



DODReads Executive Summary

Switch

How to Change Things When Change Is Hard

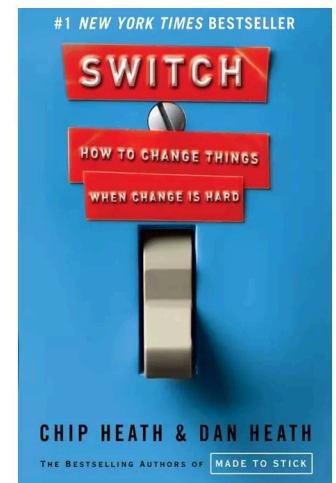
Thesis: Change is hard but can be successfully implemented by aligning our rational thoughts, emotional feelings, and environmental path.

- **The Heath Brothers**

- [Website](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)

- **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 coauthored 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](#)



[Switch](#)

Why this book is important for the Military Professional: Implementing change is a difficult part of every leader's responsibilities and therefore having a comprehensive understanding of change dynamics and a practical framework for effective change management is essential. By delving into the psychological and emotional aspects of change through the metaphor of the "Rider," the "Elephant," and the "Path," the book equips leaders with strategies to navigate resistance, motivate teams, and shape supportive environments conducive to change. By applying these principles, unit leaders can drive lasting change within their teams or organizations, addressing challenges with confidence and achieving meaningful outcomes.

Switch / ('swich) transitive verb 3b. to make a shift in or exchange of: [change](#)

When examining **change**, what people want to do isn't what they do. Many people want to lose weight or get up early to work out. This is **rational**. But we battle with our **emotions** in the moment of choice between french fries or a salad, between getting up or hitting the snooze button. **The Heart and Mind disagree fervently.**

Three surprises about **change**:

- What looks like laziness is often **exhaustion**.
- What looks like resistance is often a **lack of clarity**.
- What looks like a people problem is often a **situation problem**.

For anything to change, someone must start acting differently. Therefore, to implement change, you must ask yourself: “How can I get people to behave in a new way?”

Throughout the book, the authors use a metaphor to describe change. Imagine a **rider** atop a six-ton **elephant** walking down a **path**. The rider can steer the elephant, but if the elephant wants to go somewhere else, the rider is likely out of luck. The rider is **rational** thought. The elephant is the far more powerful **emotional** feeling, and the path is the **environment** both are operating in.

To change people’s behaviors, you must address one of these:

1. The **Rider**
2. The **Elephant**
3. The **Path**

To implement change effectively, you must affect **all three things at once**.

Part One: Direct the Rider

The **Rider** is a rational thinker and planner. He plots a course for a better future. The downfall of the Rider is over-analyzing and overthinking situations. The **Rider** is prone to “**analysis paralysis**” and must be shown:

- Where to go
- How to act
- What destination to pursue

Find the Bright Spots

- **Bright Spots** are the success stories worth emulating.
- Often people focus on problems that need to be fixed and forget to look for the solutions that are already working.
- Shifts from a “**problem focus**” to a “**solutions focus**.”
- To find bright spots ask: “What is working and how can we do more of it?”
- Currently working solutions (Bright Spots), can be copied and adapted across problem areas. Since these solutions are not “new” and likely were organic to the organization or environment, they are usually **easily implementable** and **widely accepted** by the audience.

Script the Critical Moves

- Along with “analysis paralysis” comes “**decision paralysis**”-- the inability to make a decision when given too many choices.
- Self-control and decision-making are **exhaustible resources**. The more self-control you have to exercise or decisions you have to make, the lower your ability becomes to take future action.
 - When you are “tired” of making decisions, you tend to go with the **default choice**, even if it is not the best option.
 - **Uncertainty** makes the Elephant anxious and **reverts to the status quo**.
- To aid in making critical decisions, you should **Script the Critical Moves**.
 - Transition **ambiguous goals** into **concrete behavior**.
 - Provide **clear guidance** for what you want to see in the tough moments.
 - Explain the new “**why**”, don’t assume the critical move is obvious to others.
 - Boil change ideas down to specific behaviors; **clarity dissolves resistance**.

