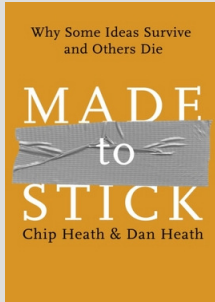


executive summaries for leaders

"knowledge to lead"



Authors: Chip Heath and Dan Heath
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Meet the Authors



The Heath brothers have solid credentials. Chip, a Ph.D. psychologist, is a professor of organizational behavior in Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. His course, "How to Make Ideas Stick," has been taught to hundreds of students including managers, teachers, doctors, journalists, venture capitalists, product designers and film producers.

Dan is a consultant at Duke Corporate Education, ranked by Business Week and the Financial Times as the world's No. 1 provider of custom executive education. A Harvard MBA, he also conducted field research and developed cases with several professors in Harvard's Entrepreneurial Management unit.

MADE to STICK: *Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*

Overview

This is a deceptively wise book. Well-written. Engaging. Carefully organized. Full of richly woven success stories highlighting everyday communication challenges.

The genius is in how the authors blend two uncommon features:

- Savvy insight into qualities that separate "sticky," or clear and memorable, communications from run-of-the-mill efforts.
- Compelling advice on how to apply these insights to stake your claim — with precision and impact — in today's marketplace of ideas.

"We wanted to take apart sticky ideas — both natural and created — and figure out what makes them stick," say brothers Chip Heath and Dan Heath.

They pay tribute to Malcolm Gladwell, the best-selling author who made "stickiness" a defining phrase in his book, *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell focused on what makes social epidemics leap from small groups to big groups. "Our interest," say the *Made to Stick* authors, "is in how effective ideas are constructed."

The book is organized around six core principles labeled the **SUCCESS** framework:

- **Simplicity.** Prioritize and exclude relentlessly to find your core message.
- **Unexpectedness.** For ideas to endure, generate interest and curiosity with unexpected information.
- **Concreteness.** To make ideas clear, explain them in terms of human actions and sensory information.
- **Credibility.** To build confidence, help people test your ideas for themselves.
- **Emotions.** To get people to care about your ideas, make them feel something.
- **Stories.** Tell stories that help your audience mentally rehearse for real experiences that might happen in the future.

executive summary

MADE to STICK: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die **by Chip Heath and Dan Heath**

1. Simple

It's hard to make ideas stick in a noisy, unpredictable, chaotic environment. As Army officers know, no battle plan survives contact with the enemy. In business, no sales plan survives contact with the customer. In the classroom, no lesson plan survives contact with teenagers.

If we are to succeed, the first step is this: Be simple. Weed out superfluous and tangential elements, even the really important ones that aren't the most important.

In the Army, for example, the Commander's Intent is the organizing device and communications tool that drives home this point. It requires officers to highlight the most important goal of an operation. "You may start off trying to fight your plan, but the enemy gets a vote," says Colonel Tom Kolditz, head of the behavioral sciences department at the United States Military Academy. "Unpredictable things happen — the weather changes, a key asset is destroyed, the enemy responds in a way you don't expect."

To be sure, the broader planning process is important because it forces people to think through the right issues. However, the Commander's Intent is a crucial follow-on to final plans. It is a crisp plain-talk statement that appears at the top of every order. And it never specifies so much detail that it risks being rendered obsolete by unpredictable events.

"You can lose the ability to execute the original plan, but you never lose the responsibility of executing the intent," says Col. Kolditz. Commander's Intent manages to align the behavior of the soldiers at all levels without requiring play-by-play instructions.

At Southwest Airlines, longtime CEO Herb Kelleher framed the Commander's Intent this way: "We are THE low-fare airline." This has been Southwest's strategy from its beginnings in the 1970s. Employees are renowned for executing it well, and Southwest has delivered remarkably consistent profitability. Any suggestion that might threaten Southwest's position as "THE low-fare airline" is carefully scrutinized, and usually rejected. Suggestions to reduce costs are eagerly welcomed, and many embraced.

Simple messages help people avoid bad choices by reminding them of what's important. They are *core* and *compact*. **If a message can't be used to make predictions or decisions, it is without value, no matter how accurate or comprehensive it is.**

2. Unexpected

How do I get people's attention? Just as crucially, how do I keep it?

