

# SOUNDVIEW Featured Book Review

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## How to Get People to Care About Your Ideas

Featured Book Review by Chris Lauer

### MADE TO STICK

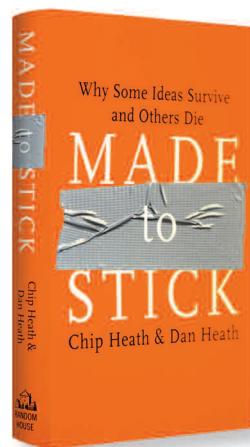
by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

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A few years ago, the Heath brothers, Chip and Dan, set out on a marvelous mission. After being wrapped up in their own individual careers — Chip's in business; Dan's in education — for many years, they found themselves both asking the same simple yet perplexing question: What makes one story reverberate around the world while another story soon disappears? In other words, why do some ideas stick and others fail?

Many years of academic research and story gathering followed. Finally, the Heath brothers developed a framework that provides a compelling answer to their initial query. In 2007, they published *Made to Stick*, which presents their findings, theories and thoughts on sticky ideas. Their book also offers readers a formula for supercharging their own ideas and getting them to stick in the minds of others.

What does a sticky idea look like? Well, as an example, think of the most recent urban legend that you've been told. The urban legend is probably one that you received in a forwarded e-mail message, whether about politics, a celebrity or a new Internet virus or threat. Chances are you read this message one time, but you will remember the story and be able to repeat it again and again. A great joke is the same way. Some ideas, true or not, just stick.



### No Sibling Rivalry

The Heaths have both learned valuable lessons about sticky ideas in their professional work. Chip Heath, for instance, has a Ph.D. in psychology and is a professor at Stanford University. His role as a professor has allowed him to turn his students into a powerful research machine that collects data on sticky ideas, codes it and analyzes it. Results from that research have been featured in *Scientific American*, the *Financial Times*, *The Washington Post*, *BusinessWeek*, *Psychology Today* and *Vanity Fair*. You may have even heard Chip Heath talking about his research on NPR or seen him in a National Geographic special.

Dan Heath has also made a name for himself as a powerful thinker who has his own very sticky ideas. With an MBA from Harvard Business School and years of experience in the world of education as a consultant at Duke Corporate Education, Dan is the co-founder of a new-media textbook company. His ideas mesh well with Chip's credentials and experience. Together, the two brothers discovered that their combined voices are even more powerful than either one alone. Through their blogs, books and magazine articles, the Heaths have established themselves as popular experts in the field of great ideas.

### Recipe for Success

*Made to Stick* quickly became a *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *BusinessWeek* bestseller. The success of the book was not simply because Chip and Dan are columnists for *Fast Company* magazine. Their popularity

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spread around the world beyond the business book community because they offer useful insights into a very important concept: developing sticky ideas.

Because the Heaths are smart and effective teachers, people are naturally compelled to hear what they have to say about the ways we can improve our communication skills. The Heath brothers know how to identify the small stories that tell much larger ones, and they know how to apply what they have learned to some of the biggest challenges in life and work.

### Deeper Impressions

In *Made to Stick*, the Heath brothers offer a short list of clever tactics for creating messages that leave deeper impressions. This list covers business and personal issues simultaneously. Many of the topics they approach involve organizational issues, but they are also deeply personal, since they apply to many of the subtlest ways we connect with other people.

A sticky idea doesn't require press releases or public relations people to spread the word. In fact, sticky ideas stick with much less effort than a poorly constructed message. Whether it is a political idea or an algebra lesson, the stickier the message, the more of an impact it can have. When Malcolm Gladwell wrote his best-selling book *The Tipping Point*, he wrote about the "stickiness" of ideas. Both his terms "stickiness" and "the tipping point" stuck in the minds of those in the business world. Those ideas stuck because of their own stickiness.

The Heaths made several crucial discoveries while they were researching and studying how the stickiest ideas are put together. At the root of those discoveries is a valuable set of stickiness principles that anyone can put into use when trying to make an idea stick.

### Keep It Simple and Surprising

The first of these principles involves keeping it simple. The essence of your idea should be simple and profound, the Heaths write. If you can sum up your point in a single sentence or phrase that compels you to follow it, you have mastered this aspect of stickiness. One great example of this principle is the Golden Rule: Treat others like you want to be treated. This message is so sticky that it has appeared around the world throughout history.

The next principle that the Heaths and their researchers found was that the unexpectedness of an idea gets audience members to pay attention to it.

