

Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard

Listen in as co-author Chip Heath explains why some attempts to change are more successful than others. Listen to comprehensive interview with the author at: <http://experiencelife.com/audio/switch-how-to-change-things-when-change-is-hard/>

Or Read: Six-Minute Summary of Switch

Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard



If you are in the role of a “change agent” this book is your **manual**. Up to this point, the bible for “organizational change” has been John P. Kotter’s book *Leading Change* published by the Harvard Business School.

Based on his article *Eight Reasons Why Transformation Efforts Fail*, Kotter outlines (not surprisingly) an eight stage process for changing a culture:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Create the guiding coalition.
3. Developing a vision and strategy.
4. Communicating the change vision.
5. Empowering employees for broad based action.
6. Generating short term wins.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change.
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture.

I have found it quite valuable in the past to challenge a leadership team to assess their own efforts against these factors, then listen to what the next level down has to say. There is *always* a large gap – what the leaders THINK they are saying clearly is much more muddled to the listeners.

Chip and Dan Heath take things down another couple of levels. They deal with the psychology – what goes on between our ears, and their process maps very well back to Kotter’s – as a much more explicit “how to.”

This book summary and review of Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard was prepared by Jennifer Marie Duplantis while a Business of Administration student in the College of Business at Southeastern Louisiana University.

On this topic

Executive Summary

This is a remarkable book about how to change things when change is hard. It can be about you, a job, friends, or even family. Change is very difficult and hard to do without a little motivation. The book helps you to look at things in a different way than you had before. Seeing the good things about why you should change and why it was better before.

One way Dan and Chip Heath, the authors, explained it in the book was that we have two parts to us. We have the emotional side (the Elephant) and the rational side (the Rider). Most of us think that the Rider always controls the Elephant, but in most cases it's the other way around. The Elephant somehow ends up controlling the Rider. It's like they talked about in the book, about someone trying to go on a diet. Your Rider side wants to look slimmer and eat healthier but your Elephant side loves those cookies and fast food. The Rider and Elephant both need to be on the same page to be able to work together but usually this isn't the case. Your heart may want one thing but your mind may want another. That is the Rider and the Elephant at war.

This book teaches you have to be on the same page with your emotional and rational side. It teaches you how to react to certain situations that are very simple and easy to do. Now they aren't saying change is easy, by far it is one of the hardest things in your life depending on what it is that you are fighting to change. There are better ways to make a change than probably what most think. Most likely they are plain and simple but you have to set forth a goal to achieve this change. One can't say, "Hey I want to lose weight soon" and just automatically it starts to happen. No! One must set realistic goals as "Hey I want to lose 10 pounds in the next 3 months. This is your rider and elephant starting to work together. Your elephant now has motivation and your rider has direction.

[Switch](#) is arranged around a correlation (immediately visual and sticky). When we are making a decision we're often torn between our rational, logical reasons and our emotional, intuitive feelings. Tell the Rider what to do, provide a good argument and the Rider will do it. The Elephant, on the other hand, represents our emotions, our gut response. The Rider might like to avoid those chocolate chip cookies but there is very little the Rider can do if the Elephant really wants it. To complete their comparison they include the Path they are travelling along. If the Rider can direct the Elephant down a well prepared Path then there is a good chance for change. The Path might represent, for example, access to user friendly technology or effective office space design. Switch is arranged in three parts: Direct the Rider, Motivate the Elephant and Shape the Path.

The Ten Things Managers Need to Know from Switch

1. **Our emotions can overwhelm our rational thought**, while relying solely on rational behavior can *"overanalyze and over think things."*
2. **There are better ways to make a change than probably what most think.** Most likely they are plain and simple but you have to set forth a goal to achieve this change. One can't say, "Hey I want to lose weight soon" and just automatically it start to happen. No! One must set realistic goals.
3. **What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem.**The book considers change at every level- individual, organizational, and societal. All change efforts usually have something in common: "For anything to change, someone has to start acting differently." But the question is always that, Can you get people to start behaving in a new way? Dan and Chip mention in this chapter that "In our lives, we embrace lots of big changes- not only babies, but marriages and new homes and new technologies and new job duties." So that means that it is quite possible for people to change.
4. **What looks like laziness is often exhaustion.** The Elephant and Rider are usually on two different pages and trying to persuade the Elephant often exhaust your mind. For example, When you try so hard to stay away from fattening foods because you are on a diet, you mind will get exhausted and won't want to find the temptation any longer forcing you to finally give in. The Elephant will usually win over the Rider.
5. **The Rider part of our minds has many strengths.**"The Rider is a thinker and a planner and can plot a course for a better future. But as we've seen, the Rider has a terrible weakness- the tendency to spin his wheels. The Rider loves to contemplate and analyze, and, making matters worse, his analysis is almost always directed at problems rather than at bright spots.

