Made to Stick: Why some ideas survive and others die by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (Random House, 2007)

Introduction

The main problem is the "Curse of Knowledge": The person sharing the idea has all sorts of insider information that others don't, so they have already framed the problem and understand its relevance. A single example illustrates the essence of the problem: One study tested a "tapper and listeners" game: They asked a person to tap out the rhythm of a song and have another recognize it - the listener nearly always failed to identify the song. What happened, of course, is that the tapper sings the song in their head and thus thinks he has the right rhythm, but the person hearing the taps cannot hear the song inside the others head and therefore has no idea of what the taps mean.

> **Example of a Sticky Idea**
> Contrast the phrase of a CEO "let's maximize shareholder value" with JFKs peel-clear call to "put a man on the moon and return him safely by the end of the decade." This is simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional (for the times), and a story. If JFK were an aerospace CEO he would have said "Our mission is to become the international leader in the space industry through maximum team-centered innovation and strategically targeted aerospace initiatives."

Chapter 1: Simple

The goal is to strip an idea to its core without turning it into a silly sound bite. The hard part isn't weeding out unimportant aspects, but it is in pruning the important, but not truly essential aspects - i.e., distilling to *the* most important idea at the core.

Find the core: Determine the single most important thing, being careful not to bury the lead. The military uses a "Commander Intent" instead of a plan. For example, rather than details on how to take a bridge, the CI might be "take the bridge." Use the technique of the inverted pyramid from journalism: Tell most important aspect first, then tailor, then add details. This forces prioritization.

Share the core: The key to motivating others with your ideas is to use the core message to help them make decisions as they apply your idea. The essential part is to make the message compact and to have it imply a sense of worth or priorities about how to implement it. (Or, to put it another way it needs to be both compact and profound.) For example, a newspaper editor liked to have his paper strongly - and only - reflect local issues. He had a motto of "names, names, and names." Note how this guides the individual decisions made by his reporters.

> **Using the core**
> Southwest uses "We are *the* low cost airlines." Thus, every decision involves meeting this concrete and simple goal. E.g., deciding whether to offer dinner on flights: Main concern isn't great passenger comfort, but it is low-cost so no dinner. Contrast to Nordstroms which emphasizes customer experience and would offer the dinner if they were an airline.

One way to do this is to tap into the memory of the idea's recipients by embedding schemas. (For example, it is hard to remember the letters *J FKFB I*, but easy to remember the same set arranged as *JFK FBI*.) In pitching a Hollywood movie a producer would describe it in terms of other hits: E.g., *Speed* will be *Die-Hard* on a bus, or *Alien* will be *Jaws* on a spaceship. One can use memory schemas to keep an idea simple: One could describe a pomelo as a "large citrus fruit with a thick, but soft rind", or as "a pomelo is basically a super-sized grapefruit with a very thick and soft rind." Another way to describe this is as a "generative analogy"; that is, a metaphor that generates new ideas.

> **Generative analogy**
> Disney uses the term "cast member" to describe their amusement park employees. This tells employees how to behave: Even if you are just sweeping the park you are "on stage" and need to behave. Contrast this to the poor choice by Subway to call their employees "sandwich artists". It is completely useless as a guide to behavior: In no way does Subway want their employees to innovate when making sandwiches, they should instead follow the rules precisely.

Chapter 2: Unexpected

The first requirement of effective communication is getting attention, the second is keeping it. In order to do this you use the unexpected: Humans like to think in patterns, the key is to break these patterns. For example, when a flight attendant at Southwest does something different with the safety announcement.

In using the unexpected a key is to avoid gimmicky. For example, a Super Bowl ad once showed a marching band on a field, and then suddenly a pack of wolves came out of a tunnel and killed them. This was not connected with the ad's message it all: The wolves didn't reinforce the message.

> **Getting attention with the unexpected**
> A TV commercial for the new Enclave minivan started as a typical car commercial: Announcer describes all its new features as a happy family piles into car and drives away, then - bang - a speeding car plows into it. The screen fades to black: "Didn't see that coming? No one does." It was seat-belt or safety ad instead of a car ad.

So, a good process for making ideas sticker is: (1) Identify the central message you need to communicate -- find the core; (2) Figure out what is counter-intuitive about the message -- i.e., What are the unexpected implications of your core message? Why isn't it already happening naturally? (3) Communicate your message in a way that breaks your audience's guessing machines along the critical, counter-intuitive dimension. Then, once their guessing machines have failed, help them refine their machines.