Surprises stick to our brains. Most compelling ad cam-

paigns and unusual newspaper stories catch our attention and stick in our heads because they are able to challenge one or more of our expectations. Engaging somebody's curiosity and interest with an attention-grabbing bit of new knowledge can be a very effective way to get started. The Heaths write that the short-term attention of audience members is easier to gain than their long-term attention. This is why "systematically 'opening gaps' in their knowledge — and then filling those gaps" can help you engage your audience members longer than a mere flash in the pan.

### Concrete and Credible

Creating "concreteness" is the next step in the stickiness equation. This means that an idea is sticky if we can understand and remember it with ease. If a message is too abstract or ambiguous, it can get lost in the shuffle.

When an idea is firm and clear, people remember it. That's why the Heaths write, "Concreteness is an indispensable component of sticky ideas."

The next stickiness principle presented by the co-authors is credibility. If you have the authority, your ideas have much more stickiness than those of someone without it. The right level of credibility will encourage people to listen to you when you share an idea. It will also help them agree with your idea. When a person we trust shares an idea, we are much more likely to care about it than a message from a stranger.

Experts and celebrities work wonders in advertising to get a message to stick because many people recognize them as credible spokespeople. If we don't have access to a famous person, the Heaths write, an anti-authority can also work wonders when spreading a message. For example, Pam Laffin was neither an expert nor a celebrity. She was a smoker whose message was very sticky. Her experiences with emphysema and the effects of the disease provided her with the crucial credibility that helped to create an effective anti-smoking ad campaign that focused on her battle to live with failing lungs.

Laffin provides a great example of how credibility can go beyond celebrity and social status, the Heaths write. Credibility is also built on such important attributes as honesty and trustworthiness, which provide a strong backbone for a sticky idea.

### The Power of Emotional Appeal

The next stickiness principle says an idea must be emotional if you want it to stick. The Heaths write that

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tapping into people's emotions and getting them to feel something is a powerful way to get them to care about your idea.

Bland, emotionless appeals don't touch us, but messages that engage our emotions are much more effective. For example, one public service campaign that still sticks for many people is the 1970s anti-littering advertisements that featured a Native American shedding a lone tear when the garbage thrown from a speeding car lands at his feet. This advertisement from the organization Keep America Beautiful and the Ad Council included the tagline "People start pollution. People can stop it." The ad campaign touched such an emotional chord that the image of the "Crying Indian" has become a national icon.

The Heaths point out that, although it was very effective at influencing behavior for years, the power of the Keep America Beautiful ad campaign had diminished by the 1980s, especially in Texas where litter had become a huge problem. The Heaths write that the emotions summoned by the crying Native American only appeal to a limited set of feelings, such as guilt and shame.

Researcher Dan Syrek found that the average person who litters in Texas is an 18- to 35-year-old man who drives a pickup truck and likes country music. The people in charge of a new anti-littering campaign in Texas realized that previous approaches to thwarting littering were not going to be as effective with this group because of its predisposition to antiauthoritarian behavior and lack of receptiveness to cute and cuddly "Give a hoot, don't pollute" messages.

### **'Don't Mess with Texas'**

The Institute for Applied Research was hired by leaders in Texas to help the state fight a serious litter problem that was costing more than \$25 million in cleanup costs each year. A new, stickier message was needed, so Syrek developed a campaign that addressed a different and more effective set of emotions. Taking a cue from the tremendous pride that Texans feel for their home state, the new campaign aimed to convince Texan litterbugs to change their behavior. It accomplished this goal by showing them that the people the average Texan admired did not litter. The result was the very effective "Don't Mess with Texas" ad campaign. Television commercials were produced that featured famous Texans from sports and music all stating that they did not litter. In the ads, they each reiterated the tagline "Don't mess

with Texas." Celebrities from Texas, including boxer George Foreman, Houston Oilers quarterback Warren Moon and musician Willie Nelson, all chimed in to spread the message.

The Heath brothers explain that the ad campaign was an instant success. It reduced littering by 29 percent in its first year. Roadside litter went down 72 percent during the first five years. The emotions tapped by the advertisements, the Heaths explain, appeal to the litterbugs' sense of identity. This is the emotion that got them to care, and caring is what the emotional principle of stickiness is all about.

By showing readers how to inject more complex emotions into their ideas, the Heaths help them find the stickiness that will help their own ideas stick in the minds of others so they can be applied when the moment requires.

