

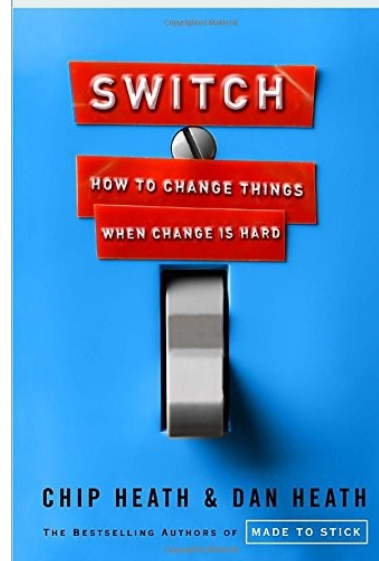
Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard

INTRODUCTION: THREE SURPRISES ABOUT CHANGE

Heath and Heath (2010) describe the struggle between the rational and emotional sides of human beings. The authors compare this to a rider on an elephant. The rider (our rational side) knows where he wants to go, but he is very small and the elephant is very large. The elephant is our emotional side. The elephant may not be compelled to follow the rider's direction even if it is the best choice. Similarly, sometimes our emotional side will overrule our rational side. (Think about a time you knew you should be going to the gym, but you didn't go.) The authors conclude that there are three ways to align the rider and he elephant to initiate change: direct the rider (appeal to the rational side), motivate the elephant (appeal to the emotional side) and change the path (make the change process easier).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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DIRECT THE RIDER

The rational side of the human brain is also referred to as the reflective or conscious system. This is the part of the brain which analyzes data and weighs options and consequences. If we compare the brain to a rider atop an elephant, the rational side of our brain can be compared to the rider. The rider holds the reins and therefore appears to be in control. However, because the rider is so small compared to the elephant, ultimately, if the rider and the elephant disagree, the elephant is going to win. This is something we have all experienced when our self-control has failed, even though the rational part of our mind knew that we were making the wrong decision. However, the rider also has faults. The rational part of your brain is the part which is prone to over-analyzing and overthinking, making it difficult to initiate change.

Additionally, just because this is the rational side of our brain, does not mean that we always know what the best decision is. Often what we perceive as resistance to change is simply a lack of clarity. In order to initiate change, we must direct the rider by ensuring that direction is completely clear to all stakeholders. This involves finding the bright spots, scripting the critical moves and pointing to the destination.

“The rider will spin his wheels indefinitely unless he’s given clear direction. That’s why to make progress on a change, you need ways to direct the rider. Show him where to go, how to act, what destination to pursue.” (Heath & Heath, 2010, pg 33)

SOLUTION FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY

Traditional psychotherapy focuses on the roots of a patient's problem. The idea is that if you can identify the cause of your problems, you can begin working towards solutions.

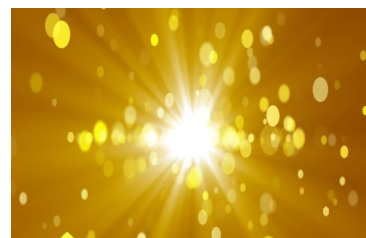
Solution focused brief therapy is not interested at all in the causes of problems, but only on possible solutions. It begins by identifying bright spots within an otherwise troubled situation. Once the bright spots are identified, the therapist and the patient begin working together to determine how to replicate these positive times.

This also gives the patient a sense of hope. They can see that despite their problems, there are times when things are working. They begin to realize that they have coping strategies already, they just need to learn to use them more frequently or more effectively.

FIND THE BRIGHT SPOTS

When tasked with initiating change, we tend to focus on what is *not* working and analyze those aspects. This can lead to “analysis paralysis” (Heath & Heath, 2010, pg. 33) where the rider will spend far too much time analyzing the situation and not take any action.

A more productive way of using our analytical powers is to identify something that is working well within the organization and seek solutions there. (See also the article to the left “Solution Focused Brief Therapy.”) Not only does this give our rider a clear sense of which direction to follow, it also helps leaders to avoid relying on “Not Invented Here” solutions.



