

Switch

- How to Change Things When Change is Hard
- by Chip Heath & Dan Heath
- Broadway Books / Random House - 2010
- Summary by Douglas W. Green, EdD - dgreen@stny.rr.com
- Doug: This is an excellent textbook for any course that deals with leadership and change. It will also be helpful if you just want to improve your life at work, at home, or at play.

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This is a book to help you change things.

- All change efforts have something in common: For anything to change, someone has to start acting differently. All change effort boils down to the same mission: Can you get people to start behaving a new way?
- First surprise: What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem. To change someone's behavior, you've got to change that person's situation.

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One Brain - Two Minds

- Human brains have their emotional side and their rational side. You can think of the two sides as the planner (rational) and the doer (emotional). In this book, the Heaths use an analogy they borrowed from Jonathan Haidt in his book *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Here, the emotional side is the Elephant and the rational side is the Rider. When the two sides disagree, the six-ton Elephant is going to win. If you want to change things you need to appeal to both the Rider and the Elephant. The Rider does the planning and the Elephant provides the energy. The Rider provides the direction, the Elephant provides the passion.

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Self-control is an exhaustible resource.

- Research shows that we burn up self-control. When people try to change things, they're usually tinkering with behaviors that have become automatic. The bigger the change you're suggesting, the more it will sap people's self-control. Change is hard because people wear themselves out. The second surprise is that what looks like laziness is often exhaustion. People are more likely to change when the new behavior is crystal clear. Telling someone to "eat a healthier diet" is anything but clear. What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity. *To change behavior, you have to direct the Rider, motivate the Elephant, and shape the Path.*

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Direct the Rider

- Without clear direction the Rider can suffer from “analysis paralysis.” When you are trying to create a plan for change, look for the bright spots. If any small part of the behavior in question is working, ask yourself, “How can we do more of it?” At the same time you need to avoid sifting through a lot of “true but useless (TBU)” information that distracts you from looking for the bright spots. Ask “What’s working, and how can we do more of it?” Avoid “What’s broke, and how do we fix it?” The problem with our language is that it contains more negative emotion words, and when it comes to what grabs our attention, bad is stronger than good.

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The status quo is comfortable.

- A compelling vision is critical, but it's not enough. Big-picture, hands-off leadership isn't likely to work in a change situation, because the hardest part of change - the paralyzing part - is precisely in the details. Ambiguity is the enemy. If it seems abstract it has no place in a change program. Any successful change requires a translation of ambiguous goals into concrete behaviors. To make a switch, you need to *script the critical moves*. You can't script every move, however, so focus on those that are vital to success. Clarity dissolves resistance. It is also important to focus on what you can control.

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Big Hairy Audacious Goals are Good.

- The setting of big, motivating, long-term goals sets the more successful companies apart from those that are less successful. When you specify a compelling destination, you're helping to correct one of the Rider's greatest weaknesses - the tendency to get lost in analysis. The Heaths call these visions *destination postcards*. Such visions of the future that can be produced by hard work can be inspiring.

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The core of the matter

- In most change situations, managers initially focus on strategy, structure, culture, or systems. This misses the most important issue, which is how to change people's behavior. To do this you need to influence emotions, not just thought. Analysis works best when parameters are known, assumptions are minimal, and the future is not fuzzy. Big change situations aren't like this. Successful change efforts are more likely to feature the sequence of SEE-FEEL-CHANGE rather than ANALYZE-THINK-CHANGE. Trying to fight inertia and indifference with analytical arguments is like tossing a fire extinguisher to someone who's drowning. The solution doesn't match the problem.

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Shrink the change

- People find it more motivating to be partly finished with a longer journey than to be at the starting gate. A business cliché commands us to “raise the bar.” If you want to motivate the Elephant, however, you need to lower the bar. Small targets lead to small victories and can often trigger a positive spiral of behavior. In this chapter, the Heaths tell several stories about how it is easier to motivate people if they think they are already on the way. They also tout the need to make small advances visible and to help the people doing the change to recognize what the next step looks like. It is also vital to focus on things that are under your control.