> **Using the unexpected**
> Nora Ephron's journalism teacher announced their first assignment: To write the lead for the student paper. He give them facts: Entire school faculty will travel to the state capital on Tuesday for a meeting with the Governor, Margaret Mead, etc. He asked them then to write the lead. They all missed it: No school on Tuesday!

A key is to always use a mystery story - even in science. As scriptwriters have learned curiosity is the intellectual need to answer questions and close patterns. Story plays to this universal

desire by doing the opposite, posing questions and opening situations. So, they key is to open gaps first in presenting your ideas, then work to close them; the tendency is to give facts first. The local news uses this technique very well: They might bump with "There's a new drug sweeping the teenage community -- and it may be in your own medicine cabinet! The story after these ads." More sophisticated version of this include a Sony engineer who visualized a "pocket radio" or JFK and his idea of "a man walking on the moon." While these seem just like brilliant ideas, they are actually sticky: Both create surprise - radios are pieces of furniture, not something for a pocket; and men don't walk on the moon. Both create insight. Rather than leading us along a plodding route from one incremental step to the next, the ideas give us a sudden, dramatic glimpse of how the world might unfold. And not just how, but why.

> **Creating gaps**
> Roone Arledge at ABC noted that most sporting events where done in a "facts first" way: The cameras started on the field and waited for things to happen. He called it "like looking at the Grand Canyon through a peep hole." He changed the shows to feature the stadium, and the town preparing for the game, etc. He created "gaps" that made people not from the area interested in the outcome from the game.

Chapter 3: Concrete

Of the six traits of "stickiness" described in this book being concrete is the easiest to accept and implement. (The hardest is likely finding the core message.) The power of being concrete is illustrated by the longevity of Aesop's fables. For some 2,500 years they have resonated and been remembered by humankind. They are a striking example of concreteness. For example, the story of the fox and the grapes ends with with the fox concluding that grapes out of his reach are likely sour -- hence the phrase "sour grapes", which appears in nearly every language. This provides a concrete image which lasts: Compare "sour grapes" to the conclusion "don't be such a bitter jerk when you fail." The latter has no staying power: It is naked fact.

> **Two examples of being concrete**
> (a) Movie popcorn contains 20 g fat; this is too abstract, say, instead contains more fat than a bacon-and-eggs dinner, a Big Mac, and fries for lunch and a steak dinner will all the trimmings - combined. (b) A simple mixture of salts and sugar - oral rehydration therapy (ORT) - in water can save lives in the developing world. Instead of giving facts and figures about how many can be saved, its promoter carries with him a packet of the power and whips it out to, say, a group of Prime Ministers and says "Do you know that this costs less than a cup of tea and it can save hundreds of thousands of children's lives in your country?"

Something becomes concrete when it can be described or detected by the human senses. A V-8 engine is concrete; "high-performance" is abstract. Concrete ideas are easy to remember. Experiments have shown that people remember concrete over abstract nouns: "bicycle" over "justice" or "personality." The kidney-heist urban legend, for example, has tons of detail about the illicit procedure.

This illustrates that the "curse of knowledge" is the main enemy of being concrete. The main difference between an expert and novice is the ability of the expert to see things abstractly. For

example, the difference in reaction between a judge and a jury: The jury sees all the concrete aspects of a trial - the lawyers' clothing, manner, the specific procedures in a classroom; the judge sees all in terms of legal precedent and the lessons of the past. Novices perceive concrete detail as concrete detail; an expert sees concrete details as symbols of a pattern.

Chapter 4: Credible

What makes people believe ideas? We base it on authorities - our parents, traditional, experts, etc. If one can bring in a true authority then the problem of credibility is easily solved, but what if we cannot? This chapter focuses on how to create credibility when you don't have such authority figures.

There are several ways to do this: (1) Use an anti-authority, (2) use concrete details, (3) use statistics, (4) use something called the Sinatra Test and (5) use testable credentials.

Anti-authority: You can use a dying smoker to make the point that smoking isn't good for you. Or, consider the scientist that could not get anyone to believe him that bacteria was causing ulcers: He swallowed the bacteria himself and demonstrated his theory to be correct. Or, a non-profit that claimed to turn homeless people into useful workers would send a car around to pick up prospective donors and employers of their clients. The trick: Their driver, unbeknown to the donors until later, was a former homeless person.