The most basic way to get someone's attention is this: Break a pattern. We can't succeed if our messages don't break through the clutter to get people's attention. Humans adapt incredibly quickly to consistent patterns. Our brain is designed to be keenly aware of changes. Smart product designers are well aware of this tendency. They make sure that, when products require users to pay attention, something changes.

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John F. Kennedy's unexpected goal in 1961 for the U.S. putting a man on the moon "and returning him safely to earth, before this decade is out," gave us a sudden, dramatic glimpse of how the world might unfold. It was audacious and provocative, but not paralyzing. Any engineer who heard the "man on the moon" speech must have begun brainstorming immediately: "Well, first we'd need to solve this problem, then we'd need to develop this technology, then ..."

If you want your ideas to be stickier, you've got to break someone's guessing machine and then fix it. But in surprising people, in breaking their guessing machines, how do we avoid gimmicky surprise? The easiest way is to target an aspect of your audience's guessing machines that relates to your core message.

A good process for making your ideas stickier is:

- Identify the central message you need to communicate — find the core.
- Figure out what is counterintuitive about the message — i.e., what are the unexpected implications of your core message? Why aren't they already apparent?
- Communicate your message in a way that breaks your audience's guessing machines along the critical, counterintuitive dimension. Then, once their guessing machines have failed, help them refine their machines.

Common sense is the enemy of sticky messages. When messages sound like common sense, they float gently in one ear and out the other. If I already intuitively "get" what you're trying to tell me, why should I obsess about remembering it? The danger, of course, is that what sounds like common sense often isn't. It's your job, as a communicator, to expose the parts of your message that are uncommon sense.

What Makes People Interested? A Knowledge Gap

Psychologists have studied for decades the question of what sparks and elevates interest in a situation. The most comprehensive answer suggests that **our curiosity rises when we feel a gap in our knowledge.**

This insight from George Lowenstein, a behavioral economist at Carnegie Mellon University, adds that gaps cause a kind of pain. When we want to know something but don't, it's like having an itch that we need to scratch. To take away the pain, we need to fill the knowledge gap.

According to Lowenstein, first highlight some specific knowledge that your audience is missing. Pose a question or puzzle that confronts people with a gap in their knowledge. We can point out that someone else knows something they don't.

Mysteries also are powerful devices for creating knowledge gaps. By posing a question, says Robert Cialdini, a social psychologist at Arizona State University, you can describe a state of affairs that seems to make no sense. Then you invite readers or an audience into the material as a way of solving the mystery.

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Mystery is created not from an unexpected moment but from an unexpected journey. We know where we're headed — we want to solve the mystery — but we're not sure how we'll get there. We jump from fleeting surprise to enduring interest.

3. Concrete

Language is often abstract, but life is not abstract. Even the most abstract business strategy must eventually show up in the tangible actions of human beings. It's easier to understand those tangible actions than to understand an abstract strategy statement.

Aesop's Fables are examples of some of the stickiest stories in world history. We've all heard Aesop's greatest hits: "The Tortoise and the Hare," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," "The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs" and "Fox and the Grapes."

Abstraction makes it harder to understand an idea and to remember it. It also makes it harder to coordinate our activities with others; they may interpret the abstraction in very different ways. Concreteness helps us avoid these problems. This is perhaps the most important lesson Aesop can teach us.

Concrete Examples Boost East Asian Math Students

East Asian schools are widely known in the United States for training students highly skilled in math. The stereotype of East Asian schools is that they operate with almost robotic efficiency. Americans think East Asian students outperform U.S. students through rote mechanics and memorization, not creativity. The truth is almost exactly the opposite.

Teachers in Japan, for instance, often explain abstract mathematical concepts by emphasizing things that are concrete and familiar: "You had 100 yen but then you bought a notebook for 70 yen. How much money do you still have?" A teacher in Taiwan poses this problem: "Originally there are three kids playing ball. Two more came later, and then one more joined them. How many are playing now?" As she talks, she draws stick figures on the board and writes down the equation $3 + 2 + 1$.

Researchers call this style of questioning Computing in Context. It is pretty much the opposite of "rote recall." And, contrary to stereotypes held in the West, researchers found in this 1993 study of ten schools in Japan, ten in Taiwan and twenty in the United States that Computing in Context occurred about twice as much in Asia as it did in the United States – 61 percent of lessons versus 31 percent.

