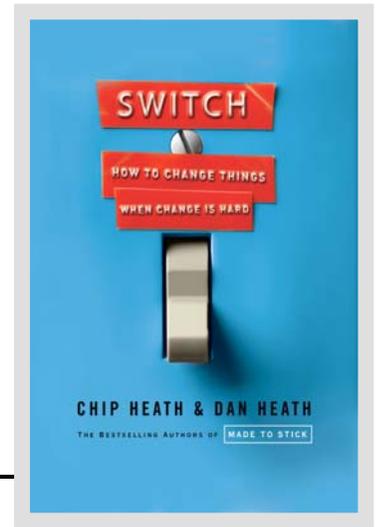


SWITCH

Book Club Questions

© 2010 Based on *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*
by Chip Heath and Dan Heath



Most of us accept the fact that change is hard. It's tough to lose weight, or to be more productive at work, or to quit smoking. Our past efforts at change may be riddled with failure. But not all change is hard, and in fact, some big changes we look forward to—getting married or having a baby. Can you describe some major changes in your life that you embraced without resistance, and in fact even looked forward to? How did that change make you feel?

How do you see the basic “personalities” of the Rider and the Elephant play out in your own life? Are there experiences you've had where you experienced conflict between the two?

The Rider

Chapter 2 covers finding the “bright spots.” What are the bright spots in your relationship? Or in your job? Can you create more of those bright spots? Think about a problem you're trying to overcome. What are the times when you *don't* have that problem? Those are your bright spots—what can you learn from them?

In what situations do you experience decision paralysis (Chapter 2)?

Whenever we are trying to change something, our Riders often become mired in TBU analysis—“True But Useless.” What are the TBUs in your life? What does the

story of Jerry Sternin and *Save the Children* (Chapter 2) teach us about tackling a problem with minimal help and meager resources? How did Sternin move beyond TBUs to help reduce malnutrition in Vietnam?

The Heaths give examples of a railroad made profitable, a town reborn, and child abusers reformed by being as clear as possible about how people should act. (Remember the “1% milk” campaign.) They point out: *What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity*. What actions can you script to achieve your personal goal? If your change involves others, how can you “script the critical moves” for them?

The ELEPHANT

Part of the challenge of change is that we may intellectually decide to change – telling ourselves that eating more healthy foods is a good thing, for example, or that limiting our Blackberry usage is a smart idea – but we don't connect that change with a feeling that engages the Elephant. Can you think of a way to connect a change you

would like to make in your life with a feeling that can help to motivate the Elephant side of your brain? Can you think of situations in life where we try to get people to change with information, rather than with feeling? To be more effective, how might we approach those situations differently?

One suggestion for overcoming our natural inertia is to shrink the change. If you want to start an exercise program, you might start by simply getting yourself to the gym and stretching or working out for 5 to 10 minutes. Can you think of a way to shrink the change for something you want to switch in your own life?

Marriage therapist Michele Weiner-Davis, a solutions-focused therapist, didn't try to get George and Paula (in Chapter 6) to understand the root causes of their emotional distance from each other. She didn't analyze their childhood relationships with their parents. Instead, she asked them to change one small way in which they interacted. One morning, George gave Paula a kiss, which launched a positive spiral of change. In your life,

have you experienced times when a seemingly small act led to big change? Have you experienced the "snowballing" aspect of change, in which one change leads to another which leads to another?

In chapter seven, *Grow Your People*, the authors show how Paul Butler motivated the population of an entire island to protect the St. Lucia Parrot. Think about the idea of "identity." How would you describe the identity of your neighborhood? Your church or synagogue? Your kids? Imagine that you had to convince one of these groups to recycle more, or to volunteer more time, or to tutor elementary-school kids. How might you appeal to their identity as a way of motivating their Elephants?

The PATH

Think back over your day. In how many ways did your environment shape your behavior? Knowing that the environment shapes our behavior, how can you consciously shape your environment so that it's easier to make the changes you desire? What Amazon 1-click-style tweaks can you create to make your goals just a little bit easier to carry out?

Look at the examples of the Rackspace customer service department (In Chapter 8), or how Bart Millar changed the high school student's behavior. Was there ever a situation where you attributed some problem to someone's "character" when you found out later it was a problem with the environment?

(Bonus question: What kind of environment might have eliminated the person's "character problem"?)

We all imitate the behavior of others, whether it is positive (e.g., shaking hands or waiting patiently in line) or negative (e.g., the binge drinking of college students). What social behaviors in your community or workplace would you like to see changed?

Do you have a "herd" at work or home that you have to rally? Is there a "free space" that you can create to bring together the people who want to change?