Point to the Destination

- To combat the **Rider** getting lost in analysis, provide a clear picture of the **destination**.
 - Create a “**destination postcard**” – a clear picture of what the end-state of the change is.
 - The postcard should be **vivid** and **aspirational**, but **undeniably clear** as to where you are going.
- Create **SMART Goals** but add the emotion of the “destination postcard.”
 - **Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Timely**
 - **Remove** any **ambiguity** from the goal, this prevents the **Rider** from rationalizing a destination change.
 - SMART Goals **presume** emotion but **do not create** it. The clearly defined **destination** creates the **emotion to motivate** the elephant.
- Align short-term action with long-term goals. Make **tactical choices** to meet **strategic objectives**.

Your **Rider** has many strengths – he is a **rational visionary**. Find what is already working, define the beginning and end, and build the playbook of actions to take him along the journey.

Part Two: Motivate the Elephant

The appeals that connect with the **Riders** may be different than those that connect with the **Elephant**. Change efforts are often driven by **emotions** and appeal to people’s emotional side to motivate action. For leaders to implement change, they must speak to the **Rider** as well as the **Elephant**.

Find the Feeling

- When people fail to change, it is not usually because they do not understand the problem.
 - If it is an **understanding problem** ⇒ use a **Rider** approach
 - If it is an **emotional problem** ⇒ use an **Elephant** approach
- The **uncertainty** that change brings **creates reluctance** in the Elephant to move. **Analytical** arguments are **unlikely** to overcome this **resistance**.
- In most successful change efforts, the sequence of change is: **See – Feel – Change**.
- Identify and communicate the emotional reasons behind the change, tapping into **individuals' intrinsic motivations**.
 - “Trying to fight inertia and indifference with analytical arguments is like tossing a fire extinguisher to someone who is drowning.”
- The **Positivity Illusion**: the tendency for people to believe they are better than they are
 - To counter this, allow people to experience the problem firsthand, and see that their solution or actions are not working or are harmful.
- If you need a **quick** and specific **action**, **negative emotions** might help. If you need a more **enduring change** that will require creativity, flexibility, and ingenuity, you will need **positive emotions**.
 - Positive emotions broaden and build our thoughts and actions.
 - Encourage open minds, creativity, and hope.

Shrink the Change

- Progress is critical because **Elephants** are easily demoralized. They need **constant reassurance**.
- Break down the change into **smaller, more manageable steps** to reduce the sense of overwhelm and make it easier for the **Elephant** to move.
- To get motivated, move yourself closer to the finish line by giving yourself a headstart.
 - Example: Free carwash punchcard, but the carwash gives you two punches on the first visit.
- Early success instills **hope**. “Hope is **Elephant** fuel.”

- **Elephants** resist big changes and hate doing things with no immediate payoff. **Small wins** keep those payoffs coming. Celebrate small victories and milestones along the way to keep the **Elephant** motivated and engaged. Small wins have two traits:
 - They are **meaningful**
 - They are within **immediate reach**
- Small targets lead to small wins which often trigger a positive spiral of behavior.

Grow your People

- When you **grow** your **people**, they develop the **strength to act**.
- Consequences and Identity decision-making model:
 - The **Consequences Model** states people weigh costs and benefits and choose the option that maximizes satisfaction.
 - The **Identity Model** states people ask themselves: *Who am I? What type of situation is this? What does someone like me do in this situation?*
 - It relies on people having a deep connection with being who they think they are.
 - It does not rely on any cost-benefit analysis.
 - **Change efforts that require people to violate their identity are doomed to fail.** Rather, make a change a matter of **identity** instead of a matter of **consequences**.
- Failure will happen, but it will hurt less if your **Elephant** is **prepared**. En route failures don't dictate overall failure, so having a **growth mindset** will help keep you on track.
- A **growth mindset** is the belief that your abilities can be grown and improved. That failure is an opportunity to learn rather than the end of the road. A **grown mindset** is imperative to keeping the **Elephant** motivated.

Part Three: Shape the Path

If you want people to change, you can provide clear direction to the **Rider** or boost the **Elephant's** motivation. Alternatively, you can simply **make the journey easier**, you can shape the **Path**.

