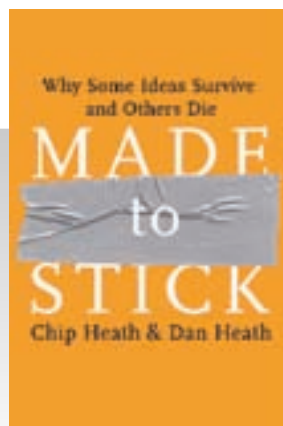


Introducing *SWITCH*, the new book from the Heath brothers—the authors of the New York Times bestseller *Made to Stick* and monthly columnists for *Fast Company* magazine.



SWITCH

How to change things when change is hard

By Chip Heath and Dan Heath

A few years ago, at the Saturday afternoon matinee of a Mel Gibson action movie, some moviegoers were offered a deal. They'd get a free bucket of popcorn and a soft drink in exchange for answering a few questions after the movie. Almost everyone accepted. They'd walked unwittingly into a study of irrational eating behavior.

Some people got medium buckets of popcorn and some got huge buckets (and both contained too much popcorn for any normal human to finish). The researchers wanted the answer to a simple question: Would the people who got the larger buckets eat more popcorn?

There was a twist: The popcorn was horrible. It had been popped five days earlier and was so stale that it squeaked. Two moviegoers, forgetting they'd received it for free, demanded their money back.

The sneaky researchers weighed the buckets of popcorn before and after the movie, so they knew exactly how much everyone had eaten. The results were stunning: People with the large buckets ate 53 percent more popcorn than people with the medium size. That's the equivalent of 173 more calories and approximately 21 extra hand-dips into the bucket. And the popcorn was horrible!

These researchers, from the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University, have run dozens of these studies, and they've come to a firm conclusion: Bigger buckets = more eating. It doesn't matter if people are hungry or full. Doesn't matter if the popcorn is fresh or stale. For that matter, it doesn't matter whether you're talking about popcorn or ice cream or potato chips. If you give someone a bigger container, they can't help but eat more.

Now imagine that someone showed you the data from this study but didn't mention the bucket sizes. On your data sheet, you'd see how much popcorn each person ate. Armed with a data set like that, you would have found it easy to jump to conclusions. *Some people in the world are Reasonable Snackers and others are Big Gluttons.*

A public health expert, studying that data alongside you, might start to worry a lot about the Gluttons. *We've got to teach these people healthier habits!* Maybe the right kind of mass-media campaign could change their popcorn-gorging behavior.

But wait a second. If you want people to eat less popcorn, the solution is pretty simple: Just give them smaller buckets. You don't have to worry about their attitudes.

You can see how easy it would be to turn a simple change problem (shrinking people's buckets) into a hard change problem (influencing their snacking attitudes). And that's one of the surprises of change: **What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem.**

How to change things when change is hard

Switch is a book to help you change things when change is hard. We'll consider change at every level—individual, organizational, and societal. Maybe you want to help your

brother beat his email addiction. Maybe you need your team at work to act more frugally because of the times. Maybe you wish more of your neighbors would bike to work.

Usually these topics are treated separately—there is “change management” advice for executives and “self-help advice” for individuals and “change the world” advice for activists. That’s a shame, because all change efforts have something in common: For anything to change, someone has to start acting differently. Your brother has got to stay out of the casino; your employees have got to start booking coach fares.

We know what you’re thinking—people resist change. But it’s not quite that easy. Babies are born every day to parents who, inexplicably, welcomed the change. Think about the sheer magnitude of that change! Yet people didn’t resist it—they volunteered for it. (Such an idea would never fly in the work world: Would anyone agree to work for a boss who’d wake you up twice a night for trivial administrative duties? And what if, every time you wore a new piece of clothing, the boss spit up on it?)

Some big changes come very easily. Not just babies, but marriages and new homes and new promotions. Even on a societal scale, change can come quickly—think of cell phones and hip-hop and Googling. Salsa, once as unfamiliar as caviar to mainstream America, now outsells ketchup. Meanwhile, other behaviors are maddeningly intractable. Smokers keep smoking and kids grow fatter and your husband still can’t seem to get his dirty shirts into a hamper.

So there are hard changes and easy changes. What distinguishes one from the other? Is it possible to turn a hard change into an easier change, as with the Popcorn Gluttons above? We believe there’s a way to do exactly that, and to see how, we’ve got to explore one of the most fascinating findings of modern psychology.

The Elephant and the Rider

The human brain can be a conflicted place. At night, we set our alarm clock 5:45 a.m., allowing plenty of time for a quick jog before we leave for the office. But in the morning, when we’re snuggled up inside a warm cocoon of sheets and blankets, we’ll press the Snooze button 12 times and blow off the jog. One day, we’ll declare ourselves on a diet and start fantasizing about all the weight we’ll lose. But the next day, we find ourselves ordering a slice of cheesecake.

The unavoidable conclusion is this: We’re all a little bit schizophrenic.

This schizophrenia presents a barrier for many types of change. Part of us may embrace, intellectually, the change that’s happening in our organization, but another part of us may rebel, craving the same old comfortable routines. Part of us may believe that recycling is good for the planet, but the other part resists walking the extra few steps to the recycling bin.

