

Book Review

The opinions expressed in this review are those of the reviewer and do not necessarily reflect the view of CORE or its member agencies.

Reviewer: Allison Prather, Program Officer, Child Health and Nutrition, CARE USA

Book Name: *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*

Author(s): Chip and Dan Heath (<http://www.heathbrothers.com/>)

Year Published: 2010

Author's argument (or perspective) and summary of the content:

In *Switch*, the Heath brothers present a formula for creating successful change and use an analogy of a Rider, Elephant, and a Path to describe the human decision making experience.

In this analogy, the *Rider* represents our rational side, the part of us that is analytical, wants the background data, loves spreadsheets, pro/con lists, and is inclined toward analysis paralysis. The Rider is influenced by reason and needs a clear direction to move forward.

The *Elephant* represents our emotional side, the Freudian "id", the side that wants to sleep in, eat the extra cookies, indulge, and follow what's immediately gratifying, easy and comfortable. A strong side indeed, the Elephant is influenced by emotion and needs inspiration to advance.

The *Path* then describes the environment in which the change will occur and we as change makers have the ability to shape this environment to better facilitate the change.

The Heath brothers use countless examples of everyday people instigating large scale changes and break out their actions to reveal how these change processes appealed to the Rider side, Elephant side and created a feasible environment for the change to unfold. Ultimately, *Switch* stresses that as people are both rationally and emotionally minded, behavior change efforts must target both by giving clear direction for movement, inspiration on the need for change, and a route to make it happen. In line with their advice to be clear on necessary steps to achieve change, the brothers provide a clear formula to follow when attempting to encourage behavior change:

- 1) *Direct the Rider*
- 2) *Motivate the Elephant*
- 3) *Shape the Path*

Main lessons learned/ applications to work in the international maternal and child health sector (list no more than 8):

1. **Directing the Rider** – this concept is presented as one of the 3 key elements of the behavior change process. It is further broken down into 3 key areas describing how to provide this direction and these are:
 - a. Follow the bright spots. This takes a bit of research. Heath brothers advise to step away from the natural tendency to focus on what's not working and seek out what is working in a given situation. When we find different tactics that appear to be working - promote and replicate them. *Ex. Jerry Sternin, Vietnam malnutrition assignment. Pinpointed different actions of mothers with healthy children in the same situation as mothers of malnourished children (financially, location-wise, etc). Found that kids receiving smaller, more frequent meals with greens and shrimp added to their rice were healthier than kids receiving the area's standard 2 bowls of white rice a day.*
 - b. Script the critical moves. Be specific, what is it people should do to help achieve the change. Remove ambiguity that leaves people feeling sure of a problem but no clear steps on what to change.
 - c. Point to the destination. Be clear not only on what needs to happen, but where these actions will take people. Almost like a mantra. *Ex. A teacher tells her first graders that by the end of the year "we'll be 3rd graders," meaning that they'll be testing at a third grade level. This clear goal helped to encourage their studies.*
2. **Motivate the Elephant** – the second key element: appeal to the very powerful, universal emotional side of people. Information alone is not enough. What often pushes people to act is being roused and inspired.
 - a. Find the Feeling. Important to tap into messages that will resonate with others.
 - b. Shrink the Change. Small, doable actions. The Elephant is the side that craves ease and comfort, not the inherent challenges of newness. Carve out small steps to push along the change. *Ex. 5 minute cleaning exercises.*
 - c. Grow Your People. People attach to a sense of *identity*. Am I the kind of person who would do this or that in a situation? Encourage people to develop an identity around a cause. *Ex. "I'm a St. Lucian, protective of our national bird!"* Additionally, encourage the adoption of a growth mindset (I can get better, improve in this area) versus a fixed mindset (I'm not a natural leader and not much can be done to change this). Research tells us that a growth mindset can be learned.
3. **Shape the Path** – ensure that the situational environment is conducive to promoting the change.
 - a. Tweak the Environment. Make it conducive to change. *Ex. To improve customer service and ensure that all calls are taken, remove the automated queue/answering machine (phones ring until call is answered!).*

