

# SOUNDVIEW Featured Book Review

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## How to Master the Challenges of Change

Review by Chris Lauer

### **SWITCH: HOW TO CHANGE THINGS WHEN CHANGE IS HARD**

by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

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As two thought leaders who dwell at the juncture where research converges with daily life, Dan Heath and Chip Heath have mastered the language of change while adding many ideas of their own to the lexicon of shift. While digging under the surface of why change can often be so difficult, they have exposed a variety of easier ways we can accelerate and improve the change process.

Most changes are tough to accomplish because we are always engaged in a constant balancing act between our emotions and our logical brains. Promoting changes at home or new initiatives at work can be complicated tasks, but the Heath brothers have figured out how to simplify the steps of making change happen into some thoughtful visual images and ideas that can help us find a better way forward.

#### **The Elephant and the Rider**

One of the ideas that the co-authors describe in their latest book, *Switch*, is the wonderfully descriptive metaphor of the elephant and the rider, which they glean from psychologist Jonathan Haidt's book *The Happiness Hypothesis*.

The human brain is not simply an emotional hurricane

or strictly a rational machine, and the conflict between our emotions and logic is not a simple tug of war. Instead, the brain is like an elephant with a rider on top. Our emotional side is like a 20,000-pound elephant being tenuously controlled by a much smaller rider, who represents our rational side. The size difference makes it very difficult to be the rider, and struggling with an unruly animal can be very tiring. In the same way as the

rider needs a break after working to keep the elephant in check for any length of time, our brains get worn out from too much emotional strain and need some time to recover. The next time you are faced with an important decision remember that scientific research has found that holding back our emotions for too long can make us extremely susceptible to the powerful effects of our untamed emotions.

#### **Initiate a Change**

The theory works both ways, so if we want to change how other people behave we cannot forget that they have their own elephants and riders with which to contend. If you want to help people change their habits or initiate a change initiative in your workplace, keep in mind that you will need to address both their elephants and their riders when motivating them to change their work or their behavior.

That's just the type of metaphor that epitomizes the insights on change that the Heath brothers bring to light in *Switch*. While presenting several different ways of looking at problems in our personal and professional lives, and showing us how to put into practice the ideas



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found in the latest research studies and product breakthroughs, they help us improve our chances of success when change is needed to get us to a better place.

The authors move the theoretical results of new scientific studies into helpful daily practices by providing an easy-to-use framework on which to build any needed change. Taking the elephant-and-rider analogy to the next level, they turn it into a three-part framework that explains the most important things to keep in mind when trying to wrangle our erratic elephants and their weary riders.

## How You Can Shape Paths

To start, the Heaths explain, if you want to motivate people to make a change, embrace a change or become involved in a change, remember that they will need some help. Elephants and their riders benefit when you “shape the path” they are on. In other words, working with the environment in which you want a change to take place will make it easier for you to get other people’s riders and elephants moving in the right direction. The path is the situation you are in, and there are always ways that you can change a situation so people will have more tools to help them stay on course. Paths can come in a variety of forms, so keep your eyes open for the unexpected ways you can smooth a route to the change you desire.

For example, movie popcorn can teach us something important about shaping paths. Studies show that if you give people larger buckets of popcorn at the movie theater, they will eat more popcorn than people who are given smaller buckets of popcorn, even if the popcorn is terrible. We might not want to eat more popcorn, and we might not even realize that we are eating more popcorn, but researchers have found that we tend to eat more popcorn from giant tubs than from little buckets. And if you want people to eat less popcorn, telling them to eat less is not as effective as simply giving them a smaller bucket. What does this research teach us about change? By shaping a situation to motivate people to change their behavior, we get better results than we do by merely telling them to change how they act.

The Heath brothers dedicate a large portion of *Switch* to showing us how different types of people and organizations have shaped the paths of others to help them facilitate changes. Although business leaders can benefit greatly from its many lessons, one of the great things about *Switch* is that it is more than a how-to manual for marketers. *Switch* is designed to help people who do not

have the authority or resources to simply command a change into existence. Filled with dozens of examples of people at all levels who were able to implement and promote effective changes in their lives and organizations, *Switch* presents guidance for anyone with a desire to make any type of change. The change principles the Heath brothers present throughout their book are universal in scope and application.

