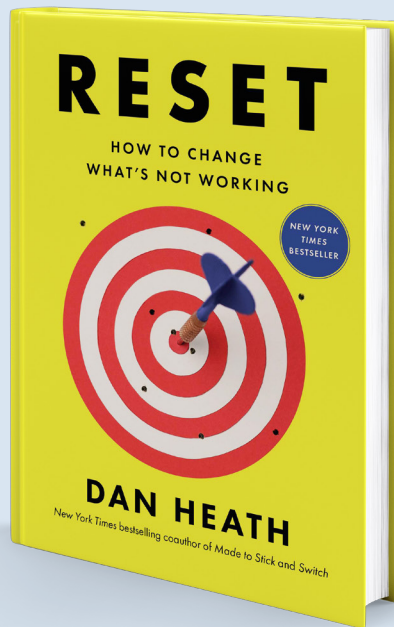


# Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



## Reset

### How to Change What's Not Working

By Dan Heath

**Dan Heath** is the #1 New York Times bestselling coauthor/author of six books, including *Made to Stick*, *Switch*, and *The Power of Moments*. His books have sold over four million copies worldwide and been translated into thirty-five languages. Dan also hosts the award-winning podcast *What It's Like to Be...*, which explores what it's like to walk in the shoes of people from different professions (a mystery novelist, a cattle rancher, a forensic accountant, and more). A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and Harvard Business School, he lives in Durham, North Carolina.

*A Book Review by Soundview*

## Unlock Forward Movement

In his book, *Reset: How to Change What's Not Working*, Dan Heath quotes Paul Batalden as saying, "Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets." If progress is to be made, then, systems need to be improved. Heath says that the changes needed in any given circumstance are not always self-evident because after a while people start to think that how something is always done is how it should be done. In order to reset a system as quickly as possible, then, people need to recognize what these stumbling blocks are, the leverage points, and then they must use their resources to change those systems.

Heath devotes his book not just to problems that occur within business. His strategies can work also in families, church communities, and any other group of people. They can also work as well within a person's own internal life and the habits that that internal life facilitates. Before Heath gets into the heart of his book, finding leverage points and stacking resources, Heath talks about the importance of noticeable progress. Research has shown how noticeable progress is the most important way to influence people's motivation as well as their perceptions of their work day. "No other work dynamics had as dramatic an effect on employees' inner life." People simply need to believe they are making progress in order to be satisfied in a situation.

### Finding Leverage Points: Observation, Goals, and Questions

The first step to change is to find leverage points, and in order to do this, a person must "go and see the work." Doing this is much more beneficial than merely sitting in a conference room discussing a situation because seeing the work allows people to work within the realm of reality rather than in the realm of guesses. Heath finds that most people do not understand how parts relate to a whole in a system. To illustrate this, Heath discusses how difficult of a time people have drawing parts on a bicycle. Most people have a functional understanding of a bike but could not explain how the system works, even those with in-depth knowledge about cycling. This is true in many situations, and it is not until the time is taken to go and watch a system up close that people can really see where problems occur.

It is usually best to go visit the people on the front lines when seeing the work because they are the ones who really understand how things work. Without seeing the work, people can find that sometimes interventions make things worse. For example, one school had students who struggle take a double class period for math. When shadowing a student to understand the system, an assistant principal noticed just how awful the double class periods were, especially because students who had to take the double class periods were cut short on electives. To improve the situation, the school decided to ensure that all students had an option to take at least one elective. This was a problem quickly mitigated because of the assistant principal's decision to "go and see the work."

Heath then encourages his reading to "consider the goal of the goal." This is important because achieving some goals results in no lasting change or benefit, making them relatively useless. Readers, therefore, need to consider whether the goals they set will achieve the outcomes they desire. One way to do this is with what Heath calls, "the Miracle Question." This question is, "A miracle happened overnight that fixed your critical problem. What are the first things you notice, after you wake up, that reveal the miracle has happened?" This question helps people zero in on quality changes that actually can make a difference. To illustrate this, he discusses a man and a woman in marriage counseling. The two discuss what they want with their therapist, and when the therapist asked the miracle question. The husband said that one thing that would change would be his wife would look at him while he was speaking to her. His wife never knew how important this was. This answer provided a tangible goal his wife could pursue that would make a meaningful difference.

## Finding Leverage: Bright Spots, Constraints, and Mapping

Another way to find leverage points is to look for what is currently working, the bright spots. After all, it does nobody any good to focus on areas where change cannot be made. If change cannot be made, the point is not a leverage point after all. It is not helpful, usually, to look at averages when trying to find leverage points because they are by nature a composite and do not necessarily represent one person or situation. Bright spots, on the other hand, are tasks, behaviors, or outcomes that you know are possible because somebody is already achieving them.