Details: We don't always have an external authority who can vouch for our message; most of the time our messages have to vouch for themselves. They must have "internal credibility." A person's knowledge of details is often a good proxy for expertise. For example, a study revealed that potential jurors where more likely to grant custody in a case where they had lots of details - even though irrelevant like the type of toothbrush a child used - than when they had scanty, but essential details. A lesson from urban legends is that vivid details boost credibility.

Statistics: This is a time-honored and standard way to make a point, but needs to be used correctly. Statistics are rarely meaningful in and of themselves. Statistics will, and should, almost always be used to illustrate a *relationship*. It's more important for people to remember the relationship than the number. Use them as input, not output. Don't go make up your mind and then go looking for the

> **Statistics I: Beyond War**
> The nonprofit Beyond War noted that people would stop a child from the running with scissors, but would shrug their shoulders when told there enough nuclear weapons to destroy millions of children. To make the statistics about nuclear weapons concrete they did the following: Beyond War would arrange "house parties" in which a group of friends and neighbors would assemble to hear about the dangers of nuclear weapons. The organizer from Beyond War always brought a steel pail and BBs. He would drop one in - it would make a distinct sound - and say it was the power of the bomb at Hiroshima. He then described the devastation of this bomb. Then he'd drop 10 BBs into the bucket: This is the fire power of one U.S. or Soviet nuclear submarine. Then he had attendees close their eyes: He poured 5,000 BBs into the bucket saying it was today's arsenal of nuclear weapons. (see p. 142-143 of the book for why this works so well.)

numbers to support yourself -- that's asking for temptation and

trouble. But if we use statistics to help us make up our minds, we'll be in a great position to share the pivotal numbers with others, as in the Beyond War example in the box.

The Sinatra Test: Frank Sinatra song *New York, New York* has a line "if I can make it there, I can make it anywhere." The authors suggest this same idea applies to making ideas credible. They advocate looking for the one test case that make your idea completely credible. For example, if you had the security contract for Fort Knox then any security idea you put forward would be credible. They use the example of an Indian entrepreneur who build a delivery system like FedEx, but for India. Even though he guaranteed on-time delivery - the only company to do so - he could not get contracts because this wasn't credible, until he tackled a major problem in India: Piracy of films. He got the contract to deliver these, which he did without fail. Note how much more powerful this was then "98.84% of our deliveries arrive on time."

Testable Credentials: This challenges the consumer or receiver of the idea to test for themselves the idea. The prime example of this was the "Where's the Beef" commercials in the 1980s from Wendy's. The ads suggested that the hamburgers at Wendy's were larger that other chains, and that the other chains had more bun than burger. This could be - and was! - verified by any fast food consumer. Another example is Ronald Reagan's query in the 1980 presidential debate "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

Chapter 5: Emotional

This chapter tackles the emotional component of stickiness, but it's not about pushing people's emotional buttons, like some movie tearjerker. Rather, the goal of making message "emotional" is to make people care. Feelings inspire people to act. For people to take action, they have to care.

To illustrate the effect of emotion versus reason a group studied the effect of soliciting funds for starving children in Africa with two appeals: An appeal based on statistics and one focusing on a single named child. Of course, the latter won. The surprising part of the study was that any time reason was evoked the amount of giving decreased. For example if they used both the statistics *and* the individual child it decreased; and if they asked a person to do a simple calculation, not related to the charity, even this decreasing giving. Once we put on our analytical hat we react to emotional appeals differently; they hinder our ability to feel.

To make people care about ideas we get them to take off their Analytical Hats: We create empathy for specific individuals; or we show how our ideas are associated with things that people already care about, or we appeal to their self-interest, although we also appeal to their identities - not only to the people they are right now, but also to the people they would like to be.

The Power of Associations: The most basic way to make people care is to form an association between something they don't care about and something they do. We all naturally practice the tactic

> **Statistics II: Soccer Teams**
> Stephen Covey emphasizes teamwork in his writings. He once tried to give the dry statistics: Only 37% of employees had a clear idea of their mission, only one in five was enthused etc. He got more impact when he mapped this onto a soccer team: "If a soccer team had this same make up only 4 out of 11 would know where their goal was ... etc."

of association. The caution here is to create new associations that get past the old, common ones which have become diluted in value. (The authors call this "semantic stretch" when the superlatives of one generation - groovey, awesome, cool, phat - lose punch.) A prime example of overcoming a tired phrase with new emotional resonance is the case of "sportsmanship." This term had become a tired phrase, which acquired too many meanings to become emotionally powerful. For example, it had come to mean "prizes given to those who lost the game." An advocate for true sportsmanship refocused the emotional appear of the concept by calling it "honoring the game." If people care about sports, then they care about the game.

