[Technology + Management Smarts]

[Business Communications Smarts]

6 Principles to Predict Whether an Idea Succeeds or Fails

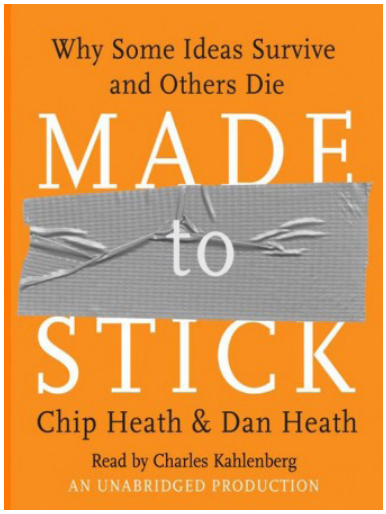
Long before Twitter was invented, Mark Twain observed, ***"A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on."***

> ***Why can you explain - in detail - the methods used by a fictitious kidney theft ring, but cannot remember the deliverables discussed an hour ago?***

Why is it that urban legends, conspiracy theories and public health scares – real or otherwise – circulate effortlessly? And what is there to be learned from urban legends that can be used (with integrity) in business to make ideas stick?

How and why some ideas thrive while others die is the core of the book, *Made to Stick*, penned by brothers Chip Heath, professor of organizational behavior at Stanford University, and Dan Heath, senior fellow at Duke University, former Harvard researcher and co-founder of textbook company Thinkwell.

This look at communications 'stickiness' gets to the root of why you can explain – in detail – the methods used by a fictitious kidney theft ring,



but cannot remember the deliverables from a meeting you attended an hour ago.

What makes ideas stick? In a nutshell:

1. [SIMPLICITY.] Relentlessly strip an idea to its core while focusing on why the idea is important. Proverbs excel at this method. Case in point: "Treat people as you would like to be treated."

2. [UNEXPECTEDNESS.] Generate interest and curiosity. Be counterintuitive. Do you remember this story from way back in 1992? "A medium-sized movie theater popcorn contains more artery-clogging fat than a bacon-and-eggs breakfast, a Big Mac and fries for lunch, and a steak dinner with all the trimmings – combined!"

3. [CONCRETENESS.] Help people understand and remember by grounding your message.

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Is your mission statement ambiguous to the point of being meaningless? Sticky ideas are full of concrete images. Think: Halloween apples with razors in them (which never actually happened, by the way.)

4. [CREDIBILITY.] Honest and trustworthy authorities make people believe. To make your idea stick, use truthful, core details, including statistics. For example, Cisco had to decide whether to upgrade technology at a cost of $500 per employee per year. They determined that "if it increases productivity by 1-2 minutes a day, you've paid back the cost of the upgrade."

5. [EMOTIONS.] To get people to care about your ideas, you must make them feel something. The hard part is finding the right emotion to harness. It may be shock, altruism … or even resentment. Shock worked for the popcorn statistic. Research shows that people are more likely to make an altruistic gift to a person than to an organization. Anti-smoking ads directed at teenagers leverage anger at Big Tobacco.

6. [STORIES.] Stories entertain and instruct; they help people visualize an idea. Jared from Subway painted a far more vivid picture of the "Subway diet," versus Subway's "7 Under 6" marketing campaign.

Understanding the vital principals of winning ideas – and implementing them in your communications – may determine whether your idea lives or dies. Before rolling out a new concept, take a hard look at your communications and see how it matches up with the 6 Principles of Stickiness.

About Technology + Management Smarts

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