

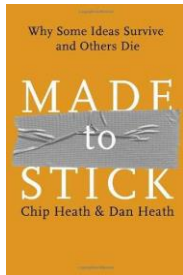


MAKING YOUR MESSAGE STICK

WHITE PAPER

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In their book, “Made to Stick, Why Some Idea Survive and Other Die,” brothers Chip and Dan Heath define a sticky idea as one that is understood, remembered, and creates some kind of change in a person's opinion, behavior, or values.

They studied the panorama of what makes ideas sticky by examining urban legends, ad campaigns, and even proverbs.

What they discovered was that making an idea stick is not about being charismatic, having lots of resources behind you, or even being a creative genius. What they identified were six traits that make ideas sticky.

These traits are listed below:

- Simple
- Unexpected
- Concrete
- Credible
- Emotional
- Story

To help you remember each trait, the first letters of the six elements are the first 6 letters in the word SUCCESS .

To communicate an idea successfully the idea must be refined to a simple and relatable core message (Simple). It must make people stop and pay attention (Unexpected). It must make people understand and remember it (Concrete). They also need to agree or believe it (Credible), care about it (Emotional), and be able to visualize it (Story).

Make your Message Simple



Simplicity is about finding the core message and sharing it in a concise way. The

core message is the one important element you want to communicate.

As the old saying goes, “No battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy.” Imagine trying to develop a plan to instruct a friend on playing a game of chess in your behalf. Outside of the opening one or two moves, it is impossible to accurately predict the opponent's response and soon any plan becomes useless. That is why the Army has what it calls the “Commander’s Intent.” Once the battle begins, commanders in the field have to adapt to the changing situation on the ground to achieve a successful outcome.

As discussed in [4 Amazingly Simple Lessons From Southwest Airlines](#), the core message of Southwest Airlines is that it is “the low-fare airline.” All new ideas are run through this one core message. By always taking this core message into account, all decisions are simplified into any easy choice. If the decision will reduce costs, it is a go. If it will increase costs, it is a no-go.

Why is finding the core message hard? It's hard because it is painful to leave behind ideas that are interesting and important to you, but isn't actually the most important idea you are trying to communicate. With too many choices, people suffer from what is known as analysis paralysis. They either make no decision or choose poorly. Therefore, the first step in creating a sticky idea is prioritizing the part of the message that is most important.

With the core message isolated, the next step is to simplify it by making it more concise. Try to communicate your core message with as few words as possible. How do you take your core message and make it more concise? Try using analogies that tap into what the other person already knows.

For example, the producer of the movie “Alien” had to simply say that his new movie was “Jaws on a spaceship.” From that simple and concise

phrase, the script writers, directors, set designers, etc. could leverage what they remembered from “Jaws” and apply that to the new movie “Alien.” Therefore, when it came to set design, the producer didn't have to describe the interior of the space ship to the set designer, because the set designer could easily recall that the boat in Jaws was old, somewhat obsolete, had lots of character, and overall was less than reliable. All that information was conveyed in the simple analogy that “Alien” was basically “Jaws on a spaceship.”

Make your Message Unexpected



Unexpectedness is about grabbing a person's attention. You can grab an

individual's attention by surprising them with something that violates their expectations. Surprise is an emotion that forces a person to pause and collect more information about the world around them.

Surprise gets a person's attention in the moment, but curiosity holds their attention over time. How then do you create curiosity? Create a gap between what a person knows and what he wants or feels he should know. These gaps cause us a kind of pain that stimulates our desire to fill them in.

“Massacre in San Bernardino (unexpected) – details at 11:00 (curiosity)”. The headline captured our attention and stimulated our desire to fill in the details of the event.

Make your Message Concrete



Sticky ideas create a visual that the other party can see and feel. Aesop's Fables are great examples of abstract moral truths

made concrete. For example, the abstract lesson to “always tell the truth” was concretely illustrated in “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.”

The distinguishing trait of concrete ideas is that you can picture them in your head. For instance, some of my blogs are lessons from successful people. By creating the image of Howard Schultz plunging his hands into a barrel of coffee each morning and breathing in deeply to remind him why he got into the business in the first place, I am able to connect the abstract concept of getting your passion back to a specific and relatable person in a sensory rich image.

