



DODReads Executive Summary

Made to Stick

Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die

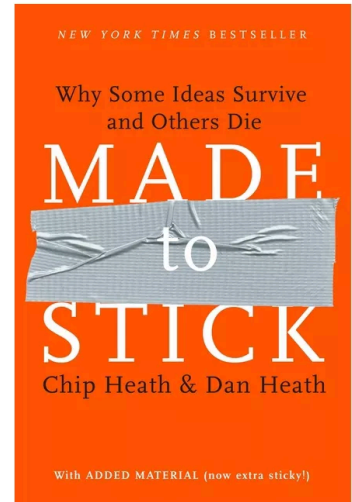
Thesis: Ideas can be crafted and communicated in a way that makes them memorable, impactful, and enduring, which gives them power and influence.

- **The Heath Brothers**

- [Website](#)
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- **Chip Heath:** Chip Heath is a professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business, teaching courses on business strategy and organizations. He is the co-author of four books. Chip has consulted with clients ranging from Google and Gap to The Nature Conservancy and the American Heart Association. [LinkedIn](#)

- **Dan Heath:** Dan Heath is an acclaimed American author, speaker, and scholar, renowned for his insights into business strategy, change, and decision-making. He has co-authored four New York Times best-selling books. In addition to his writing, Dan taught at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and Duke University's CASE center, which he co-founded. [LinkedIn](#)



[Made to Stick](#)

Why this book is important for the Military Professional: *Made to Stick* equips leaders with the tools to effectively communicate their vision, goals, and strategies to their team members. By understanding the principles of stickiness, military professionals can enhance their ability to convey orders, strategies, and critical information to their people in a way that is clear, concise, and compelling. This enhances the ability to influence and persuade stakeholders and adapt to changing circumstances. Additionally, the emphasis on storytelling, emotional resonance, and credibility helps leaders cultivate trust and inspire action, leading to higher levels of engagement, collaboration, and unit success.

stick / ('stik) intransitive verb 2b. to hold fast or adhere resolutely: [attach](#)

Part One: What Makes Something Sticky

Made to Stick is an expansion and tribute to Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* and its concept of "Stickiness" as one of the three attributes that create epidemics.

Some ideas, concepts, slogans, and stories **stick** in our minds better than others. This is not a mistake or an anomaly. It is in fact because of identifiable and repeatable qualities. Things stick with they are:

- Simple
- Unexpected
- Concrete

- Credible
- Emotional
- Stories

Each attribute has its own deeper qualities and when they are all combined, ideas can become very “**Sticky.**”

There are things that **inhibit** ideas become **sticky** as well.

- The **Curse of Knowledge**: what is obvious to you may not be obvious to others.
 - Once we know something, we find it hard to imagine what it was like not to know it.
 - Bridge the gap between what you know and what your audience needs to know.

Part Two: **SUCCESS**s

SUCCESSs is the **Stickiness** checklist. It helps people:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| ● What to say | Simple |
| ● Pay attention | Unexpected |
| ● Understand and remember | Concrete |
| ● Believe and agree | Credible |
| ● Care | Emotional |
| ● Act | Stories |

Simple: Keep your message clear and straightforward. Simplicity guides what you have to say.

- **Finding the Core**: Distill your message to its essential elements for maximum impact.
 - Example: Southwest Airlines - “We are THE low-fare airline”. Yes, customer service, safety, and employee morale are all important and can impact decision-making, but at the end of the day being “THE low-fare airline” drives every decision they make.
- **Commander's Intent**: Clearly communicate the overarching goal to guide decision-making at all levels.
 - It is the clearest expression of the desired end-state.
 - It is different at every level of execution from high-level strategy to unit-level tactics.
 - It doesn't tell you “how” to accomplish the objective, just what success looks like.
- **Don't Bury the Lead**: Just like in newspapers, put the lead upfront and make it clearly visible. The **core** of your message must be **first**, be **simple**, and be out in the **open**.
 - **Forced Prioritization**: “If you say three things, you don't say anything.” What is the most important point, the headline or lead of the story? Other data points or other main ideas dilute the **core** and take away the power of your idea.
- **Decision Paralysis**: When given too many options, counter to rational thinking, people make worse decisions or no decision at all. Limiting choices gets people to make decisions and take action.
- A **Schema** is the existing mental framework or knowledge that people use to interpret information. Make ideas **sticky** by attaching them to something people already know or care about.
 - By attaching your message to things people already know or easily relate to, your idea doesn't have to build a new memory, it can leverage or get attached to already established ideas.

