

Made to Stick  
by Chip Heath & Dan Heath - 2007

Book review video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX5V1EXVKTI>

Book video 8:38:15 (no longer available online)

0:00:00 0. Introduction

urban legends like the Kidney Heist tale stick and spread  
compared with a business presentation that cannot be remembered  
theater popcorn has 37 grams saturated fat, from popping in coconut oil  
visual comparison message with a large amount of equivalent unhealthy food  
your ideas need to stand on their own merits  
sticky ideas are understood and remembered, and have a lasting impact  
they change your audience's opinions or behavior  
big ideas are stick-worthy; new strategic direction and guidelines for behavior  
the oldest class of naturally sticky ideas is the proverb  
a nugget of wisdom that often endures over centuries and across cultures  
The Tipping Point book examined forces that cause social phenomena to "tip"  
or make the leap from small groups to big groups. three sections:  
1 the need to get the right people  
2 "the stickiness factor"; innovations are more likely to tip when sticky  
3 the need for the right context  
the Halloween candy-tampering epidemic story is sticky and is false  
six principles of sticky ideas; SUCCES  
1 Simplicity; strip an idea down to its core  
2 Unexpectedness; violate people's expectations  
engage curiosity over time by opening gaps in knowledge, then filling gaps  
3 Concreteness; explain in terms of human actions, sensory information  
4 Credibility; carry their own credentials for people to test for themselves  
5 Emotions; get people to care by making them feel something  
6 Stories; get people to act on ideas; mental simulation of critical situations  
Curse of Knowledge psychological villain confounds ability to use principles  
+ tappers and listeners study; fail to communicate but believe we are effective  
+ once we know something, we cannot imagine what it was like not to know it  
becomes difficult for us to re-create our listeners' state of mind  
systematic creativity can be learned

0:46:36 1. Simple

Commanders' Intent; goals; desired end state of an operation  
lower levels are more concrete  
CI aligns behavior at all levels without requiring instructions  
simple = find the core of an idea  
strip down to critical essence  
challenge: weed out important ideas that are not the most important  
singularity

achieved perfection when there is nothing left to take away  
step 2: translate the core using SUCCES checklist  
find the lead and avoid temptation to bury lead in the details  
forced prioritization  
decision paralysis; driven by unknown | uncertainty  
irrelevant uncertainty can influence outcome; irrational  
additional good options reduces probability to choose either option  
idea clinics; how to make idea stickier  
simple = core + compact  
proverbs spread on their own; profound influences lifetime of behavior  
sound bite = simple without core  
avoid feature creep; what is + what is not  
how to cram more information into a compact message  
remember raw data vs concepts  
pack a lot of meaning into a little bit of messaging  
tap the existing terrain of the audience, use what is already there  
create complexity from the artful use of simplicity; staged and layered  
schema is an idea you already have; build upon schema  
want higher level schema  
message value to make accurate predictions or decisions  
analogies derive power from schemas; X is like Y  
invoke concepts you already know  
generative metaphor; e.g. Disney calls employees "cast members"

## 2:04:55 2. Unexpected

challenge of communication is to attract people's attention  
break a pattern; vs consistent stimulation makes us tune out  
brain is sensitive to changes  
how do I get people's attention? how do I keep it?  
we need to break through the clutter  
emotions: surprise + interest  
urban legends frequently contain plot twists  
our schema guessing machine failed which causes us to be surprised  
emotions generate heightened interest and conviction  
surprise gets our attention to compare with expectations to input new info  
anger gets our attention to focus on a known problem  
we look for answers why we are surprised; big surprises call for big answers  
avoid stepping over the line into gimmickry; surprise should be germane to core  
sticky message needs surprise + postdictable  
break someone's guessing machine and then fix it  
process for making  

1. identify the message you wish to communicate; find the core
2. figure out what is counterintuitive about the message  
what are the unexpected implications of your core message  
why isn't it already happening naturally
3. communicate your message in a way that breaks your audience's

guessing machine along the critical counterintuitive dimension  
then once their guessing machines have failed,  
help them refine their machines  
common sense is the enemy of sticky messages  
expose your parts of the message that are uncommon sense  
mystery story; begin with a puzzle; create a need for closure  
first level unexpected: fleeting surprise  
second level unexpected: enduring interest  
generate curiosity  
situational interest; knowledge gap theory of curiosity

### 3:16:45 3. Concrete

describe things that readers can visualize  
Aesop's fables have persisted for centuries around the world  
encoded truths to describe human nature  
avoid abstract language  
able to examine with senses; specific people doing specific things  
case study has specific examples  
velcro memory model; multiply idea with many hooks to stick to memory loops  
path to abstraction, blueprint, machine  
experts can see abstraction = a higher level of insight  
novices see detail  
Curse of Knowledge; abstract designers + physical implementers  
expert lost knowledge what it's like to view as a non-expert  
solve problems at the physical level that everyone understands  
a universal language is concrete; allows coordination  
concreteness makes targets transparent  
concreteness focuses your brain  
concreteness test; 15-second timer  
1. write down as many white things as you can think of  
2. write down as many white things in your refrigerator as you can think of  
another concreteness test  
1. think of 5 silly things people have done in the world in the past 10 years  
2. think of 5 silly things your child has done in the past 10 years  
find some way to invite people to the table to share their knowledge  
what would the customer do if in the expert's shoes