Most people can think of a time when an outsider was tasked to come into an organization and make changes. Perhaps you were that outsider. When solutions from other organizations are introduced, they can be met with a lot of resistance. Identifying bright spots within an organization stops people from thinking “Well, that sounds great, but it would never work here.” It is already working there.

“Find the bright spots—what seems to work in your institution? Obsess about them. Study them. Clone them. (Heath & Heath, 2010, pg 72)”



SCRIPT THE CRITICAL MOVES

As part of the rider's imperfect analysis skills, we can often fall victim to decision paralysis. This phenomenon describes how when we are presented with more options, even if they are good ones, we have more difficulty making a decision. It may seem counterintuitive, but sometimes eliminating options is the best way to get people moving. Ambiguity tires out the rider and makes us more likely to stick with the status quo.

Many leaders are guilty of providing big picture visions where the goals are often obvious, but fail to provide people with specific details on how to accomplish the end goal. Another common mistake is that leaders assume that the steps are obvious. Something that is intuitive to you, may not come naturally to someone else.

It is also extremely important to remember that you only need to script the *critical* moves, not provide step-by-step directives. While people may need more details to overcome their decision paralysis, no one likes to be micro managed.

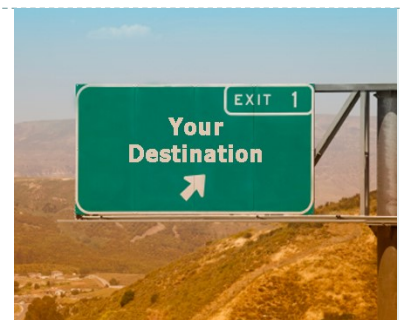


“Clarity dissolves resistance.” (Heath & Heath, 2010, pg 72)

POINT TO THE DESTINATION

The flip side to a leader who provides a big picture vision without providing any intermediary steps, is a situation where people do not know where the change is headed. Heath and Heath (2010) explain the importance of providing people with a “destination postcard—a vivid picture from the near-term future that shows what could be possible” (pg 76).

As we know, the rider has a tendency to analyze everything. This can lead to the rider getting stuck in the analysis phase and not moving to the action phase, or the rider may decide that the best course of action is no action at all. By providing a clear picture of the destination, we can redirect this tendency to analyze the current situation to encourage the rider to analyze how to best arrive at the destination.





MOTIVATE THE ELEPHANT

In the elephant rider analogy the emotional part of our brain can be compared to the elephant. Although the rider holds the reins, the elephant is ultimately the one with the decision on where to go. The elephant is significantly larger than the rider and will not always agree with the rider on the best way to go. Though elephants are intelligent animals, they do not have the same powers of analysis as humans. So although the elephant is extremely powerful, it may not be the best at making decisions based on the information at hand.

The elephant is fond of quick payoffs and not very good at identifying long-term payoffs. Although we addressed in the previous sections the problems of the rider (over-analysis, lack of action) when change fails it is usually the elephant's fault. Any change worth initiating involves short-term sacrifices in order to achieve long-term payoffs.

“Changes often fail because the rider simply can’t keep the elephant on the road long enough to reach the destination.” (Heath & Heath, 2010, pg 7)

WORKING TOGETHER

Motivating the rider without the elephant will result in understanding without motivation. Motivating the elephant without the rider will create passion with direction. Creating a situation where the elephant and the rider are working together, will allow change to happen easily.

The elephants love of short-term gains is constantly at odds with the rider's ability to think beyond the moment and understand the possible benefits of self-restraint. But that does not mean that the elephant is constantly derailing the objectives; the elephant has some powerful positive attributes.

Your emotions can be a powerful tool for initiating change, as long as you understand how to harness them. Ultimately, your elephant is the part of you which is going to take action and get things done. It is the energy and drive of the elephant which carries the rider to their common destination. While the rider is analyzing every possible situation, the elephant will be the motivation to make a decision and begin working towards it.

