



## Review: *Switch*—Change Yourself, Change the World

• By [Jonathan Liu](#) May 30, 2010

If you know me, you know that I'm big on change. I try to [change myself](#), I try to [change my community](#). (I haven't quite gotten up to trying to change the world.) And the one thing I've learned from experience is this: **change is hard**. A new book by brothers Chip and Dan Heath, authors of *Made to Stick*, tackles the idea of change; it won't make it easy, but it'll put you on the right path.

*Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* is a fantastic book. Some of it reminds me of Malcolm Gladwell's writing—the sort of it's-so-obvious-now-that-you-explain-it revelations about how our minds work—with one major difference: *Switch* is a how-to book. Rather than just describing a problem or exposing [why we make mistakes](#), the Heath brothers discuss why change is so hard, and then give a short list of concrete steps to follow.

The biggest obstacle to change is our minds: specifically, their dual nature. Whether you think of it as the emotional self and rational self, or Freud's id and superego, we basically have an instinctive side and a deliberate, analytic side. In order for you to embrace change, you need to get both parts of your brain engaged in the process. The Heaths borrow an analogy from Jonathan Haidt's book *The Happiness Hypothesis* which I found particularly useful: the Elephant and the Rider:

Perched atop the Elephant, the Rider holds the reins and seems to be the leader. But the Rider's control is precarious because the Rider is so small relative to the Elephant. Anytime the six-ton Elephant and the Rider disagree about which direction to go, the Rider is going to lose. He's completely overmatched.

As somebody who's a Myers-Briggs "Thinker," I tend to work with the rational side of things, and I discount the emotional. But I know from experience that just because you make a convincing, logical argument for something doesn't mean that you'll get somebody to change their mind (or their actions). Just see Erin Biba's column in the latest issue of *Wired* [Why Science Needs to Step Up Its PR Game](#): facts and figures simply aren't enough to convince everyone on global warming, or vaccinations, or evolution. You need to appeal to the Elephant, and not just the Rider. Using that analogy, *Switch* breaks down into three main categories: Direct the Rider, Motivate the Elephant, Shape the Path.

**Directing the Rider** includes giving specific, concrete actions that lead to a specific, measurable destination. A goal like "I will do better" is almost as bad as no goal at all; your Rider will just spin his wheels, going in every direction at once. They caution against information that is TBU: True But Useless, and instead advise you to focus on bright spots—places where things are working and going according to plan.

**Motivating the Elephant** is just as important, and is probably harder for many. The Elephant is

what makes you reach for the snooze button even when your Rider knows it's time to get up. Sometimes your rational self can force you to do something for a limited amount of time, but it turns out that self-control is an exhaustible resource. Eventually, unless the Elephant *wants* to go in a certain direction, it won't. The Heaths give a few steps toward changing how you (or your organization) *feel* about a change. One in particular is "Shrink the Change": breaking things down into small, easy-to-swallow steps, because often small changes can have huge impacts.

**Shaping the Path** includes anything that changes the environment of the issue at hand. One example is a study done about popcorn eating habits. I won't get into the details of the study here, but basically the finding was this: if you give people larger buckets, they will eat more popcorn. So if you're trying to get people to eat less popcorn, one thing you can do is use smaller buckets—it requires no appeal to the Rider *or* the Elephant, just a simple change in the environment. Building habits is a good way to shape the path as well, and *Switch* has several suggestions on how to create new habits.

What I loved about *Switch* is that it puts its own techniques into practice. It uses a bunch of success stories to grab you emotionally, and then also provides statistics and examples of studies to convince you intellectually. There are a limited number of steps to follow, and there are even "Clinic" sidebars that let you practice what you've just learned. And at the end of the book, there's a handy summary (which won't make much sense unless you've actually read the book) which matches up particular types of problems with the types of solutions that may work. There are also a bunch of [resources on their website](#), with podcasts broken down into different kinds of change: business, marketing, social sector, and personal.

**Does it work?** Well, I just finished reading the book so I haven't starting putting everything into practice yet. But I'm already full of ideas of places I'd like to try things out. One of the biggest lessons I learned (and am trying hard to keep in mind) is avoiding the Fundamental Attribution Error: "our inclination to attribute people's behavior to *the way they are* rather than to *the situation they are in.*" If you see people as more or less "fixed," as having specific qualities that are inherent in them, then it's much harder to believe that they can change. But if you have a growth mindset, then you believe that change is possible. Even our reliance on things like the Myers-Briggs personality types tends towards the Fundamental Attribution Error, and *Switch* shows that in some cases you can cause change even when people want to resist.

It's an inspiring book, to be sure, all the more so because it's not just about changes that others have accomplished, but about how you can start some change yourself. For anyone struggling with change—be it personal, organizational, or societal—I highly recommend picking up a copy of *Switch*.

*Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* is published by Broadway Books retails for \$26 but is currently only [\\$14 on Amazon](#).

*Disclosure: GeekDad received a review copy of Switch.*

Read More <http://www.wired.com/geekdad/2010/05/review-switch—change-yourself-change-the-world/#more-33926#ixzz0x9ceYdSb>