
BOOK REVIEW

"Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard" by Chip & Dan Heath

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Reviewed by Dr Darryl Cross,
leadership & careers coach
& psychologist
www.DrDarryl.com



Written by brothers, Chip (professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business) and Dan Heath (Senior Fellow at Duke University's Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship), *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* helpfully mixes psychological research with pleasing metaphor to articulate how to best effect change.

We have all experienced cultural, organisational or personal difficulties in effecting change. It can be difficult to change the *status quo*.

The Heath Brothers believe that a culture where change is difficult develops when the heart (our emotions), and the mind (our rationality), disagree. Of course, each of us has a rational and emotional side. It was Jonathan Haidt, psychologist and author of *The Happiness Hypothesis*, who elaborated and expanded upon these two parts that make up who we are by referring to a simple and helpful metaphor: our emotional side is like an elephant and our rational side like its rider.

Let's expand this further.

The elephant is emotional and often lazy, seeking instant gratification. The rider is more rational, exacting, but is sometimes prone to over-analyse and over-think things which is called *analysis paralysis*.

So, if change is like riding an elephant, how to do you do it? Well, the Heath brothers suggest three necessary steps. To create change you need to direct the rational rider, motivate the emotional elephant and shape the path or the environment.

1. Direct the Rider

- A. **Follow the Bright Spots.** *Emulate successes rather than focus on thorny root problems that are more difficult to change.*

Jerry Sternin effected great change through his work with Save the Children in a Vietnamese village in 1990. He observed that mothers who fed their children smaller, more frequent meals of pure rice per day containing nutritious supplements, especially mud crabs, were healthier than other malnourished children. Around 65% of children began to eat more healthily in six months by rationally instructing the other mothers to emulate this style of cooking.

- B. **Script the Critical Moves.** Ambiguity is the enemy of change because it brings new choices that create uncertainty, therefore, *when you want someone to behave in a new way, give specific instructions clearly.*

This is powerfully applied to parenting. Stubbornness and opposition in children can be caused by a lack of clarity. Beverly Funderburk at the University of Oklahoma stopped abusive parents from harming their children by improving the amount of detail they gave when instructing their child. For example, a parent might ask a child "Put your shoes on" with little response, but "The bus is about to arrive, please put on your shoes" was a more successful request.

- C. **Point to the Destination.** When you describe a compelling destination, you're helping to correct one of the Riders great weaknesses— tendency to get lost in analysis. *When you point to an attractive destination, The Rider starts applying his strengths to figure out how to get there.* You need a vision or a picture postcard of the destination!

2. Motivate the Elephant

- A. **Find the Feeling.** *Knowing something isn't enough to cause change. Make people feel something.*

Robyn Waters, a disgruntled and retrenched fashion snob from Versace employed at Target before its rise to current dominance, found a way to motivate bottom-dollar-driven fabric merchants away from the previous season's stability in monochrome towards explosive colour that was recently embraced in London and Paris by pointing out their positive reaction towards other colourful products of the time making the same transition such as M&M's and the iMac.

- B. **Shrink the Change.** *Break down the change until it no longer spooks the Elephant.*

Marla Cilley devised a "5-Minute Room Rescue" cleaning technique which is not too spooky for reluctant elephants. Set the oven timer for 5 minutes before making a start in the dirtiest room in the house. The trick is that people are more than likely to keep cleaning after 5 minutes has passed, the hard part is not getting overwhelmed.

- C. **Grow your People.** *Cultivate a sense of identity and instill the growth mind set.*

Paul Butler encouraged the people of St Lucia island in the Caribbean to protect its rare St. Lucia Parrot by convincing them that they were a people who protected their own through a grass roots campaign that instilled a sense of affinity with the endangered bird.

3. Shape the Path

- A. **Tweak the Environment.** *When the situation changes, the behavior changes. So change the situation.*

The perfect example of making desirable behaviors easier to perform is

Amazon's 1 Click Ordering; much easier than entering your details over and over again.

- B. **Build Habits.** *When behavior is habitual, it's "free" – it doesn't tax the Rider. Look for ways to encourage habits.*

General Pagonis, US Head of Logistics during the Gulf War, created an ingenious way of making his meetings more efficient by enforcing attendees to stand. This change in behavior encouraged contributions to be shorter and more direct.

- C. **Rally the Herd.** *Behavior is contagious. Help is spread.*

Elephants are often frightened of initiating a new behavior. This is why baristas 'seed' their tip jars with cash and why theatrical companies 'plant' stooges during review nights to encourage the crowd to laugh more raucously or start clapping at the right moment.

People who achieve change in themselves or others have a clear direction, ample motivation, and a supportive environment.

Remember therefore, that it takes both the rider and the elephant to arrive at the desired destination. How can you ensure that you have engaged both when you either seek to attain personal growth or seek to bring about organisational or team change? Ignore one or the other at your peril.

[Dr Darryl Cross is a clinical and organisational psychologist as well as a credentialed executive and personal coach. He is also an author, international speaker and university lecturer. Dr Darryl assists people to find their strengths and reach their goals. Further information on Dr Darryl can be seen at www.DrDarryl.com]