



## Made to Stick

# THE SUMMARY

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Some stories stick with us forever. Long after we hear them, we could easily re-tell them. A lot of Aesop's fables are like that: The Boy Who Cried Wolf, The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg, etc. We are all familiar with the opposite experience—reading an article that we can't remember five minutes after we have finished, or listening to a lecture that leaves our brain as quickly as it enters. They are the opposite of "sticky."

Why do some ideas succeed while others fail? How do we nurture our ideas so they'll succeed in the world? Many of us struggle with how to communicate ideas effectively, how to get our ideas to make a difference. This book is about how to do just that.

In researching successful, "sticky" stories, six principles emerged. Sticky ideas shared certain traits that made them more likely to succeed. This doesn't mean that there is a formula that guarantees success, but it does mean it is possible to greatly improve our odds.

The six principles are:

#### **Principle 1: Simplicity**

Don't misunderstand this as being short in length; it means stripping an idea down to its core. A successful defense lawyer says, "If you argue ten points, even if each is a good one, the jury won't remember any." It means to relentlessly prioritize, and create ideas that are both simple and profound.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

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### **Principle 2: Unexpectedness**

How do we get our audience to pay attention to our ideas, and stay interested? Surprise always grabs people's attention, so use it as a means to open the way. Surprise, however, doesn't last; it is not enough. For our ideas to endure they must, first, generate interest and curiosity to open gaps in people's knowledge; then, we fill those gaps.

### **Principle 3: Concreteness**

How do we make our ideas clear? We have to avoid ambiguity and abstractions, and explain ideas in terms of human actions and vivid images.

### **Principle 4: Credibility**

How do we make people believe our ideas? When former surgeon general C. Everett Koop talks about a public health issue he has credibility—people believe him. But, everyone does not have this kind of platform. Sticky ideas have to carry their own credentials, and draw people into testing them.

### **Principle 5: Emotions**

How do we get people to care about our ideas? We make them feel something. Research shows that people are more likely to make a charitable gift to a single needy individual than to an impoverished nation. We are wired to feel things for people, not abstractions.

### **Principle 6: Stories**

How do we get people to act on our ideas? We tell stories. Hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight simulator, preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively.

These are the six principles of successful ideas. In order to sum up these principles, an acronym may act as a checklist for creating a successful idea: Simple Unexpected Concrete Credentialed Emotional Story (SUCCEs). Many of these seem like common sense. So, why are we not deluged with sticky ideas?

There is a villain, an obstacle to overcome that hinders our efforts. It is called the "Curse of Knowledge."

Think of it this way. In 1990, a study was done in which people were assigned to be "tappers" or "listeners." Each tapper was asked to pick a song and tap out the rhythm to the listener. The listener's job was to guess the song. Only 3 out of 120 songs were guessed correctly—just 2.5%. The tappers had predicted the listeners would guess correctly 50% of the time. Why the huge discrepancy?

The problem was that the tappers have been given knowledge (the song title) that makes it impossible for them to imagine what it's like to lack that knowledge. This is the Curse of Knowledge. Once we know something, it's hard to imagine what it was like not to know it. It is then difficult to share our knowledge with others, because we can't connect with our listener's state of mind.

### **Chapter 1: Simple**

Before an Army unit goes into battle, there is a tremendous amount of planning that takes place. The plans are detailed and thorough, and are the result of a lot of effort. There is just one problem: They often turn out to be useless.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

Col Tom Kolditz says, “The expression we always use is No plan survives contact with the enemy.” Unpredictable things happen in a battle. So, in the 1980’s the Army adapted its planning process, inventing a concept called Commander’s Intent (CI). The CI is a simple, clear statement that appears at the top of every order, specifying the plans goal. The CI never gives too much detail, but it does enable every single soldier to know what the goal is. That enables individuals to improvise as needed and adapt to their situation; when they know the intent they can generate their own solutions.

If we are to succeed, the first step is this: Be simple. That doesn’t mean dumbing things down; it does mean finding the core of the idea.