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Concreteness as a Foundation

Using concreteness as a foundation for abstraction is not just good for mathematical instruction; it is a basic principle of understanding. Novices crave concreteness. It helps us construct higher, more abstract insights on the building blocks of our existing knowledge and perceptions. Trying to teach an abstract principle without concrete foundations is like trying to start a house by building a roof in the air.

The Velcro Theory of Memory

What is it about concreteness that makes ideas stick? The answer lies with the nature of our memories.

Many of us have a sense that remembering something is a bit like putting it in storage. The surprising thing is that there may be completely different filing cabinets for different kinds of memories.

To test this yourself, take this quick exercise created by David Rubin, a cognitive psychologist at Duke University.

The following set of sentences will ask you to remember various ideas. Spend five or ten seconds lingering on each one — don't rush through them. You'll notice that it feels different to remember different kinds of things:

- The capital of Kansas
- The first line of "Hey Jude" (or some other song that you know well)
- The Mona Lisa
- The house where you spent most of your childhood
- The definition of "truth"

Here's why it feels different to remember different kinds of things:

- Remembering the capital of Kansas is an abstract exercise, unless you happen to live in Topeka.
- When you think about "Hey Jude," you may hear Paul McCartney's voice and piano playing.
- No doubt the Mona Lisa memory conjured a visual image of that famously enigmatic smile.
- Remembering your childhood home might have evoked a host of memories — smells, sounds, sights. You might even have felt yourself running through your home, or remembering where your parents used to sit.
- The definition of "truth" may have been harder to summon. You probably have no set definition to pluck from memory, and had to create one on the fly.

Rubin's point is that memory is not like a single file cabinet. It is more like Velcro, a material with thousands of tiny hooks on one side and thousands of tiny loops on the other. Your brain hosts a truly staggering number of loops. **The more hooks an idea has, the better it will cling to memory.**

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The Curse of Knowledge

The Tapper Game tells us a lot about why ideas don't stick. It is a simple game, with one person tapping out rhythms of twenty-five well-known songs, and another person guessing the names of the songs. It is also a very difficult game. No music, just tapping on a table. In an experiment with four sets of players at Stanford University, only 3 of 120 songs were identified correctly. The tappers had predicted *half* the songs would be guessed correctly.

How could they be so wide of the mark? Once tappers know their song titles, it is hard for them to imagine what it's like not to have that knowledge. This is the Curse of Knowledge. **Once we know something, we find it hard to imagine what it was like *not* to know it.** It becomes difficult to share our knowledge with others; we can't readily recreate our listeners' state of mind.

Tapper/listener dynamics are evident in countless ways every day across the world. Tappers and listeners are CEOs and frontline employees, teachers and students, politicians and voters, marketers and customers, writers and readers. All rely on ongoing communication, but, like the tappers and listeners, they suffer from enormous information imbalances.

It's a hard problem to avoid. You can't unlearn what you already know. Becoming an expert in something means that we become more and more fascinated by nuance and complexity. That's when the Curse of Knowledge kicks in, and we start to forget what it's like not to know what we know.

Business managers seem to believe that once they've clicked through a PowerPoint presentation showcasing their conclusions, they've successfully communicated their ideas. What they've done typically is share data, but they haven't created ideas that are useful and lasting. Nothing stuck.

Accuracy to the point of uselessness (uselessness in the eyes of a listener) is a symptom of the Curse of Knowledge. People are tempted to tell you everything, with perfect accuracy, right up front, when they should be giving you just enough info to be useful, then a little more, then a little more.

The **SUCCESS checklist** (excluding Simple, in this instance) is an ideal tool for dealing with communication problems. For an idea to stick, for it to be useful and lasting, it's got to make the audience:

- Pay attention » Unexpected
- Understand and remember it » Concrete
- Agree/Believe » Credible
- Care » Emotional
- Be able to act on it » Story

4. Credible

What makes people believe ideas? Family, personal experiences, and faith are all foundations for individuals' beliefs. Thankfully, we have no control over the way these forces affect people. If we're trying to persuade a skeptical audience to believe a new message, the reality is that we're fighting an uphill battle against a lifetime of personal learning and social relationships. Yet the most obvious sources of credibility — external validation and statistics — aren't always the best.