Tweak the Environment

- The **Fundamental Attribution Error** is the tendency to ignore the situational forces that shape a person's behavior; assessing behavior as "the way they are" rather than "the situation they are in"
- Modify the physical or social environment to make **desired behaviors easier** and **undesirable behaviors more difficult**.
- People will take the **easiest path**, so if you want a certain behavior, make sure that is the easiest path.
- Environmental tweaks beat self-control every time.
- In accident prevention, the **Haddon Matrix** provides a framework to examine Pre-event, Event, and Post-event actions that can mitigate risk or dangerous outcomes. This framework can help shape behaviors in other fields.

Build Habits

- People are sensitive to the **norms** and **expectations** of the **societies** and **cultures** they are in. These shape behaviors almost more than anything else.
- When you **change** your **environment**, your **habits change**. In new places, even temporarily, our habits and routines adjust, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse.
- Encourage the repetition of desired behaviors until they become **automatic habits**, reducing the cognitive effort required from the **Elephant**.

- Habits are **behavioral autopilot**, they change behavior in a way that doesn't pull from the **Rider's** reserve of **self-control**.
- "**Action triggers**" are things that happen that set something else in motion. They preload a decision. These can be used to build good habits.
 - Action triggers pass **control** of their **behavior** to their **environment**.
- To create habits that support the change you are trying to achieve:
 - The habit must **advance** the **mission**.
 - The habit must be **easy** to **embrace**.
- **Checklists**
 - Educate people about what is best
 - Ensure against overconfidence
 - Standardize mission-critical elements.
 - Help avoid blindspots.

Rally the Herd

- In ambiguous situations, we look to **others** for guidance on **how to act**. The **Elephant** looks to the herd.
- Leverage "**peer pressure**" to work in your favor to support your desired change.
- Involve individuals in the change process and empower them to take ownership of their roles in driving change.
- Set the social standard for the **Rider** by **designing** the **environment**. Examples:
 - Tip Jars at coffee shops
 - "Reuse your towel" signs in hotel bathrooms
- In group change dynamics, there are "**reformers**" who support the change and work to **rally the herd**.
 - Build "free-spaces" small-scale meetings where reformers can gather to prepare for collective action.
- **Social pressures** can ensure or doom a change effort.

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

Resources and Additional Reading

1. Leading Change
2. Atomic Habits
3. The Heart of Change
4. The Happiness Hypothesis

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](#)

HOW TO MAKE A SWITCH

For things to change, somebody somewhere has to start acting differently. Maybe it's you, maybe it's your team.

Picture that person (or people).

Each has an emotional Elephant side and a rational Rider side. You've got to reach both. And you've also got to clear the way for them to succeed. In short, you must do three things:

➤ DIRECT the Rider

FOLLOW THE BRIGHT SPOTS. Investigate what's working and clone it. [Jerry Sternin in Vietnam, solutions-focused therapy]

SCRIPT THE CRITICAL MOVES. Don't think big picture, think in terms of specific behaviors. [1% milk, four rules at the Brazilian railroad]

POINT TO THE DESTINATION. Change is easier when you know where you're going and why it's worth it. ["You'll be third graders soon," "No dry holes" at BP]

➤ MOTIVATE the Elephant

FIND THE FEELING. Knowing something isn't enough to cause change. Make people feel something. [Piling gloves on the table, the chemotherapy video game, Robyn Waters's demos at Target]

SHRINK THE CHANGE. Break down the change until it no longer spooks the Elephant. [The 5-Minute Room Rescue, procurement reform]

GROW YOUR PEOPLE. Cultivate a sense of identity and instill the growth mindset. [Brasilata's "inventors," junior-high math kids' turnaround]

➤ SHAPE the Path

TWEAK THE ENVIRONMENT. When the situation changes, the behavior changes. So change the situation. [Throwing out the phone system at Rackspace, 1-Click ordering, simplifying the online time sheet]

BUILD HABITS. When behavior is habitual, it's "free"—it doesn't tax the Rider. Look for ways to encourage habits. [Setting "action triggers," eating two bowls of soup while dieting, using checklists]

RALLY THE HERD. Behavior is contagious. Help it spread. ["Fataki" in Tanzania, "free spaces" in hospitals, seeding the tip jar]