“Finding the core” means stripping an idea down to its most critical essence. To get to the core, we’ve got to weed out the superfluous elements, and also the important ideas that are really important, but just aren’t the most important.

Southwest Airlines has mastered this. They are THE low-fare airline. CEO Herb Kelleher said this: “I can teach you the secret to running this airline in thirty seconds. We are THE low-fare airline. Once you understand that fact, you can make any decision about this company as well as I can. Example: Tracy from marketing comes in and suggests that people would really like a nice salad on the Houston to Las Vegas flight. How do you respond? Simple—you just ask her “How will adding the salad make us THE low-fare airline on that route? If it doesn’t help us do that, we’re not serving any damn salad.”

When people have too many choices, they tend to get paralyzed and find it difficult to make decisions. It often isn’t clear what is best. Core messages help people make choices by reminding them of what’s important, and enabling that to guide their decisions.

Besides being core, simple messages also need to be compact. That probably seems obvious: we know that sentences are better than paragraphs, easy words are better than hard words, etc. It’s a bandwidth issue. We can learn and remember only so much information at once. The challenge is how to be core and compact in a way that is also memorable. One way is to use analogies. They connect with information people already have in their head, so they can be shorter and simpler.

Coming up with a profound compact phrase is actually incredibly difficult. However, it is well worth the effort. “Finding the Core” and expressing it in the form of a compact idea can be enduringly powerful.

### **Chapter 2: Unexpected**

The most basic way to get someone’s attention is to break a pattern. Humans adapt incredibly quickly to patterns. We often simply tune them out. Think of the hum of a fan, or traffic noise, or a familiar smell. We only become aware of them when something changes.

In trying to make an idea sticky, we need to ask two essential questions: How do I get people’s attention? And second, How do I keep it?

To understand the answers to these two questions, we have to understand two essential emotions: surprise and interest. Surprise gets our attention (You use only 10% of your brain), and interest keeps it (gossip and conspiracy theories keep us coming back for more).

Naturally sticky ideas are frequently unexpected. If we can make our ideas more unexpected, they will be stickier.

The TV commercial for the new Enclave minivan opens with the Enclave sitting in front of a park. After a football game, the family gets in, with Dad behind the wheel, mom next to him in the passenger seat, and the kids are in the back. The

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

Enclave pulls away from the curb and begins to move slowly down the street, with a voice-over talking about the cars different features.

The car pulls to a stop, and the camera zooms in on the boy looking out the window. That's when it happens.

A speeding car barrels into the intersection and broadsides the minivan. There is a huge collision, with metal buckling and glass flying. The screen fades to black, and a message appears: "Didn't see that coming?"

The question fades and is replaced by a statement: "No one ever does." Then a final message flashes across the screen: "Buckle up...always."

There is no Enclave minivan. The ad was put together by the Ad Council to promote wearing seatbelts. The ad capitalizes on the unexpected. We know how car commercials are supposed to behave. No one dies, ever.

Surprise jolts us to attention. It is triggered when our expectations fail, and it prepares us to understand why the failure occurred. When our guessing machines fail, surprise grabs our attention so that we can repair them for the future. Unexpected ideas are more likely to stick because surprise makes us pay attention and think. The extra attention and thinking sears unexpected events into our memories.

Surprise doesn't work well if it's just gimmicky. To be surprising, an event can't be predictable. Surprise is the opposite of predictability. But to be satisfying, surprise must be "post-dictable." The twist makes sense after you think about it, but it's not something you would have seen coming.

Surprise gets people's attention, but we still need to keep it. A few years ago, Robert Cialdini, a social psychologist at Arizona State University, set out to improve the way he talked about science in his classes. He studied every book he could find in which scientists were writing for nonscientists, and noted the most interesting passages.

One thing stood out: the most successful of the pieces all began with a mystery story. The authors described a state of affairs that seemed to make no sense and then invited the reader into the material to solve the mystery. Mysteries are powerful because they create a need for closure. Cialdini says "You've heard of the famous Aha! experience, right? It's much more satisfying when it is preceded by the Huh? experience." What will happen next? How will it turn out? are both questions that keep us interested.