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The Antiauthority

Experts such as Oliver Sachs on neuroscience or Alan Greenspan on economics are one kind of authority. Celebrities and other personalities we want to be like are another. We care because we want to be like Michael Jordan or Oprah Winfrey. But there is another type of authority that can be highly credible, the antiauthority. Someone like Pam Laffin — the star of a series of anti-smoking TV ads broadcast in the mid-1990s.

A smoker from the age of ten, the 29-year-old mother of two had suffered from emphysema for five years. The series of 30-second spots showed Laffin battling to live while slowly suffocating because of her failing lungs. She said in one, “I started smoking to look older and I’m sorry to say it worked.” She died in November 2000 at the age of thirty-one.

There’s no question Laffin knew from personal experience what she was talking about. She had a powerful tale to tell. The takeaway is that it can be the honesty and trustworthiness of our sources, not their status, that allow them to act as authorities. Sometimes antiauthorities are even better than authorities.

Statistics and Human Scale

Statistics are rarely meaningful in and of themselves. They will, and should, almost always be used to illustrate a relationship. It’s more important for people to remember the relationship than the number. When the anti-nuclear missile group, Beyond War, described the out-of-control arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the 1980s, no one realized the scale of the growth. Even though a single warhead was enough to decimate a city, the number worldwide had grown to 5,000.

To demonstrate the scale, a Beyond War speaker would pour 5,000 BBs into a metal bucket. BBs are weapons, and the sound of the BBs hitting the bucket was threatening. It was irrelevant whether there were 4,135 nuclear warheads or 9,437. The point was to hit people in the gut with the realization that this was a problem that was out of control.

5. Emotional

Making people care isn’t something that only charities do. Managers have to make people care enough to work long and hard on complex tasks. Teachers have to make students care about literature. Activists have to make people care about city-council initiatives. The goal of making messages “emotional” is to make people care. Feelings inspire people to act.

The most basic way to make people care is to form an association between something they don’t yet care about and something they do care about. We all naturally practice the tactic of association. Over time, associations get overused and become diluted in value. The superlatives of one generation — “groovy, awesome, cool, phat” — fade over time because they’ve become associated with too many things.

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Jerry Weisman, a former TV producer and screenwriter who now coaches CEOs on how to deliver speeches, says that you shouldn't dance around the appeal to self interest. He says that the WIIFY — “what's in it for you,” pronounced whiff-y — should be a central aspect of every speech.

IDEO is a design firm that has become known for creating the kinds of simulations that influence employees to empathize with their customers. Time seems to erode empathy in some contexts, and IDEO's simulations manage to restore the natural empathy that we have for others. “The world of business tends to emphasize the pattern over the particular,” says Jane Fulton Suri, a psychologist at IDEO. “The intellectual aspects of the pattern prevent people from caring.”

How can we make people care about our ideas? The way to get people to care about your message is to provide context. Get them to take off their Analytical Hats. Create empathy for specific individuals. Show how your ideas are associated with things that people already care about. Appeal to their self-interest, but also to their identities — not only to the people they are right now, but also to the people they would like to be.

6. Stories

Psychologist Gary Klein, author of *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, says that stories are told and retold because they contain wisdom.

Stories are effective teaching tools. They show how context can mislead people to make the wrong decisions. Stories illustrate the causal relationships that people hadn't recognized before and highlight unexpected, resourceful ways in which people have solved problems.

Effective stories provide simulation (knowledge about how to act) and inspiration (motivation to act). Both benefits are geared to generating action. Previously, we've seen that a credible idea makes people believe. An emotional idea makes people care. **The right stories make people act.**

When we hear a story, we simulate it in our minds. Simulating past events is much more helpful than simulating future outcomes. Why does mental simulation work? It works because we can't imagine events or sequences without evoking the same modules of the brain that are evoked in real physical activity.

Mental simulation is not as good as actually doing something, but it's the next best thing. In the world of sticky ideas, the right kind of story is, effectively, a simulation. Stories are like flight simulators for the brain. Being the audience for a story isn't so passive after all. Inside, we're getting ready to act.

Stories can almost single-handedly defeat the Curse of Knowledge. In fact, they naturally embody most of the SUCCEs framework. Stories are almost always Concrete. Most have Emotional and Unexpected elements. The hardest part is making sure stories are Simple, that they reflect your core message. **It's not enough to tell a great story; the story has to reflect your agenda.**

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