Unexpected: **Surprise** your audience to **capture** their attention and **interest** them to **keep** their attention.

Unexpectedness gets people to pay attention.

- The most basic way to get someone's attention is to **Break a Pattern**.
- Capture the moment by violating people's expectations. Break their schemas. Break their guessing machine – the subconscious stream of thought of what you think will happen next.

- Create a **mystery** to hold people's attention. When an audience is intrigued with what will happen next or what the outcome will be, they will stay engaged.
 - *What will happen next? How will it turn out?* These questions keep people watching bad movies and reading stories they otherwise might not just to find out the answer.
- The **Gap Theory of Curiosity** states that knowledge gaps cause pain. Instinctively, whether we care about the underlying matter at hand or not, we want to fill that **knowledge gap**.
 - Using this to make ideas sticky requires opening the gap first. People tend to present facts and data first but if you present the question (opening the gap) first and the data last, you will hold your audience's attention and keep them interested. Example: Click-bait headlines.
- **Priming the Gap**
 - Knowledge, particularly overconfidence, is the enemy of the **Gap Theory**. To combat the effects of overconfidence (believing there is no gap in knowledge to fill) force your audience to make a commitment or prediction and then pull the rug out from under them.
 - Overconfident people are more likely to recognize their knowledge gaps when people publicly disagree with them.
 - If your topic is more like an abyss than a gap in someone's knowledge, you must fill in the void with enough knowledge to make a gap. Set the scene, leverage comparable schema, and pull at emotions to build a knowledge base that leaves a gap.

Concrete: Make your ideas **tangible** and **memorable**. Concreteness gets people to understand.

- Concrete ideas are **tangible**, people can identify them with their senses. Abstract ideas lack specifics and therefore clarity, making them harder to imagine.
 - Clarity is essential; ambiguity leads to confusion. **Uncertainty is the enemy of stickiness.**
 - You can make abstract ideas concrete by adding details or changing the way it's described.
 - Use units that people can understand. Example: 400 square miles or 256,000 acres are both hard to visualize. A "mountain range" is easier for us to picture and therefore connect with.
- Put people into the mix. Make them **live an experience** and they will better understand it. By living an experience, or even just role-playing, the concepts move from abstract to concrete.
- Your brain remembers things differently. Some things have emotional memories, some have abstract memories, and some have sensory memories. If you can latch on to these different types of memories, you can increase the **stickiness**. The **Velcro Theory of Memory** states your brain is like the loop side of Velcro, so the more hooks in your idea, the better it will stick.
- Help people coordinate:
 - Find common ground at the lowest level. When communicating, it is essential to communicate in a "universal language" so that everyone understands.
 - Set **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound** goals. This level of concreteness is needed to align teams and create a shared "turf" for people to collaborate on.
- Concreteness **focuses** and **mobilizes** our brains. Specifics create limits or boundaries around our thoughts and allow us to think better and act more effectively **toward a given objective**.
- It is simple to slip into abstractness. Remember, other people may not know what you know. **The Course of Knowledge**. Speak with tangible specifics in a common language to your audience.

Credible: Back up your ideas with **evidence** or **authority**. Credibility gets people to believe.

- How do you get someone to believe your ideas? Find a **source of credibility** and draw from it.
- **External Credibility** uses sources outside of yourself or your organization to support your idea.
 - Includes experts, research studies, reputable organizations, or authoritative figures.
 - Establish trust and legitimacy with the audience, making ideas more believable and persuasive.

- Anti-authority - use of an “average person” who did the opposite of what you are proposing and is now paying the price. Example: Lifelong smokers describing the harms of smoking.
- **Internal Credibility** is based on the audience's perception of the communicator's expertise, sincerity, and trustworthiness.
 - Demonstrate expertise or authority on the topic, build rapport with the audience, and maintain consistency in your message.
 - Authenticity and sincerity are important in building internal credibility. Audiences are more likely to trust those who appear genuine and honest.
- **Statistics and Details**
 - Making statistics and details **tangible** and **relatable** to the audience. Instead of presenting raw numbers or abstract figures, provide context and real-world examples to illustrate the significance.
 - While statistics can add credibility to a message, overloading the audience with too many statistics can be overwhelming and dilute the impact of the message.
 - Use statistics to support emotional appeals and storytelling, creating a persuasive and memorable message that resonates with the audience on both **rational** and **emotional** levels.
- **The Sinatra Test** challenges that one example alone can be enough to establish credibility. “If you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere.”
 - Example: If you were selected to cater a White House dinner, then certainly you are qualified to cater for any other group's event.
- **Testable Credentials** are examples when the audience can see for themselves if a claim is credible.
 - You don't have to “sell” anything, rather, you are inviting your audience to assess your idea themselves and come to their own conclusion.

