

TIME

ELECTION PREVIEW

THE LONE RANGER

He's faltering in Iraq.
He's out of favor with his own party.
He's increasingly isolated.
Why this election is
all about George W. Bush
and the world he's created.



Are You Sticky?

A PSYCHOLOGIST AND AN EDUCATION EXPERT EXPLAIN HOW TO GET PEOPLE TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU SAY

BY
BARBARA
KIVIAT

YOU KNOW JARED. HE'S the guy in the Subway commercials who lost 100 lbs. in three months by eating two subs a day.

Now here's a question: Why do you know Jared? Of all the stories out there, why did Jared's land on *Oprah*, get a book deal, help push Subway sales up 18% in one year—why does it persist in the pop lexicon seven years later? Or, more to the point of anyone in the business of selling ideas (manager, fund raiser, coach, parent): How do you get your message to resonate as loudly as Jared's?

Those are questions brothers Chip and Dan Heath parse in their upcoming book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. The exploration follows from a class Chip, 43, a professor of organizational behavior, teaches at Stanford's Graduate School of Business. He comes to the topic by way of research into urban legends and conspiracy theories—ideas that are wrong but so annoyingly sticky they just won't go away. Dan, 33, draws his interest from working as an education consultant and trying to figure out what makes some teachers so effective.

Together they find that the key to creating traction is to take your idea, whatever it may be, and present it as a

Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional Story. "We were a little embarrassed when it turned out that we could summarize it with SUCCESS," quips Chip. Breathe easy: the hokeyness quickly passes.

The Heaths trumpet the notion that certain ideas are "sticky"—a term plucked from *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell's tome about how ideas and behaviors catch on in society. Gladwell, whom the Heath brothers revere, writes about "the stickiness factor" but never fully fleshes out what makes an idea sticky. That's where Chip and Dan come in. Finding insight in fields as disparate as psychology,

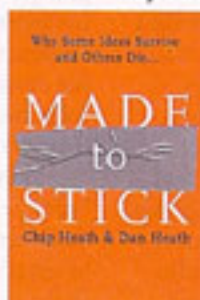
politics, screenwriting, economics, folklore and epidemiology, they deconstruct sticky ideas—from Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign classic "It's the economy, stupid" to the way Jane Elliott taught the civil rights movement to third-graders in an all-white Iowa town (see next page). At the same time, they lay out a blueprint for engineering your own sticky ideas, whether your goal is to stop teen smoking, sell more soap or get your boss to take you seriously. Says Dan: "We tackle the notion that having the idea is enough."

What makes this approach to sticky sticky is that underpinning the Heaths' advice is an avalanche of social-science research. Sim-

Brothers Dan, left, and Chip Heath lay out a six-point system for crafting ideas that influence



JONATHAN BAUNGER FOR TIME



Change Agents

In 1968 a teacher told her all-white class that brown-eyed kids are better. Why the lesson on prejudice stuck:

plicity, for example, is intuitively attractive—Southwest's goal of being *the* low-fare airline is elegant in its minimalism. The Heaths push beyond what sounds like it should work and explain why it actually does.

Psychology research shows that choice can hinder decision making. In one experiment, college students were given the option of studying or attending a lecture by an author they admired. Only 21% opted to study. Yet when a third option—watching a movie—was thrown in, 40% chose studying. The need to pick between two fun outings made students twice as likely to have no fun at all.

Could Southwest include positions on customer comfort and safety ratings in its mission statement? Sure. But that extra information might hinder, not help, employees looking to the corporate ethos as a guide for making decisions.

For a case study in unexpectedness, consider the Japanese company that became Sony. After World War II, the firm was struggling, when the company's lead technologist proposed a new product: a pocketable radio. That was nearly insane. At the time a radio was a piece of furniture. But the suggestion worked. As a product, yes, but before that as an idea. Cognitive science tells us that the human brain is wired to perceive patterns and is drawn to aberrations—a radio small enough to fit in *my pocket*?

Behavioral economics theorizes that when we have a gap in our knowledge, we strive to resolve it. Imagine the engineers immediately asking, A pocket-size radio, how would we even *start* to build one?

Just as important, though, the notion of a tiny radio meshed with Sony's business: a maker of electronics. Gratuitous surprise may catch our attention briefly, but it doesn't hold our interest.

Everywhere the Heath brothers look, it seems, there is a lesson to be learned. The Nature Conservancy gives tracts of land spiffy names like the Mount Hamilton Wilderness—a better ring than “1,875 square miles of environmentally critical ecosystem”—and donations perk up. Chalk that up to the power of being concrete. The Texas department of transportation casts Dallas Cowboys and Houston Astros in testosterone-soaked ads telling drivers “Don't mess with Texas,” and roadside litter drops 29% in a year. Consider it a score for an emotional appeal to identity—a way of getting litterbugs to believe that real men don't throw beer cans out the window.

Then there is Jared. Jared has it all. His idea is simple (weight loss),

unexpected (weight loss by eating fast food), concrete (weight loss by eating fast-food subs), credible (*his own account* of weight loss by eating fast-food subs), emotional (*his own triumphant account* of weight loss by eating fast-food subs)—and a story (*his own triumphant account* of weight loss by walking to Subway twice a day and eating fast-food subs).

It's common sense that stories hook people on ideas—Who doesn't like a tale?—but again the Heath brothers back up their claims with scientific findings. In one experiment described, a group read a story in which John put on his sweatshirt before going out for a jog, and another group read a story in which John took off his sweatshirt before heading out. Two sentences later, up popped a reference to the sweatshirt. People who had read about John taking off his sweatshirt spent more time over this new bit of information. Mentally, they had left the sweatshirt behind. In other words, when we hear a story, we create in our minds a simulation of what's happening. Do you walk down the street to Subway just because Jared

SIMPLE Brown eyes or blue? It's easy to tell

UNEXPECTED No one goes around talking about how eye color determines how smart or good a person is

CONCRETE Blue-eyed kids were placed at the back of the room and separated at recess

CREDIBLE The source was a teacher—a person in authority

did? No. But hearing his story does rehearse you to follow in his footsteps.

Even the major roadblock to crafting a sticky message, which the Heaths dub (hokey alert!) the Curse of Knowledge, is explained as a sociopsychological phenomenon. This is the thing that makes a CEO talk about “maximizing shareholder value”—a phrase that may make sense to someone immersed in the logic and parlance of business but not to rank-and-file employees. The Heath brothers recount an experiment in which one group was asked to tap out songs for another group to guess the title. There was no music, just knocking on a table. Listeners correctly named about 2.5% of the songs—but the tappers predicted they'd get about half right. When you hear a tune in your head, it's tough to put yourself in the position of a person who doesn't. To a large extent, the framework the Heaths lay out is a step-by-step guide for getting around that Curse, a how-to for anyone with good ideas who wants to captivate an audience, whether they want to lose weight or not.

EMOTIONAL Within a day, brown-eyed kids were tormenting their blue-eyed former friends

STORY Fifteen years later, students still vividly recalled the course of events at school that day