### 4:23:16 4. Credible

what makes people believe ideas?  
because our parents or friends believe  
we have had experiences that led us to our beliefs  
because of our religious faith  
because we trust authorities  
is challenging to affect what people believe  
classes of authority: expert + celebrities & other aspirational figures  
we care about what authorities believe because we want to be like them

we can tap the credibility of anti-authorities  
stories from real people; living proof  
messages must have internal credibility; vouch for themselves; principles:  
+ has concrete details, even unrelated; seems more real and believable  
+ details that support our core idea  
how to use statistics in a way to make meaningful  
is more important to remember a relationship  
human scale: contextualize in terms that are more human, everyday  
use statistics as input vs output, to make up your mind on an issue  
don't make up your mind and then go looking the numbers to support yourself  
Sinatra test; one example alone is enough to establish credibility  
in a given domain; if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere  
where's the beef

#### 5:36:50 5. Emotional

for people to take action, they have to care  
feelings inspire people to act, more than analytical thinking  
Mother Theresa effect; charities know that donors respond better  
to individuals than to abstract causes  
semantic stretch and the power of association  
piggy back emotions associate with emotions that already exist  
the most basic way to make people care is to form an association between  
something they don't yet care about and something they do care about  
over time, associations become overused and become diluted in value  
what matters to people; people matter to themselves; invoking self-interest  
measure mail-order advertising effectiveness; slightly different mail addresses  
get into every ad: here is something they want; is fundamental  
promise huge benefits for trivial costs  
companies emphasize features when they should be emphasizing benefits  
forget to tell us why we should buy  
"What's In It For You" should be a central aspect of every speech  
Have audience personally imagine the benefits  
Maslow studied needs and desires that motivate people to try to fulfill  
transcendence: help others realize their potential,  
self-actualization: realize our own potential, self-fulfillment, peak experiences  
aesthetic: symmetry, order, beauty, balance  
learning: know, understand, mentally connect  
esteem: achieve, be competent, gain approval, independence, status  
belonging: love, family, friends, affection  
security: protection, safety, stability  
physical: hunger, thirst, bodily comfort  
all needs are desired vs hierarchy  
people care about higher levels but believe others care about lower levels  
"What's in it for my group" trumps "What's in it for me"  
we use two basic models to make decisions  
+ calculating consequences; weigh alternatives; choose the most value

- the standard view of decision making in economics classes
- people are self-interested and rational
- + people make decisions based on identity
  1. who am I? 2. What kind of situation is this?
  3. What do people like me do in this kind of situation?
- there are no calculations about consequences for themselves
- only norms and principles

## 6:56:25 6. Stories

- stories are told and retold because they contain wisdom
- stories are effective teaching tools
- they show how context can mislead people to make the wrong decision
- stories illustrate causal relationships that people hadn't recognized before
- and highlight unexpected resourceful ways in which people have solved problems
- the story format has more drama and is interesting
- the audience can follow along and imagine how they would act
- is part entertainment and part instruction
- we create a simulation from the stories we hear
- mental simulation stimulates the same parts of the brain as real action
- mental simulation helps with problem solving
- helps us think of things we might otherwise have neglected
- mental simulations help us determine appropriate responses to future situations
- mental rehearsal can prevent people from relapsing into bad habits
- mental simulation can also build skills, 2/3 the benefit of real practice
- stories are like flight simulators for the brain
- a story provides the context missing from abstract prose
- velcro theory of memory: the more hooks we put into our ideas,
- the better they will stick
- builds in emotions, historical background, lesson can apply to future actions
- stories are collected; how to spot stories that inspire to take action
- need to consciously look for ideas; story templates
- uplift, motivate, energize
- + Aristotle's four primary dramatic plots; simple tragic, simple fortunate, complex tragic, complex fortunate
- + screenplay-writer Robert McKee lists 25 types of stories
- modern epic, disillusionment plot, etc.
- + sorting concludes there are three basic plots; classifies 60-80% of stories:
  - 1 challenge; David and Goliath; inspire us to act
    - a protagonist overcomes a formidable challenge and succeeds
    - variations: underdog, rags-to-riches, triumph of will-power over adversity
    - key element: obstacles seem daunting to the protagonist
  - 2 connection; good Samaritan; inspire in social ways; want to help others
    - story about people who develop a relationship that bridges a gap
  - 3 creativity; apple falls on Newton's head inspiring theory of gravity
    - someone makes a mental breakthrough, solving a longstanding puzzle,
    - attacking a problem in an innovative way

- make us want to do something different, be creative, experiment
- + springboard story lets people see how an existing problem might change
- tell people about possibilities, combat skepticism and create buy-in
- + story engages the audience, involves them with the idea, asks to participate
- compared with abstract directive: respond by fighting back,
- implicitly asking to evaluate the argument and argue back.
- + work in harmony with "little voice" inside the head
- springboard stories mobilize people to act, focus on potential solutions
- visible goals and barriers shifts the audience into a problem-solving mode
- mass customization: each audience member evaluates for themselves

## 8:07:35 Epilogue

### Villains

- + bury the lead, to get lost in a sea of information; Curse of Knowledge
- strip out information in order to focus on the core
- + focus on the presentation rather than the message
- + decision paralysis
- anxiety and irrationality from excessive choice or ambiguous situations
- find the core, share proverbs
- + Curse of Knowledge
- stages to get a message across: get the answer + tell others
- factors that work in the answer stage backfire in the telling others stage
- need expertise to get the answer, we mistakenly tell others as if they are us
- communication framework is reserved until the end of the book because
- Curse of Knowledge can easily render the framework useless
- the SUCCES framework is more tangible and is less subject to Curse of Knowledge
- communication framework to make an idea stick, to be useful and lasting
- 1 audience pay attention; Unexpected
- 2 understand and remember it; Concrete
- 3 agree, believe; Credible
- 4 care; Emotional
- 5 be able to act on the idea; Story
- x Simple is about the answer stage, honing in on the core of your message
- and making it as compact as possible
- simple messages help throughout the process for people to understand and act
- problem symptoms and solutions