The Velcro Theory of Memory says that the more “hooks” we can put into an idea, the stickier it will be. Concreteness not only helps people understand ideas, it helps them work towards a common goal. During the Apollo missions, engineers had to make sure the occupants could survive for up to 13 days and make it to the moon and back. This clear message ensured that all the engineering teams from Life Support to Propulsion would be working toward the same goal of sending 3 men to the moon and returning them safely back to earth.

Make your Message Credible



Credibility makes people believe in your ideas. When trying to establish credibility for your idea, we often rely on

recognized authorities who have shared similar views. If the surgeon general endorses a plant-based diet, then who is to argue the point?

Other times, we try to establish credibility by making use of statistics. When you must use statistics, you should try to use the “human-scale principle” to make your data more easily understood by the lay person. For example, as I

write this blog, the national debt is approaching 19 trillion dollars. That number is just too hard for many to comprehend until you say that this amounts to over \$160,000 per taxpayer.

However, there are lots of other ways to make your ideas credible such as outsourcing your idea's credibility to the audience using a "testable credential." Take, for instance, Ronald Reagan's famous question from the 1980 presidential debates. Instead of using statistics, Ronald Reagan asked, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?"

Make your Message Emotional



Making your idea emotional simply means that it needs to tap into something people care about.

A frequently used technique is to talk about the consequences of ideas for individuals. When 18-month-old

Jessica McClure fell into an old well in her aunt's back yard in 1987, there was around the clock coverage. The world could not get enough of the story. It even spawned a TV movie called "Everybody's Baby." However, when 301 people died in a mine explosion in 2014, nobody even remembered it a year later. The reason the first story was so sensational is Jessica was a single individual that we could care about. In the second story, the miners were just a statistic.

To make people care, you can use the power of association. For example, many ads associate products with status or sex appeal which everyone cares about. White Diamonds perfume by Elizabeth Taylor associates a perfume with both riches and sex appeal. Diamonds are clearly associated with wealth (status) and Elizabeth Taylor is a seductive and

alluring character to men (sex appeal) because she had been married to so many powerful and influential husbands.

Another common way to make people care is to appeal to their self-interest by telling them what's in it for them.

Tell your Message in a Story



Stories provide people with a model showing them how to act. When a person shares a story, it is only natural for the listener to think, "How would I have reacted if I'd been in that situation?"

Recently, a good friend of mine related a story on Facebook about a situation she encountered when taking her daughter to a public restroom. A young girl, who was suffering from a sore and runny nose, was crying her eyes out because her mother was forcing her to blow her nose with a rough bathroom paper towel. Since the girl was upset, her mother started yelling at her and calling her names. The responses to my friend's post were filled with comments like "I would have punched the mom" or "I would have called security." This ability to visualize oneself in the situation is the next best thing to actually experiencing it and acts as like a "flight simulator" for the brain.

Stories also have the power to inspire. Consider Subway's Jared, the man who lost hundreds of pounds eating nothing but low-fat sandwiches. Millions were inspired to eat healthier from his example. Essentially, there are three types of story plots that inspire:

The Challenge: In this story, a person overcomes obstacles to succeed. For example, [Madam CJ Walker](#) overcame many challenges such as her inability to read to become the first black woman millionaire.

The Connection: In this story, two dissimilar people overcome social barriers to achieve a common goal. For example, Earl Tupper, the introverted inventor and [Miss Brownie Wise](#), who over came her fears and built a 9,000 person army of sales people.

The Creativity: In this story, an individual or team uses resourcefulness and gumption to solve a problem in a novel way. For example, [Keurig's](#) selling it's coffee makers at

cost to retailers to capture the reoccurring revenue of selling coffee pods to consumers.

A final kind of story, the “springboard” story, that allows people to see how something new is destined to change the future. For example when [William Boeing](#), a lumber merchant, attended an air show in 1910 and caught a glimpse of the future of aviation and how his lumber business could help make it happen.

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