## Take Steps to Deal with Emotions

The second element in the Heath brothers’ three-part framework for change is the idea that the elephant needs to be motivated. In other words, never forget about the emotional side of people’s brains when you are trying to make an appeal for change. The Heaths explain that sometimes what you are seeing when you are looking at the emotional response of others is not what it seems. Since there is always an emotional element to the choices people make, including a decision to change, it is useful to address those emotions when trying to motivate them to adopt a change in behavior.

For example, in *Switch*, the authors describe a public health campaign in

West Virginia that used social marketing methods to try to reduce the consumption of whole and 2 percent milk, and increase the consumption of low-fat and no-fat milk products. One way the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) sought to do this was by making people aware of the massive amount of saturated fat that they could eliminate from their diet each year by simply switching from whole milk to 1 percent milk. To make the emotional side of its appeal, the CSPI ran evocative television, newspaper and radio ads for two weeks. During one press conference, CSPI scientists demonstrated the amount of fat in a half-gallon of whole milk by presenting a tube full of fat. This is the type of emotional appeal that gets people to take notice of a change that could really help them, the Heaths point out. The positive results of the group’s media campaign showed that the “emotional elephant” had been greatly motivated, and the change in milk-purchasing behavior was still apparent after six months in both of the West Virginia communities where the media campaign took place.

The CSPI scientists are not the only people to use such an appeal to help people change their diets. The New York City Department of Health recently used similar emotion-laden imagery in its campaign to promote healthier choices among New York City residents.

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Public health officials wanted to help city residents become healthier by spreading the word that sodas and other sweet drinks are part of an obesity epidemic. Through posters placed in the city's subway system and in a multilingual health bulletin, the agency ran the campaign for three months in 2009. Knowing that vague appeals to become healthier are not as effective as more specific messages, the agency used emotional imagery to make its point. In the posters, a flowing drink from a soda bottle turns into disgusting blobs of yellowy, gelatinous fat by the time it reaches the overflowing glass below. The advertisement's copy asks readers, "Are you pouring on the pounds?" This question is followed by the simple admonition, "Don't drink yourself fat." Then it advises readers to "Cut back on soda and other sugary beverages. Go with water, seltzer or low-fat milk instead."

The poster campaign was so effective that the agency created a matching video campaign in 2010, in which viewers see a man pour and drink globs of flowing fatty fluid from a glass. Along with the poster's tag line, a statistic is added: "Drinking one can of soda a day can make you 10 pounds fatter a year." Why did the ads have such an effective impact on the people who saw them? In their *Fast Company* column describing the ads, the Heath brothers write, "Change comes from feeling, not facts. Furthermore, the ad is masterfully simple: Sugary soda equals fat." With this combination of emotional and rational appeals, the New York City Department of Health's ad campaign also followed the third part of the Heaths' framework for change: "Direct the Rider."

### 'Direct the Rider'

Getting back to the elephant-and-rider metaphor, the co-authors explain that motivating the elephant and preparing the situation so change can be adopted more smoothly are only the first two parts of the three-prong approach they describe throughout *Switch*. The third element in their framework addresses the need to make a straightforward rational appeal as well.

Be clear about the directions you give your people. Sometimes they just need to know the facts so they know their emotions are leading them in the right direction. Without a clear look at the reality behind a change, people are likely to resist a change rather than embrace it. We recognize that animal fat looks disgusting and makes us want to cringe when we see somebody drinking it out of a glass or pouring it out of a soda bot-

tle, but also stating the fact that soda has been proven to make people fatter helps to complete the formula for helping people embrace the move from soda to a healthier choice.

### Tweaking the Environment

While trying to motivate other people to change, it is easy to imagine that the people who resist making the change are simply being defiant. But this can be a mistake. Studies show that sometimes the situation surrounding a change initiative is the culprit that is preventing people from making a desired change. By simply "tweaking the environment," the Heaths write, you can make your change initiative more effective.