6. **We are all human but sometimes we tend to make the default plan** because that was the first plan given to us and when looking at the facts we look at the negative side, which then leads us to our first decision, which may not always be the best.

7. **Make sure your goals are reachable and specific.** If not then you may tend to go in circles when trying to achieve your goal. Taken small steps are best way to achieve any big time change in your life. Too big of a step can end up being too overwhelming and cause you to give up more easily.

8. **“In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought.”** “In other words, when change works, it’s because leaders are speaking to the Elephant as well as to the Rider.” Change only works if the Elephant and Rider are working together.

9. **The gates of large goals are lined with small accomplishments.** Remember to compliment yourself when completing little steps towards your goal, it will help motivate you.

10. **“Any new quest, even one that is ultimately successful, is going to involve failure.** You can’t learn to salsa-dance without failing. You can’t learn to be an inventor, or a nurse, or a scientist, without failing. Nor can you learn to transform the way products are developed in your firm, or change minds about urban poverty, or restore loving communication with your spouse, without failing. And the Elephant really, really hates to fail.” So how is it that you keep the Elephant motivated to not give up? “The answer may sound strange: You need to create the expectation of failure- not the failure of the mission itself, but failure en route.”

Full Summary of Switch

Introduction

This book teaches you how to be on the same page with your emotional and rational side. It teaches you how to react to certain situations that are very simple and easy to do. Now they aren’t saying change is easy, by far it is one of the hardest things in your life depending on what it is that you are fighting to change. There are better ways to make a change than probably what most think. Most likely they are plain and simple but you have to set forth a goal to achieve this change. Through the entire book Dan and Chip use the example of an Elephant and a Rider, the Elephant is your emotional side and the Rider is your rational side. A person can’t say, “Hey I want to lose weight soon” and just automatically it starts to happen. No! One must set realistic goals as “Hey I want to lose 10 pounds in the next 3 months. This is your rider and elephant starting to work together. Your Elephant now has motivation and your Rider has direction. “Anytime the six-ton Elephant and the Rider disagree about which direction to go, the Rider is going to lose. He’s completely overmatched.”

Our emotions can overwhelm our rational thought (the reason for the elephant-driver metaphor; the elephant is bigger than the driver), while relying solely on rational behavior can “*overanalyze and over think things. Chances are you know the people with Rider problems, your colleague who can brainstorm for hours but can’t ever seem to make a decision.*” Switch dedicates itself to change processes that manage both aspects — *direct the rider and motivate the elephant*— along with a third segment, Shaping the Path, that details the steps once driver and elephant are mastered.

Managing our “driver and elephant” brains also include surroundings. Tweak the Environment covers how a person should not simply blame people, but also account for the situation: “*What looks like a person problem is often a situation problem.*” The Heaths advocate small tweaks – “even small environmental tweaks can make a difference” – and examine “action triggers” – the associations of one action to another – to address habits. Occasional clinics pull the segments together in situations set in organizations. Relating a business process to everyday happenings bring the idea to “script the change” into a living concept that, well, sticks in your mind.

Switch makes the psychology behind its thesis accessible. It identifies the basic psychological conflicts that can lead to poor choices or derail the most complex business team. It makes its points using narrative, yet the stories are rooted in scholarly sources. It explains in straightforward terms. Great books broaden a reader's world outlook, and the Heaths broaden outlooks very well. They do it with an optimistic tone that strengthens their points and the utility of their concepts.

Overall I found *Switch* an excellent starting point to discuss change in a professional or organization. Not only does it stand well on its own for learning how to manage and infuse change into a given situation. Change isn't easy, so to speak, but *Switch* makes the process of change easier.