Emotional: Appeal to your audience's **emotions** to create a lasting impact. Emotions get people to care.

- **Mother Teresa Principle:** People are more likely to remember and be moved by concrete, individual stories or examples than by abstract statistics or generalizations. *“If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will. When it comes to our hearts, one individual trumps the masses.”*
 - **Drop in the Bucket Effect:** When dealing with a problem, the small impact of an individual's action doesn't seem to move the needle due to being overwhelmed by the scale of the issue.
- When people think analytically, they are less likely to think emotionally. This is a problem because emotional appeals create significantly more action in favor of an idea. **Feeling inspires people to act.**
- The **Power of Association** can evoke strong emotional responses in the audience by tapping into their personal experiences or values. By connecting an idea to emotions such as joy, fear, or nostalgia, you can make the message more impactful and persuasive. Be cautious though, over time associations become overused and dilute in value.
- Appeal to **Self-Interest**
 - Understand the audience's needs by knowing what matters to your audience and tailor the message to appeal to their self-interest effectively.
 - Highlight personal **benefits** by emphasizing the advantages your idea provides.
 - Have your audience **visualize** how their life will be better with your idea. Imagining the possessive effects of your message will increase action.
- Avoid focusing solely on addressing low-level needs or features of a product or idea, neglecting to highlight higher-level benefits or values that may resonate more deeply with audiences. To avoid **Maslow's Basement**, strive to understand the deeper motivations, desires, and values of your audience and tailor your messages to address these higher-level needs.
- Appeal to **Identity**. People make decisions based on their identity:
 1. Who am I?
 2. What kind of situation is this?

3. What do people like me do in this kind of situation?

- The **Curse of Knowledge** can prevent you from clearly articulating your idea to an audience that knows nothing about the subject.
 - Making people care is really about stripping an idea down to its **core**.
 - Ask “Why?” three times. This will help you simplify our idea to explain the **core** value.

Stories: Use narratives to make your message more **compelling** and **relatable**. Stories get people to act.

- Stories are almost always concrete. Most of our communication is implicit, not explicit.
- **Simulations** tell people **how to act**.
 - Shoptalk or war stories share knowledge learned across a like-minded audience and are far more effective than sending an email or publishing a training slide.
 - Mental simulations, specifically, event-simulation, train our brains almost as well as physically doing a task. Sharing stories accomplished the same effect by adding the human **emotion** and **mystery** of the outcome.
- **Inspiration** gives people **motivation to act**.
 - Stories that inspire people help them act accordingly.
 - Stories that showcase relatable characters overcoming challenges energize us to tackle similar challenges in our own lives.
- Three basic structures of a good story:
 - The **Challenge Plot** depicts a protagonist facing daunting challenges or obstacles, highlighting their journey to overcome adversity. It showcases the protagonist's resilience, determination, and growth as they confront and conquer the challenges they encounter.
 - The **Connection Plot** focuses on the interpersonal relationships between characters, emphasizing the emotional bonds and connections that develop between them. It explores themes of love, friendship, and human connection, drawing the audience into the characters' lives.
 - The **Creativity Plot** centers around the process of generating novel ideas, solutions, or discoveries, highlighting the ingenuity, innovation, and problem-solving abilities of the characters. It inspires audiences to think creatively and explore new possibilities.
- A **Springboard Story** is a narrative that serves as a catalyst for launching a broader discussion or conveying a key message or idea.
- “You can extract a moral from a story, but you can’t extract a story from a moral”

How to make something Unstick

- Making something **unsticky** is virtually impossible. It **stuck** for a reason. The best tactic is to replace it with **something even stickier**.
- Fight sticky messages with sticky actions and allow people to decide for themselves.

*This executive summary is composed of both verbatim excerpts and summarizations from **Made to Stick** by Chip Heath and Dan Heath.*

Resources and Additional Reading

1. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference
2. To Sell is Human
3. Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion
4. Contagious: Why Things Catch On

Thanks to Adam Smith for writing this Executive Summary. Adam is a United States Air Force Pilot and former Headquarters Air Force Staff officer.

If your office or command is in need of one book or a hundred we would be honored to [source them](#)