For example, the co-authors describe one study in which two groups of students are defined as either highly altruistic or unlikely to give to a charity. After both groups were given a request for a canned food donation, the results of the canned-food drive were just as the researchers expected: Some of the "saints" made the donation and none of the "jerks" gave a thing. But, when more specific and detailed instructions were given to both groups so they knew exactly what, when and how to make their donations, the researchers were

surprised by their findings: Five times as many of the "saints" made a donation and 25 percent of the "jerks" also donated. In other words, one quarter of the worst donators were inspired to donate because they were simply given a little help along the way. This is just another example of how a simple "tweak" to a situation can guide people to change their behavior. The lesson here is that what we think is a people problem might really be a problem with the situation we've created. Since situations are usually easier to control than people, focusing on the environment surrounding a change is a great place to look for opportunities for improvement.

Another way to promote change and keep that change in place is to help people build better habits, the co-authors write. And since our environment deeply affects our habits, a shift in our environment can make all the difference when promoting a change in behavior. For example, studies show that smokers often find it easier to stop smoking when they are on vacation. This is because there are fewer things around them that remind them of their usual smoking habits.

### Action Triggers

Like shifting the environment or breaking a change down to specific actions, laying the "mental ground-

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work” for a change can also be a very effective way to help people make a shift in their behavior. One example of this is what researchers call an “action trigger.” An action trigger, according to psychologist Peter Gollwitzer, is something that sets off a preloaded decision. This means trying to associate a common action with doing something else that might be a little more difficult to motivate. For instance, one study showed that action triggers had a dramatic effect on the recovery time of patients who had undergone hip- or knee-replacement surgery. Those who were told to plan their therapeutic walks ahead of time — by writing down specifically when and where they planned to walk — recovered in half the time as those who did not write down their plans. According to Gollwitzer, action triggers create “instant habits” that help people adopt changes more quickly. New behaviors can be made into habits by applying this type of “behavioral autopilot” to make the changes more likely.

*Switch* is filled with a slew of strategies like these for getting change to stick. Compelling case studies coupled with clearly defined actions for getting the most from the latest science fill every chapter. Finally, after all of the examples and experiences are woven into a fascinating tapestry of change inspiration, the Heath brothers offer a one-page cheat-sheet for recalling their advice on making a switch. Along with this useful document, the Heaths have also included a list of common obstacles to change and the ways they can be overcome. These types of resources, along with all of the stories that fill *Switch* from end to end, offer readers dozens of lessons that can help them work through any change initiative.

### Made to Stick

The Heath brothers have obviously figured something out. As columnists for *Fast Company* magazine, the

Heaths have made a name for themselves as change experts while honing their ability to translate the latest science, business research and real-world experiences into applicable change strategies.

Their first book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas*

*Survive and Others Die* was an incredible success for exactly the same reason that *Switch* is so compelling: It is fun to read. That’s why *Made to Stick* spent 25 months on the *BusinessWeek* Bestseller List, became the top book in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper and has been translated into more than 24 languages. Stellar reviews in *Time*, *People*, the *Washington Post* and *Psychology Today* turned *Made to Stick* into a worldwide hit.

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### Stickiness

By simplifying the ideas that anyone can use to promote change, whether it comes in the form of change initiatives at work or efforts to change oneself, the Heath brothers have created a winning formula for enhancing the stickiness of the latest advances in behavioral and business sciences. While the work of Malcolm Gladwell follows a similar path into new science, as do the works of Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, the Heath brothers offer a relevancy and clarity of focus that surpass their predecessors.

Throughout all of their work, whether in their magazine columns or their books, the Heath brothers translate the metaphors and studies from today’s top scientists into basic steps that can be used by anyone to safely navigate a changing world of life and work that becomes more complex every day.

In *Switch*, Dan Heath and Chip Heath have translated the best work and research on the subject of change into witty stories, pertinent lessons and illuminating images we can all use to improve our change-filled work and lives. ●

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