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The importance of identities

- When people make choices they either assess the costs and benefits and make a rational decision, or they ask themselves who they are and what they will do in a given situation. The former is the *consequences model* and the latter is the *identity model*. Our identities are adopted as we move through life. New identities can grow from small beginnings. Because identities are central to the way people make decisions, any change effort that violates someone's identity is likely doomed to failure. (Doug: When you are trying to make a change, consider what you know about the identities of the people you are trying to change. If the change isn't consistent with their identities you need to alter the identities or alter the nature of the change.)

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Mindset Matters

- Carol Dweck at Stanford is the author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. She refers to the two basic mindsets as the *fixed mindset* and the *growth mindset*. If you have a fixed mindset you tend to avoid challenges for fear of being seen as a failure by others. You are also threatened by negative feedback. People with a growth mindset accept more challenges despite the risk of failure. Failure is seen as a natural part of the change process. Such people succeed as they see failure as part of the learning process. When given negative feedback they think “my teacher thinks I can do better.” The lesson for teachers is to praise effort rather than natural skill. Students need to see their brains as muscles that can be strengthened with the right kind of practice.

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The problem might be the environment.

- What looks like a people problem is often a situation or environment problem. You will often have more control over changing the situation than changing the people. Tweaking the environment might make the right behaviors a little bit easier. In terms of the Rider and Elephant metaphor, the environment is the path they have to take. This chapter contains a number of excellent examples of how people were able to use this key understanding to make important changes without having to change core characteristics of the people involved.

Habits are important.

- Habits are essentially behavioral autopilot. The right habits can allow lots of good behaviors to happen without the Rider taking charge. It's a huge plus if some things happen "free" on autopilot. Habits will form inevitably, whether they're formed intentionally or not. The Heaths discuss *action triggers* as ways to help instill the right habits. They are procedures that are specific and visible so as to interrupt people's normal stream of consciousness. Imagining a time and place where you'll do something increases the likelihood that you'll actually do it. Action triggers can serve to create instant habits. Humble checklists can also serve to get things done. They provide insurance against overconfidence, which we all have a knack for.

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Herd Mentality

- People look to each other for cues as to how to behave in ambiguous situations. A lot of what you do is due to the behavior of others, also known as *peer pressure*. Behavior is contagious. This even includes obesity and drinking. Change agents need to pay attention to social signals. They can guarantee or doom your efforts. If the Elephant is on an unfamiliar path, chances are it's going to follow the herd. When people see data that makes them look like poor performers, they are likely to do something about it. This is why it is good to publish group norms. In some cases you can make undesirable behavior seem comical or otherwise undesirable. You also need to create free space for your reformers and add new language to the culture.

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In Conclusion

- When you see even small changes in the desired direction, you have to reinforce them. This is how animal trainers work and it even can work on husbands. Change isn't an event, its a process. Once a change is started, it can feed on itself. People can also learn to like things they are exposed to if they are are around long enough. The people in Paris didn't like the Eiffel Tower at first. At some point inertia will shift from resisting the change to supporting it. Small changes can snowball to big changes.
- When change works it follows a pattern. Provide clear direction, ample motivation, and a supportive environment. This aligns the Rider, the Elephant, and the Path.

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Cool Quotes

- When you set small, visible goals, and people achieve them, they start to get it into their heads that they can succeed. They break the habit of losing and begin to get into the habit of winning. (Bill Parcells)
- When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur... Don't look for quick, big improvement. Seek small improvement one day at a time. That's the only way it happens - and when it happens, it lasts. (John Wooden)
- I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn't just one aspect of the game - it *is* the game. (Lou Gerstner)

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What I left out

- To promote sales of this outstanding book, I left out summaries of things I hope you will want to know more about. At the very least, your organization should make this book available for those who want to dig deeper into this vital subject.
- This book contains many fascinating stories culled from decades of scientific research on the subject. Reading these stories will make it much easier to internalize the important concepts. Specific stories of how people used bright spots to direct change were especially enlightening. You will find many of the successful stories surprising and memorable.
- The book contains a number of real-world case study situations called “Clinics.” You can work on them yourself or use them as part of group activities in training seminars or leadership classes.
- At the end of the book is a treasure chest of resources to help people who wish to lead change efforts. There are also directions to additional online resources.

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