ELEPHANT VS. RIDER

If you feel like people are not supporting your change, before you can get them on your side, you need to know why you don't have their support. If they don't understand what the change is or why it must be initiated, then you have a rider problem. If the problem is simply that they are not excited about it then you have an elephant problem. It is the difference between knowing how to act and being motivated to act.

Once you understand the difference, you must respond accordingly. Often our first response is to provide people with more information, but this will only solve a rider problem, not the elephant problem.



FIND THE FEELING

The typical way in which we think about change is the process of analyze-think-change. This will indeed work well in normal environments. However it is often the case for big change that the parameters and the future are not clear. This can cause the elephant to be reluctant to move due to the fear of the unknown.

Therefore, in these situations we must follow a new process: see-feel-change. You can speak to the elephant by presenting people with evidence that makes them feel something.

Change is hard because the status quo is easy and familiar.

This leads some people to believe that a crisis is a necessary catalyst for change. While an emergency will elicit a quick and specific action, it will not provide lasting change. This is because negative emotions have a narrowing effect, preventing us from seeing all of our options. It is much better to build change on positive emotions which broaden interests and build skills and resources.



SHRINK THE CHANGE

Worthwhile changes are complex and involve a multitude of steps and sacrifices. Elephants are easily demoralized and hate to do things without immediate payoff, so it can be difficult to keep the elephant on track for the entire process.

Shrinking the change will create the illusion that you are closer to the end than you actually are. Some strategies include breaking down huge tasks into manageable chunks, engineering early success to create hope and celebrating small milestones by focusing on the positive aspects, rather than how far you have to go.

These small wins should firstly be meaningful and secondly within immediate reach. Though it goes against our rational way of thinking, the second criteria is actually more important. Small, early successes help to keep the elephant hopeful throughout the process, even though they will not have as much impact on ultimately reaching the end goal.

GROW YOUR PEOPLE

If you can't shrink the change, you can grow the people, to give them the strength to take on a difficult change. An important part of this is to develop a culture where people feel part of a group. Once people have adopted a certain identity, it can be easier to get them on board with new ideas. (See article to the right "Decision Making: Consequence Model vs. Identity Model.")

One way to establish identity is using the "foot in the door" approach. Ask for something small to establish identity first, then bigger change comes more easily. Another strategy is to work on establishing a culture of growth mindset rather than fixed mindset. This attitude helps people believe that change can happen.

Lastly, create an expectation of failure. Don't expect everything to go right from the start. "Everything is hard before it is easy" Heath & Heath, 2010, pg. 166.)

SHAPE THE PATH

Sometimes the rider understands what to do, and the elephant is motivated to do it as well, and yet change still does not happen. Often we think that this means that people are resistant for no reason. However, often what we think is a people problem is actually a situation problem. Rather than trying to explain the situation or use motivational tactics, you have to look at the situation to see how it is affecting the people and potentially stifling their motivation. Small changes to the environment can make the path easier for people. This can mean making good decisions easier or making poor decisions more difficult. Remember that habits happen automatically, so don't require decision making at all. Establishing good habits takes the elephant's emotional approach out of the picture. Lastly, behavior is contagious. If you can get some people making good decisions, others will be more likely to change, once they have a good example to follow.



DECISION MAKING: CONSEQUENCE MODEL VS IDENTITY MODEL

Whether you realize it or not, you use two different models to make decisions. When you use the consequence model, you weigh out the pros and cons of each side and then make the choice you think will benefit you the most. Although this is the rational way to make decisions, it is not always how it happens.

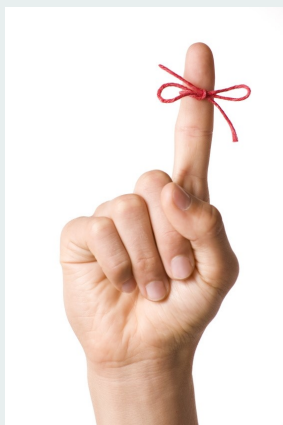
Other times, you use the identity model. Rather than making a decision based on what is best for you, you what decision would be suit your identity. This is why you may sometimes feel good about a decision, even if it does not directly benefit you.