There’s a scientific basis for this “schizophrenia” that we feel. The conventional wisdom in psychology, in fact, is that our brains have two independent systems at work at all times. First, there’s the emotional side, the part of us that is instinctive, the part of us that feels pain and pleasure. Second, there’s the rational side, also known as the reflective or conscious system. It’s the part of you that deliberates and analyzes and looks into the future. And often, these two sides come into conflict—as when we set our alarm clock for one time and then Snooze our way through 30 more minutes.

This internal tension between our rational and emotional sides was captured perfectly in an analogy by the University of Virginia psychologist Jonathan Haidt. He said that our emotional side is an Elephant, and our rational side is its Rider. The Rider, perched atop the Elephant, holds the reins and seems to be the leader. But the Rider's control is precarious, because he's so tiny relative to the Elephant. Anytime the 6-ton Elephant disagrees with the direction, the Rider is going to lose. He's completely overmatched.

You've experienced situations where the Elephant overpowers the Rider if you've ever: slept in, overeaten, dialed up your ex at midnight, procrastinated a report, tried to quit smoking and failed, put off giving feedback to your employee, skipped the gym, gotten angry and said something you regretted, refused to speak up in a meeting because you were scared, etc. Good thing no one is keeping score.

When change efforts fail, it's usually the Elephant's fault, since the kinds of change we want typically involve short-term sacrifices for long-term payoffs. We cut back on expenses today to yield a better balance sheet next year. We avoid ice cream today for a better body next year. Changes often fail because the Rider simply can't keep the Elephant on the road long enough to reach the destination.

But what may surprise you is that the Elephant also has enormous strengths and that the Rider has crippling weaknesses. The Elephant is the one who gets things done. To make progress toward a goal, we need the energy and persistence of the Elephant. This strength of the Elephant is the mirror image of the Rider's great weakness: spinning his wheels. The Rider tends to over-analyze and overthink things—if you've ever met someone who can agonize for 20 minutes about what to eat for dinner, you've met the Rider.

The challenge of a change agent is to appeal to both. If you reach the Riders of your team but not the Elephants, they'll have understanding without motivation. If you reach their Elephants but not their Riders, they'll have passion without direction.

Building on this realization, we present a framework for changing things when change is hard:

➤ **DIRECT THE RIDER:** *What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity.* So you've got to provide crystal-clear direction. We'll encounter:

- A Brazilian manager who took over a nearly bankrupt railroad and turned it around by establishing 4 simple decision principles for his hundreds of employees;
- A Teach for America teacher who energized her first-grade students with the challenge to be "third graders by the end of the year";
- Other mysteries: How did a sales manager sniff out the recipe for closing deals on an underperforming product? What one simple behavior led to the rebirth of a dying South Dakota town? How did the head of an aluminum firm get his company to take worker safety seriously?

➤ **MOTIVATE THE ELEPHANT:** *What looks like laziness is often exhaustion.* The Rider can't win a tug-of-war with the Elephant for very long. So it's critical that you engage people's emotional side—get their Elephants on the path and cooperative. We'll encounter:

- A designer who helped Target become Tar-Zhay by convincing numbers-oriented, analytical merchants to appreciate the importance of cool design;

- A football coach who won the Super Bowl by breaking down his team's work into small, achievable goals;
- Other mysteries: How did a college student manage to save an endangered bird in St. Lucia? How did a teacher managed to trick her students into cleaning up after themselves? How did a stodgy Latin American manufacturing firm come to embrace cutting-edge Japanese innovation practices?

➤ **CLEAR THE PATH:** As we saw with the popcorn buckets, *what looks like a people problem is often a situation problem*. Simply altering the environment influences the way people behave, irrespective of their Rider and Elephant. We'll encounter:

- An entrepreneur who transformed his internet hosting firm from a customer-service nightmare to a customer-service champion—by throwing out the phone queueing system.
- A medical advisor who saved thousands of lives by popularizing a simple checklist;
- Other mysteries: How did the “designated driver” concept become a social norm? How did factories use clever design to make certain workplace injuries impossible? What is the technique for creating what psychologists have come to call an “instant habit”?

This framework is designed for people who don't have scads of authority or resources. Some people can almost get their way by fiat—CEOs, for instance, can sell off divisions, hire people, fire people, change incentive systems, merge teams, etc. Politicians can pass laws or impose punishments to change behavior. The rest of us don't have these tools. (Though, admittedly, it'd make life easier: “Son, if you don't take out the trash tonight, you're fired.”)

Whether the switch you seek is in your family, in your charity, in your organization, or in society at large, you'll get there by making three things happen. You'll direct the Rider, motivate the Elephant, and clear the path.

About the Authors

Chip and Dan Heath are the co-authors of the *New York Times* bestselling book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*.

Made to Stick stayed on the *BusinessWeek* bestseller list for 21 months; it has been translated into 27 languages; and it was named the Best Business Book of 2007 by Jack Covert and Todd Sattersten (Authors of *The 100 Best Business Books of All Time*).

The Heath brothers are popular writers for *Fast Company* magazine, where they've had a monthly column since 2007. Chip is a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford University, and Dan, a former researcher at Harvard Business School, is now a consultant in Raleigh, NC. They speak and consult frequently on the topics of creating change and communicating with impact.