To illustrate this concept, Heath discusses a subscription service. Crucial to the success of a subscription service is for clients to renew their service. Some client partners at this particular enterprise had success with retaining their customers while others had much less success. When the company looked at the top performers versus the lowest performers, they realized that there were areas where individual's tactics were quite different. For example, top performers were over 50% more likely to have a "defined daily process" than the lowest performers were. Because there was such a gap between success and failure, this was a solid leverage point. If the company could get their lowest performers to have their own "defined daily process," it is likely they would start to improve dramatically. On the other hand,

the company realized that there was not a huge difference between the follow up processes of the lowest and highest employees, and as such, this would not serve as a solid leverage point. This demonstrates how looking specifically at the brightest spots in any organization or process can help a person determine where the best leverage points are.

On the flip side, it is also possible to find leverage points by targeting the constraint. A constraint is "the limiting factor" or what it is that is holding you back from greater success. Heath states that "what's counterintuitive about constraints is that even smart-seeming investments can be worthless at improving the operations of a system if they don't address the constraint." The constraint will depend on what the actual goal is.

To explain identifying constraints, Heath discusses a hypothetical donut stand where cooking the donuts takes 60 seconds and taking the orders takes 90 seconds. It would not make any sense to purchase a new machine that could cook the donuts in 30 seconds because the cooks would not be in use a large part of the time because they would be waiting on orders which still take 90 seconds. If the owner of this same stand instead hired an extra person to take orders, quickening the order process, they could move the line more quickly. At this point it may make sense to purchase the new machine that could keep up with the faster order taking. It is important to find the constraints.

Finally, it can be helpful to "map the system" when finding new leverage points. People within organizations can get stuck in silos where they do not understand the overall system as a whole, making it difficult to find leverage points. It is the person who stands above the system and determines how it all works together who can find leverage points most easily. It is also important to find inherent assumptions and see if they are, in fact, true.

## Resetting Resources

When resetting resources, it can be incredibly helpful to start with a burst to get everybody off on the right track. Heath is careful to note that a burst is not a time to expect people to do exponentially more work. Rather it is a set time dedicated to the task at hand, limiting distractions. For example, having everyone work on pushing on a specific leverage point for forty hours over the course of one week is an example of a burst. One reason this works is because switching between tasks takes time. When people are able to focus intently on one task over the course of a week, that down time is eliminated or is at least reduced.

It also helps when people are working together. Miscommunication and misunderstandings can occur when people are not working in the same space at the same time. This is eliminated or reduced when everyone is together. Even if people are separated by distance, however, the idea of joint work can become possible when everyone makes themselves available for synchronous communication at the same time over whatever remote systems the group is working with.

Heath discusses the importance of effectiveness over efficiency in bursts by discussing an issue a man had at home with his wife. His wife wanted him to install a hose system that would allow her



## Motivation is “the very heart of change”

to more easily water her garden beds. The husband went to the home improvement store and bought everything he needed, but when he got home, he realized that one component was broken. It would have been more efficient for him to put the project on hold and get a new part the next time he went to the store, likely within a couple of days. This way he would not waste time or gas. He knew that this would not be okay with his wife, however, because she was less concerned with efficiency than she was with effectiveness at that moment. She wanted the hose system. He, therefore, went and got the part that day to finish the project. This task served as a burst. He put all of his resources into finishing the task before moving on to something new. It is important to accomplish meaningful work during a burst by focusing directly on the task that needs to be completed.

### Downtime

Another way to focus on resetting resources is to seek out and then to eliminate waste. Heath uses the acronym DOWNTIME to explain waste. With this acronym, he refers to “eight possible categories of waste: defects, overproduction, waiting, non utilized talent, transportation, inventory, motion, and extra processing.” This principle is usually used to describe waste in factories, so it can be used in people’s personal lives, but it may need to be tweaked a little bit. An example Heath gives of a company using DOWNTIME to eliminate waste involves Sweetgreen, a salad restaurant. At this restaurant, staff would mix salads in large metal bowls, but the bowls constantly had to be washed and were pricey. Adding to the price was the labor and water needed to wash these bowls. If they had customers mix their own salads, they believe people would enjoy the experience less. Therefore, they decided to purchase larger take home bowls in which staff could mix the salad directly in the bowl. Sweetgreen was able to reduce waste without compromising quality by using DOWNTIME, and this was only possible because they first mapped the system to find out where the waste was.