> **Making youth care**
> Most teenagers believe cigarette smoking is dangerous. There is no credibility problem with the message, yet many take up smoking. You need to make them care to take action. An ingenious and effective set of ads where launched in the late 1998. They feature a semi-truck that drove up to the headquarters of a major tobacco company. Teenagers unloaded "body bags" that represented the number of people killed a day by smoking. The ads carefully directed their anger toward "The Man": The evil corporation, the authority figure. So, the ads tapping into anti-authority resentment, the classic teenage emotion. Once teens smoked to rebel against The Man. This ad makes them rebel by not smoking.

Self-Interest: Another way to make people care about ideas is to appeal to their self-interest. A common error is to emphasize features over benefits, e.g., tell people you have the "best seed", instead of that it will give them the "best lawn", which is what they truly care about. In general people selling an idea resist talking about self-interest: Yet an appeal with the word "you" throughout, instead of a generic "people" is always much more successful.

> **Appealing to higher levels of self-interest**
> High school algebra teachers often get the question: Why do I have to learn this stuff? The typical answer is that it will get you into college, future math classes need this, etc. One teacher said this instead: "Never. You will never need it. But then again why do you life dumbbells? You do it for the future: If you are attacked you can fight, or carry your groceries, or life your grandchildren. Same with algebra: You exercise your mental muscles, which you will need your whole life - it is a means to an end, not an end in itself." Note the emotional appeal is to a higher plane: Learning and self-actualization. Note, too, that it contains elements we've seen already: a) A surprise or unexpected answer, and b) make brilliant use of analogy.

Appealing to Identify: In defining self-interest it pays to not focus narrowly on money and other tangibles - often intangibles such as self-esteem or a sense of duty form an important motivator. Often people make decision not in a rational way - write down all alternatives and look at pluses and minuses - but instead they make them based on identity. They ask questions like: Who am I? What kind of situation is this? And what do people like me do in this type of situation? For example, a seller once offered a free popcorn popper to fire departments to consider his safety program; this appeal to greed offended the firemen.

Chapter 6: Stories

A key to making an idea sticky is to tell it as a story. Stories encourage a kind of mental simulation or reenactment on the part of the listener that burns the idea into the mind. For example, a flight simulator is much more effective than flash cards in training a

> **Appealing to Identity**
> Texas had a problem with roadside garbage. Signs to "Please don't litter" or to "Pitch in" weren't working: They typical bubba didn't care. To make them care the state developed a campaign that used very "Texas" spokesmen - George Foreman, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Willie Nelson - to record ads that said "Mama, tell you baby's, don't mess with Texas", implying that tossing trash out the window of a moving car violated the macho ethos of Texas.

pilot. The hard part about using a story is creating it. The best way to use a story is to always be on the look out for them. Most good stories are collected and discovered, rather than produced *de novo*. For example, Subway's powerful story of Jared, a man who lost 245 pounds by eating at the restaurant was discovered. (Compare the resonance of his story with the tagline they originally wanted to use: 6 under 7, i.e., six sandwiches with less than seven grams of fat.) The authors share the three major types of stories too look for.

   1. The Challenge Plot: This is the classic underdog, rags to riches, or sheer willpower triumphing over adversity. The key element of the Challenge plot is that the obstacles seem daunting to the protagonists. E.g., Subway's Jared losing 245 pounds.

   2. The Connection Plot: A story about people who develop a relationship that bridges a gap -- racial, class, ethnic, religious, demographic, or otherwise. E.g., the Mean Joe Greene commercial of the 1970s where he make friends with a scrawny young white kid. All connection plots inspire us in social ways. They make us want to help others, but more tolerant of others, work with others, love others.

   3. *The Creativity Plot*: This involves someone making a mental breakthrough, solving a long-standing puzzle, or attacking a problem in an innovative way.

   Here's how a story helps rid one of the *Curse of Knowledge*. When explaining how to solve problems someone might say "Keep the lines of communication open." They are hearing in their heads a song filled with passion and emotion. They're remembering the experience that taught them those lessons -- the struggles, the political battles, the missteps, the pain. They are "tapping" -- as describe in the first paragraph of this document. They need to share the story of their trials. In fact, stories usually automatically meet other criteria for making ideas sticky: They are almost always concrete, they are often emotional and have unexpected elements. The real difficult is to be sure they are simple enough.