Three Surprises About Change

1. **What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem.** The book considers change at every level- individual, organizational, and societal. All change efforts usually have something in common: "For anything to change, someone has to start acting differently." But the question is always that, Can you get people to start behaving in a new way? Dan and Chip mention in this chapter that "In our lives, we embrace lots of big changes- not only babies, but marriages and new homes and new technologies and new job duties." So that means, that it is quite possible for people to change.
2. **What looks like laziness is often exhaustion.** When you try so hard to stay away from fattening foods because you are on a diet, your mind will get exhausted and then you will finally give in.
3. **What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity.** "If the Rider isn't sure exactly what direction to go, he tends to lead himself in circles."

Direct the Rider

1. Directing the Rider isn't an easy task. The elephant most of the times seems to disagree with the rider making it very difficult for the rider to go in the correct path. Often the heart and mind disagree. Consider a person who wants to wake up at 5:45am to go workout but the other side of us when the alarm clock goes off doesn't like waking up to plain darkness in the morning and just wants to snooze for a few more minutes. That's an example of your heart and your mind having a disagreement. So how do we make this switch? There are three main points in this book that you need to remember when trying to make that switch which is:
 2. To Direct the Rider- Script the critical moves
 3. Motivate the Elephant- Shrink the change
 4. Shape the Path- Build a habit

Find the Bright Spots

The rider part of our minds has many strengths. "The Rider is a thinker and a planner and can plot a course for a better future. But as we've seen, the Rider has a terrible weakness- the tendency to spin his wheels. The Rider loves to contemplate and analyze, and, making matters worse, his analysis is almost always directed at problems rather than at bright spots. You can probably recall a conversation with a friend who agonized for hours over a particular relationship problem. But you can remember an instance when a friend spent even a few minutes analyzing why something was working so well?" The Rider will spin his wheels indefinitely unless he's given clear direction. That's the one reason you always need to direct the Rider. You want to show him exactly where to go, how to act, and what destination to pursue. "And that's why bright spots are so essential, because they are the best hope for directing the Rider when you're trying to bring about change."

Another major point Dan and Chip Heath make in this chapter is about "solutions-focused brief therapy" which is about digging around for clues about why you act the way you do instead of asking about your childhood. Solutions-focused therapists do not care about your childhood like other therapists may; they tend to go at finding out what the problem may be in a different way. In a brief story about a lady and her

golf swing, they explain what they mean by using “Solution-focused therapy.” They explain, “Most people, including most therapists, believe the change process has to be complicated and difficult. ‘No pain, no gain’ is the general rule of thumb.” This brief story shows otherwise. “At one point, her golf swing started misfiring, so she went to a golf pro, thinking her technique needed a major overhaul. She noted that the golf pro didn’t do anything archaeology. He never said, “You obviously have a fear of winning. Did your father intimidate you as a little girl? Instead, all he did was suggest a minor modification: relaxing her tight grip on the club.” She was peeved at first by the advice given to her but realized later in her game that her balls were going straighter and were improving. This type of therapy uses common techniques for discovering potential solutions. Finding the bright spots is a critical part in helping to solve problems and be a major thing for businesses. It’s stated in the book, “There is a clear asymmetry between the scale of the problem and the scale of the solution. Big problem, small solution. Big problems are rarely solved with commensurately big solutions. Instead, they are most often solved by a sequence of small solutions, sometimes over weeks, sometimes over decades. And this asymmetry is what the Rider’s predilection for analysis can backfire so easily.” “When the Rider analyzes a problem, he seeks a solution that befits the scale of it. If the Rider spots a hole, he wants to fill it, and if he’s got a round hole with a 24-inch diameter, he’s gonna go looking for a 24-inch peg. But that mental model is wrong. You need to think the question, “What’s working right now?”

At the very end of the chapter they give you a list of 24 words of “emotion” found in the dictionary and said that only 6 of them are positive words. It seems that people are more focused on the negative things than the positive. It is stated, “A group of psychologists reviewed over two hundred articles and concluded that, for a wide range of human behavior and perception, a general principle holds true: “Bad is stronger than good.” It was said that a study was done and participants were given a photo of bad and good events and they spent more time viewing the bad ones.” Also, if you think back to when talking to a close friend about someone and a lot of it was good but just a little was bad, you always tend to remember and talk about the bad. The researchers in this book call this “positive-negative asymmetry.” Dan and Chip Heath consider that if a person uses, “These flashes of success-these bright spots- can illuminate the road map for action and spark the hope that change is possible.”