Another way that DOWNTIME can be used is with the concept of shifting right. There are certain tasks that all people can do, and there are other tasks that only one person or only particularly qualified people can do. An example of this is in the world of medicine. Only a doctor can diagnose patients. Therefore, medical systems sought to hire out other steps of the process, such as checking in patients and checking vitals, to other cheaper labor. This made the endeavor cheaper for the organization. Heath uses this example, however, to explain that prudence is also needed when trimming waste as patients consider whether or not the quality of the experience is the same when they see the doctor for such a short period of time. To determine whether such a right shift is beneficial, Heath

thinks people need only to ask those affected whether or not the change is worth the cost.

Heath moves on to discuss the necessity of both adding and subtracting to what it is that you do. This often requires people to make tough decisions. He writes about a story that he read about in which a woman sought therapy because she had an exceedingly difficult time getting her children out of the door in the morning. One of her daughters has ADHD and it was particularly difficult for this child. The woman spoke with a therapist who suggested she look at what went well and add on to that. The woman realized that her daughter shines when they have one on one time. She realized that she, herself, works better when she is well-rested. She made some changes, and the situation changed very quickly. At least one of these changes inflicted a cost, however. She had to give up some time with her husband in the evenings in order to wake up early enough in the mornings to have some time to calmly start her day by herself. People should look at what they should add or increase in a situation as well as what they should stop doing or should start doing less of. Heath finds that both individuals and organizations will often spend too much time on some low pay off projects or customers and way too little time on what matters the most. When people look to see what to cut or to minimize, they ought to be looking for those activities that give the least amount of payoff, so they are not wasting resources on less productive tasks or customers.

### Restacking Resources

It is also important to consider people’s motivation when it comes to restacking resources. Motivation is “the very heart of change,” according to Heath. To illustrate how important motivation is, Heath discusses a man named Ezra Fox who was struggling to get his children to put away their toys. Fox realized that his children simply had no desire to follow his direction, and so he made it a game for them. While the motivation from this game only lasted a short amount of time, he was able to come up with other games that gave the children motivation to promptly clean up their belongings. By tapping into their motivation, he was able to help his children achieve his goals for them.

Obviously motivation extends beyond just children and cleanliness. Tapping into employees’ motivation can help everyone become more effective. One method for doing this is to establish swaps where everyone lists out aspects of their jobs that they love and hate. Then if one employee loves working on something another hates, they can switch tasks. It will not always be possible to have people only working on tasks they enjoy, but when possible, it does help increase employee motivation. In this way, you are restacking human resources to work on what it

is each person can most effectively accomplish.

Heath moves on to the importance of giving people some power over their own work in his second to last chapter on resetting resources. He claims that offering people autonomy “instills more accountability... taps higher-order skills, and... reduces waste from micromanagement.” Heath describes how dialysis nurses at one center started to train patients to do their own dialysis. Many feared what could happen because successful dialysis is crucial to keeping people alive. They worried about all that could go wrong. In the end, they found out that giving patients control over their dialysis was highly successful and that there were actually fewer patient emergencies. A tactic like this helps redistribute resources as the patients themselves do some of the work, making them feel in control. It also opens up other resources. This all must be done within reason, however. The most successful situations where people are given autonomy happens when the level of autonomy is also aligned to the goals of the organization. In these cases, it is the leaders who decide on the problems but the team members who decide how to solve those problems.

Finally, Heath turns to accelerated learning. In order to work effectively and manage leverage points, ample information is needed, and the quicker people get information, the quicker they can change. In order to facilitate this change, it is important to quickly identify failure and also figure out who is most likely to give effective feedback. Finally, it is also important to locate successes. One organization that effectively captured quick feedback was the 49ers. They desired to know, in real time, what changes they could make to improve the fan experience. They ended up installing terminals throughout the park where people could rate their experience. People interpreting that data in real time could go to sources of problems and solve them immediately. This fast learning allowed them to make quick changes in the areas where small changes could make big differences. This is a key example of leveraging resources.

Heath’s book sets out to teach readers how to effectively manage their resources in order to make noticeable improvements in key areas of life. While many of the examples in the book pertain to the world of business, not all of them do. This is because Heath’s tactics can be used in families, too, as well as with people’s personal goals. This is because the book is all about finding areas where problems exist that can be quickly changed. The concepts are all easy to follow because Heath gives numerous examples for each of his steps, illustrating how the concepts are used in different areas of life. Additionally, he ends each chapter with a summary of key points from the chapter, allowing readers to quickly go back and review information they may have forgotten. All of this comes together to form a coherent and easy to implement plan of action for people looking to use their resources to the best of their abilities and to use leverage points to make improvements.