- b. Build Habits. There's a notion that setting "action triggers" can help to instantly create a habit. Such as saying, "right after Seinfeld on Mondays and Wednesdays, I will put on my running shoes and go for a run." By setting the trigger, you've established a habit. Checklists are a form of action triggers as well (steps for placing a central line to reduce infections).
- c. Rally the Herd. People adopt the behaviors of others around them (obesity trends within social networks; not reacting to a smoke filled room if others remain calm). Help spread the behavior.

In addition to the 3 key concepts above, here are a few other buzz phrases and key reminders of interest:

4. *Remove ambiguity*. In regards to the Rider, keep messages and directions on actions clear.
5. *Creating the Expectation of Failure*. Change means trying something new and the process of this trial includes inherent failure. Switch highlights the need to frame the change process as a learning process and set the tone that failure is an inevitable part of the process. This opens the door to questions and feedback and acceptance that we don't have it right from the start.
6. *Growth Mindset*. The above concept touches on another interesting topic – the idea of a growth versus fixed mindset wherein the growth mindset is open to failure and feedback and believes that practice leads to improvement. The fixed mindset is more inclined to think that one has certain positive and negative abilities and that these are largely static. It's fascinating to evaluate the effects of this mindset and research has shown that a growth mindset is vital to implementing change and reaching one's full potential. (A quote from the Apple "think different" campaign - "the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do" - comes to mind.) The Heath brothers attest that having a growth mindset protects against defeatism and conclude that groups who establish that a changeover will be a learning process, complete with inherent mistakes, are more successful in completing the change.

Reader's professional opinion on the author's argument (perspective) [*i.e. Was his/her point valid? How does the author's view compare to the opinions of CORE and its member organizations?*]

At a workshop recently, I was caught by the phrase "**we're in the design stage everyday**" and then saw many of the heads in the room nodding in agreement. I thought this was a great comment as it's a full admission that the programming process is a constant learning process and exemplifies the need to frame the introduction of new ideas, or programming in this case, as coming with problems. Rather than seeing a need for changes in the original plan as a fault or failure, it's expected in order to make continuous improvements. This was just one example that resonated with me. It may sound like a given but the Heath brothers compare this to groups that attempt to implement change without this expectation of failure and may give up too soon (these groups are less successful).

As mentioned above, another interesting concept is the growth versus fixed mindset. Switch shares evidence that a growth mindset – the one that believes abilities are like muscles that can be exercised and improved upon with practice – is required for implementing successful change. People with a growth mindset will more readily accept challenges because they expect to be bad initially, but also believe they can improve and meet the challenge with proper effort. Furthermore, the Heath brothers provide evidence that the growth mindset can be learned and encouraged. One with growth mindsets:

- Will stretch themselves, take risks, accept feedback for improvement, looks at the long term
- Praises effort rather than natural skill
- “Everything is hard before it is easy”

The growth mindset sounds like a necessity for high self-efficacy.

Overall, I found the book to be interesting and helpful, complete with impressive research and examples relevant to social and behavior change efforts in the social sector. The Heath brothers’ website (www.heathbrothers.com) offers more resources in the form of worksheets, handouts, and podcasts, including one specifically for the social sector.

On a scale of 1(not recommend to others in SBC) to 10 (highly recommended for others in SBC) – how would you rate this book?

I would give this a 10. I think it hits the core areas of our work in trying to utilize effective methods to encourage behavior change. The Heath brothers have come up with a nice, clear formula to follow and in addition, the book is full of inspiring examples of everyday people from all walks of life pushing along big, meaningful changes.

If nothing else, you can’t help but to feel inspired reading pages upon pages of stories of successful change. And the reiteration of these few concepts – be clear on the direction, inspire emotions around the change, and shape a facilitating environment –provide nice guidance to keep us thinking in a holistic way about behavior change.