Script the Critical Moves

In this chapter Dan and Chip talk about “decision paralysis.” “More options, even good ones, can freeze us and make us retreat to the default plan. This behavior clearly is not rational, but it is human.” Discussed in this chapter is a good example of this. A doctor told his patient that she was going to need surgery and then realized after checking with the pharmacy that there was one medication that hadn’t been tried. “Now the doctor faced a dilemma: Should he prescribe the untried medication, even though other medications had failed, or should he go ahead and refer the patient for surgery? When doctors were presented with this case history, 47 percent of them chose to try the medication, in hopes of saving the patient from going under the knife. In another variation on the dilemma, another group of doctors were presented with almost exactly the same set of case facts- except this time, the patient’s pharmacy discovered two untried medications. If you were the patient with the arthritic hip, you’d be thrilled- certainly two nonsurgical options are better than one. But when the doctors were presented with two medications, only 28 percent chose to try either one.” Why would they do this? Does it even seem to make sense? “The doctors were acting as though having more medication options somehow made medication a worse bet than surgery. But if 47 percent of doctors thought medication shouldn’t have tipped them toward surgery.” This is where the doctors used “decision paralysis.” We are all human but sometimes we tend to make the default plan because that was the first plan giving to us and when looking at the facts we look at the negative side, which then leads us to our first decision.

Point to the Destination

This chapter demonstrates pointing to a destination or “goal” that you want to reach by a certain date. Make sure that it is a reachable goal that you can stay on and one that makes you want to reach it. In this chapter the example they use is a group of first graders who weren’t even at the kindergarten level and some couldn’t even hold a pencil. The teacher used a great way to help the students and herself reach a goal. She

told them, “By the end of this school year, you’re going to be third graders.” She didn’t mean literally but it made the students admire what that would feel like and made them feel good. The teacher made this decision very carefully knowing what level the children were at and when they had to end up at the end of the year. She made sure the goal was realistic and reachable. “One of her first efforts was to cultivate a culture of learning in her classroom, calling her students “scholars” and asking them to address one another that way.” When others would come to see the class, “she introduced her class as a group of scholars and asked them to define the term for the guest.” The students would then tell the guest and of course want to go home and tell their parents what they had learned in class. It always makes one happy when they have accomplished part of their goal and can then take that information that they gained and transfer it and teach it to someone else. They also say in the put about praising yourself in some way for what you have achieved and for how far you have come, which will then have you wanting to keep moving forward to achieve your entire goal. “When you describe a compelling destination, you’re helping to correct of the Rider’s great weaknesses- the tendency to get lost in analysis. Our first instinct, in most change situations, is to offer up data to people’s Riders: Here’s why we need to change. Here are the tables and graphs and charts that prove it. The Rider loves this. He’ll start poring over the data, analyzing it and poking holes in it, and he’ll be inclined to debate with out about the conclusions you’ve drawn. To the Rider, the “analyzing” phase is often more satisfying than the “doing” phase.”

“Goals in most organizations, however, lack emotional resonance. Instead, SMART goals- goals that are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Timely- have become the norm. A typical SMART goal might be “My marketing campaign will generate 4,500 qualified sales leads for the sales group by the end of Q3’09.” These types of goals will get your motivated and because it is a reachable goal, make you set forth more of an effort to achieve it.

Find the Feeling

In this chapter it is a matter of reaching the Elephant inside others. Kotter and Cohen said, “that in most change situations, managers initially focus on strategy, structure, culture, or systems, which leads them to miss the most important issue: The core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people, and behavior change happens in highly successful situations mostly by speaking to people’s feelings. This is true even in organizations that are very focused on analysis and quantitative measurement, even among people who think of themselves as smart in an MBA sense. In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought.” “In other words, when change works, it’s because leaders are speaking to the Elephant as well as to the Rider.”

