and identify it as an antilitter message. Within one year, litter had declined 29 percent.

How can we make people care about our ideas? We get them to take off their Analytical Hats. We create empathy for specific individuals. We show how our ideas are associated with things that people already care about. We appeal to their self-interest, but we also appeal to their identities – not only to the people they are right now, but also to the people they would like to be.

Principle 6: Stories

In the late 1990s, the fast-food giant Subway launched a campaign to tout the healthiness of a new line of sandwiches. It was focused on the remarkable story of a college student named Jared Fogle.

Jared had a serious weight problem. By his junior year in college, he had ballooned to 425 pounds. After three months of the "Subway diet," as he called it, he stepped on the scale. It read 330 pounds. He had dropped almost 100 pounds in three months by eating at Subway.

Despite the hurdles - an initial refusal of Subway's marketing director to unveil the tale of Jared since in his experience, "fast foods can't do healthy"; the director's initial decision to focus on the taste of Subway's



sandwiches; and problems regarding who would pay for the Jared commercials - the campaign was a stunning success.

The Jared story has a morsel of simulation value. Even skinny people who aren't interested in dieting will be inspired by Jared's tale. He fought big odds and prevailed through perseverance. And this is the second major payoff that stories provide: inspiration. Inspiration drives action, as does simulation.

Note how well the Jared story does on the Success checklist:

- **It's simple:** Eat subs and lose weight. (It may be oversimplified, frankly, since the meatball sub with extra mayo won't help you lose weight.)

- **It's unexpected:** A guy lost a ton of weight by eating fast food! This story violates our schema of fast food, a schema that's more consistent with the picture of a fat Jared than a skinny Jared.

- **It's concrete:** Think of the oversized pants, the massive loss of girth, the diet composed of particular sandwiches. It's much more like an Aesop fable than an abstraction.

- **It's credible:** It has the same kind of antiauthority truthfulness that we saw with the Pam Laffin antismoking campaign. The guy who wore 60-inch pants is giving us diet advice!

- **It's emotional:** We care about an individual, Jared, than about a mass. And it taps into profound areas of Maslow's hierarchy - it's about a guy

who reached his potential with the help of a sub shop.

- **It's a story:** Our protagonist overcomes big odds to triumph. It inspires the rest of us to do the same.

Stories naturally embody most of the SUCCESS framework. Stories are almost always Concrete. Most of them have Emotional and Unexpected elements. The hardest part of using stories effectively is making sure that they're Simple - that they reflect your core message. It's not enough to tell a great story; the story has to reflect your agenda. You don't want a general lining up his troops before battle to tell a Connection plot story.

Stories have the amazing dual power to simulate and to inspire. And most of the time we don't even have to use much creativity to harness these powers - we just need to be ready to spot the good ones that life generates every day.

Making Strategies Stick: Three Principles

The trick to talking strategy is making strategic ideas sticky. Here are a few tips for making your strategy stick with people:

1. **Be concrete.** The beauty of concrete language - language that is specific and sensory - is that everyone understands your message in a similar way.

2. **Say something unexpected.** If a strategy is common sense, don't waste your time communicating it. (If it's common sense, why bother?) It's critical, though, for leaders to identify the



uncommon sense in their strategies. What's new about the strategy? What's different?

3. Tell stories. A good story is better than an abstract strategy statement. Remember, you can reconstruct the moral from the story, but you can't reconstruct the story from the moral.

Final Words

Regardless of your level of "natural creativity," this book will show you how a little focused effort can make almost any idea stickier, and a sticky idea is an idea that is more likely to make a difference.

All you need to do is understand the six principles of powerful ideas!

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