The final stickiness principle that the Heaths explore in *Made to Stick* is the idea that stories help people act on an idea. According to psychologist Gary Klein, author of *Sources of Power*, stories stick inside people's minds because they contain wisdom. Powerful stories are told and retold so people will learn to do things that will help them or others. Great stories also demonstrate unexpected causes and effects, point to better solutions and illustrate ways smart actions or decisions can be repeated.

### **Mental Simulation**

One reason why great stories make people act is because the human brain is highly susceptible to mental simulation, the Heaths write. When we imagine events or sequences of events, we trigger the same parts of our brain that are triggered when we experience a real physical activity. When scientists look at the brain scans of people who are told to imagine a flashing light, the same areas of the brain are activated as the ones that are activated by a real flashing light. When we imagine words that begin with the letter *p* or the letter *b*, our lips subtly move to form the letter. Researchers have even found that if we imagine we are drinking lemon juice when we are drinking water, we salivate more.

This all leads to the conclusion that mental simulations through storytelling can help us do many types of things. The Heaths write that mental simulation can improve our ability to solve problems because it can help us anticipate the right response to a future situation. For example, picturing a difficult situation, such as an argument with the boss, and imagining a better way to respond, such as avoiding a usual reaction, can be an

**When a story connects to its audience through links to real experiences, it will be recalled, retold and used to spread an idea.**

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effective way to prepare for the situation before it occurs. Studies also show that mental simulation can help us build our skills. One study even showed that mental practice produces about two-thirds of the benefits of actual physical practice.

The Heaths point out that these findings are important because they show us that mental simulation can be a very powerful tool when creating sticky stories. Remember, a sticky story is really just a mental simulation that guides people through a lifelike framework to a nugget of wisdom that we want them to remember. When a story connects to its audience through links to real experiences, it will be recalled, retold and used to spread an idea.

### Great Stories Inspire

The Heaths point out that great stories stimulate as well as inspire. The great thing about stories, they add, is that they really don't take too much creativity to use. Great stories are all around us, we just need to learn to recognize the best ones that pass in and out of our daily lives and catch them so we can apply them when we need them most. The Heath brothers' book offers practical advice to help executives develop their filters and sift the story gold from the silt.

Beyond its stickiness principles, *Made to Stick* also helps readers understand stickiness by summarizing many of its points into "Clinics." These sections address a specific problem with some of the learning the authors have revealed. For example, while discussing the role of stories in creating a sticky idea, the Heaths present a clinic for "Dealing with Problem Students."

First, they present the situation, which involves the issues of professors having to deal with challenging students in their classrooms. Next, they offer messages from two different sources that are dissected and analyzed using the stickiness principles. Finally, they present their "Punch Line." This is where they compare the effec-

tiveness of the messages and reach a conclusion about the best way to respond to a similar situation. These clinics transform the lessons presented throughout *Made to Stick* into useful actions that anyone in a similar situation can use to cope with a difficult situation. They also show how real people have successfully applied stickiness principles to their work.

### The 'Made to Stick' Phenomenon

*Made to Stick* has become a phenomenon because it embodies all of the six principles it describes. For instance, it breaks down the ideas it contains into extremely memorable lessons that are simple and straightforward. The absence of industry-specific jargon or complicated metaphors help the authors quickly and smoothly get to their points. Additionally, many of those points are counterintuitive and unexpected. They offer surprises that keep readers tuned in for more ideas they can share with others.

The ideas presented throughout *Made to Stick* are also rock solid. There is very little speculation going on, other than the important reflections on the future and questions for readers that bring them into the lessons presented. Also, the Heaths have the academic credentials and the public exposure from their popular writing gigs to make them very credible sources of the information they present. They have also picked wonderful stories to illustrate their points. These stories contain a variety of emotional topics and situations to draw in all types of readers.

This insightful combination of the stickiness principles turn *Made to Stick* into a clear example of the lessons it contains. The book's popularity and best-selling success demonstrate that Dan and Chip Heath have captured valuable information in their book that is as applicable to our modern world as it is appealing to our desire to find sticky ideas that we can use to improve our work and our lives. ●

**The authors:** Chip Heath is a professor of organizational behavior in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. Dan Heath is a consultant at Duke Corporate Education. A former researcher at Harvard Business School, he is a co-founder of Thinkwell, an innovative new-media textbook company. Together, Chip and Dan Heath are the authors of *Made to Stick* and *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*.