Shrink the Change

The gates of large goals are lined with small accomplishments. In this chapter the authors Dan and Chip Heath propose that the only way to get to your larger goals is to accomplish smaller goals first, and build momentum. They call this “Shrink the Change.” It is a fascinating concept and one that I tend to believe in. They provide numerous examples including businesses, financial and sports success. Here is one example of how it works: Two car wash companies offered a promotional deal. The first company’s offer was to give you a stamp when you bought a car wash. Get eight stamps, get a free car wash. The second company’s offer was a free car wash after ten stamps. The difference...the second company gave the customer two stamps to begin with. Both offers are the same. Buy eight car washes and get one free. However with the second company the consumers’ perceptions, feelings and beliefs led them to think they were 20 percent on their way to their goal. A few months after this promotion, the second company had a 34 percent market share versus 19 percent for the first company. This story is intended to illustrate that the further along you are to your goal the more you will work towards your goal. When we are overwhelmed with a task, it is often because we have had no success on that task. However when we have some success, it is easier for us to build on that success, and keep going. The authors recommend lowering the bar first, and then raise it after you have had some accomplishments. When you set the bar high from the beginning, you may become overwhelmed. This contributes to individuals, and even teams, to give up before they even get started. “The Elephant has no trouble conquering these micro milestones, and as it does, something else happens. With each step, the Elephant feels less scared and less reluctant, because

things are working. With each step, the Elephant starts feeling the change. A journey that started with dread is evolving, slowly, toward a feeling of confidence and pride. And at the same time the change is shrinking, the Elephant is growing.”

Grow Your People

When you struggle to change something big about yourself, especially if it's something completely new, you will have up and down moments. As Dan and Chip put it, “Any new quest, even one that is ultimately successful, is going to involve failure. You can't learn to salsa-dance without failing. You can't learn to be an inventor, or a nurse, or a scientist, without failing. Nor can you learn to transform the way products are developed in your firm, or change minds about urban poverty, or restore loving communication with your spouse, without failing. And the Elephant really, really hates to fail.” So how is it that you keep the Elephant motivated to not give up? “The answer may sound strange: You need to create the expectation of failure- not the failure of the mission itself, but failure en route.” This chapter teaches you to have a “growth mindset,” which will help you to conquer more challenges and not think so much about failure. “People with a growth mindset- those who stretch themselves, take risks, accept feedback, and take the long-term view- can't help but progress in their lives and careers.” It is said that business people tend to reject the “growth mindset” because of the way we think. We think in two stages: “You plan, and then you execute.” We do not have a “learning stage or practice stage in the middle.”

Tweak the Environment

“When some guy cuts you off in traffic, you probably think, instinctively: What a jerk. What you almost certainly don't think to yourself is, Gosh, I wonder what's wrong that he is in such a hurry.” It's crazy how we don't think in that way. Most of us have been in this type of situation where we are running late for something very important and wind up driving like a crazy maniac and have people wanting to call us a jerk as well. It is very easy to judge someone by what they do. A good example of how to tweak the environment in a situation where a child is always late to class is for “The teacher to lock the door when the bell rings so that latecomers are stuck in the hallway.” This teaches that student to make sure he is on time or he will be standing outside the class.

Build Habits

This chapter helps you break your bad habits. “People are incredibly sensitive to the environment and then culture- to the norms and expectations of the communities they are in. We all want to wear the right clothes, to say the right things, to frequent the right places. Because we instinctively try to fit in with our peer group, behavior is contagious, sometimes in surprising ways.” When we think about our habits most of us think about the bad ones: “biting our fingernails, procrastinating, eating sweets when we're anxious, and so on.” Most of us don't think about the good habits that we have.” To change yourself or other people, you've got to change habits. Habits tend to change when the environment changes.

Rally the Herd

In this chapter it's about looking around to see what others are doing versus what you think you should do in a particular situation. In a study, a group of students were put in a room alone to fill out a survey when others were put three at a time into a room. Smoke then began to come through the air vents in which most of the students that were by themselves alerted someone about the smoke while in the room with a few people, only a few alerted someone about the smoke coming through the vent. They sat in the room looking at what each other was doing instead of getting up to let someone know. The point is that when someone isn't sure of something around them or doesn't feel comfortable, they tend to look at others for answers.

Keep the Switch Going

In the final chapter it talks about taking step by step to reach your goals. When you take small steps you will get farther than if you were to try and take a giant step because it may seem to get to overwhelming and then you may give up. As Dan and Chip write, “The first thing to do is to recognize and celebrate that first step. You’ve directed the Rider, you’ve motivated the Elephant, you’ve shaped the path- and now your team is moving, or you’re moving.”

The Video Lounge

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb-SdduiUMk>

This video is Chris Brogan giving main points of what is in the book and why you should read it. He talks about the three main points in the book: the Elephant, the Rider, and the Path. He explains what Dan and Chip Heath talk about through their book and how it is a must read.

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