CREATING ACTION TRIGGERS

Working a new habit into your routine can be a very difficult process. One way to help you to initiate change is to create action trigger.

Action triggers work by associating the new habit which you want to form with a habit which you already have. For example: “I will go to the gym after I walk the dog.”

By doing this you are passing the control of the behavior to the environment. The key to a good action trigger is to make the trigger specific and visible enough to break into your consciousness as you go about your day. Saying “I will go to the gym after work” is likely not a specific enough trigger.



TWEAK THE ENVIRONMENT

Every time we meet new people, we make judgments about their character. This is an important process as it allows us to understand how to react to this person if we see them again. However, we often do this with very little information. This leads to a phenomenon called Fundamental Attribution Error. This means that we often don't consider what situational forces may influence behavior, we just assume their behavior is a reflection

of their character.

We are quick to label people as resistant to change, without considering situational forces which may be holding them back. Tweaking the environment is about creating a situation where change is encouraged. We can help others and ourselves to make positive change by making positive behavior easier and negative behavior harder or even better, impossible.

BUILD HABITS

We are sensitive to our environment and culture; we overwhelmingly want to fit in. And this need to fit in guides many of our behaviors. Also, behavior is contagious, which means we pick up on subtle cues in our environment which guide our actions. Our environment can enforce or deter our habits

By creating new habits, we can clear the path to make it easier to achieve change. (See the article of the left “Creating Action Triggers.”)

RALLY THE HERD

When you find yourself in a new situation and you do not know what to do, you probably watched other people and mimicked their behavior. But what happens if no one knows what to do?

Find people in your organization who are keen to initiate change. Create free spaces where they can meet and discuss ideas. Once some ideas have been put into action, publicize good behavior so people know it's the norm. Once they have a guide for their actions, it will be easier for them to make the necessary changes.

CAITLIN JONES

EADM 826

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Creating lasting change is a topic I have been interested in since I started my masters program. This book provides a lot of great ideas for initiating change in a number of different situations. Anyone in a leadership position would benefit from reading this book.

TRY IT!

Situation: Two middle school students in your class are consistently late. When they arrive, they sit at the back of the class and do not pay attention. How can you get the students to class on time?

What is the “Switch” and what is holding it back?

You know that you cannot expect these students to begin acting like model students today. But if you can get them to class on time, you might be able to snowball change from there.

This is not a rider problem, as the students know they are supposed to be in class on time. It is likely an elephant problem, as the students are not motivated to be in class on time or learn. However, middle school students are notoriously difficult to motivate. So, don't forget to consider the path.

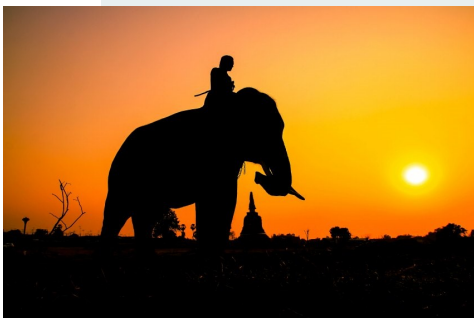
How do we make the Switch?

Motivate the Elephant: find the feeling. Can you appeal to the student's sense of empathy and let them know how you feel when they are constantly late for class?

Shape the Path: build habits. Start each class with a short quiz, if they are late, they will fail.

Shape the Path: rally the herd. Find a way to let the students know that their behavior is affecting other students. Peer influence will be more effective than that of a teacher.

Shape the Path: tweak the environment. Put a couch at the front of the class. Students who arrive early will be able to sit at a couch rather than in a desk. This will incentivize coming to class on time.



REFERENCES

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.