That kind of curiosity happens when we notice a gap in our knowledge. We feel a need to fill the gap. That need can make us finish a bad book, or watch a bad movie to the end, because we want to know what happens. The gap in our knowledge (curiosity) holds our attention.

One important implication of the gap theory is that we need to open gaps before we close them. Our tendency is to tell people the facts. First, though, they must realize that they need these facts. The trick to convincing people that they need our message is to first highlight some specific knowledge that they're missing. We can pose a question or puzzle that confronts people with a gap in their knowledge. As an example, most local news programs run teaser ads for upcoming broadcasts. They are meant to create a gap that people then need to fill by watching the program.

To make our communication more effective, we need to shift our thinking from "What information do I need to convey?" to "What questions do I want my audience to ask?"

### Chapter 3: Concrete

One summer day a Fox was strolling through an orchard. He saw a bunch of grapes high on a grape vine. "Just the thing to quench my thirst," he said. Backing up a few paces, he took a run and jumped at the grapes, just missing. Turning

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

around again, he ran faster and jumped again. Still a miss. Again and again he jumped, until he gave up out of exhaustion. Walking away with his nose in the air, he said: "I am sure they are sour." It is easy to despise what you can't get.

Aesop authored some of the stickiest stories in world history. We've all heard his greatest hits: "The Tortoise and the Hare," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," and many more. His fables would not have survived 2,500 years if they didn't reflect some profound truths about human nature. But, there are many more profound truths that have never seeped into our day to day language. This truth is especially sticky because it is concrete—the grapes, the fox, the final comment—all enable us to get hold of it.

The world needs more fables. We are surrounded by buzzwords no one can remember: "reciprocal cost-based re-engineering," "customer-oriented visionary paradigm," and "idiopathic cardiomyopathy" (cardiomyopathy means something is wrong with your heart; idiopathic means we have no idea why yours isn't working).

Language is often abstract, but life isn't abstract. Abstraction makes it harder to understand and remember an idea. It also makes coordinating our activities with others more difficult, since they may interpret the abstraction differently than we do. Concreteness helps us avoid these problems.

What makes something "concrete?" If you can examine something with your senses, it's concrete. A V-8 engine is concrete. "High-performance" is abstract. Most of the time, concreteness boils down to specific people doing specific things. Nordstrom's is renowned for "World-class customer service" which they make sticky by telling concrete stories: the Nordie who cheerfully gift wrapped products a customer bought at Macy's; or the Nordie who refunded money for a set of tire chains—even though Nordstrom's doesn't sell tire chains. These are concrete stories.

Abstraction is the luxury of the expert; novices crave concreteness. Have you ever read a paper or an article and found yourself so confused by the language that you were crying out for an example?

If concreteness is so powerful, why do we easily slip into abstraction? The reason is simple: the difference between an expert and a novice is the ability to think abstractly. Biology students try to remember whether reptiles lay eggs or not; biology teachers think in terms of the grand system of animal taxonomy. And because experts are capable of thinking on a different level, they naturally want to talk on a different level.

It's easy to lose awareness that we're talking like an expert. We start to suffer from the Curse of Knowledge, like the tappers in the "tappers and listeners" game. It can feel unnatural to speak concretely about subject matter we've known intimately for years. But, if we are willing to make the effort we will see the rewards: our audience will understand and remember what we're saying. This doesn't mean we dumb things down; it does mean that we learn to communicate in ways everyone can understand.

Concreteness also enables coordination by making targets clear. Even experts need clarity. Consider a software start-up with the goal of building "the next great search engine." Within the start-up are two programmers with nearly identical skill-sets working next to each other. To one "the next great search engine" means completeness, ensuring that the search engine returns everything on the web that could possibly be relevant. To the other it means speed, ensuring pretty good results very fast. Their efforts will not be fully aligned or coordinated until the goal is made concrete.

How do we move towards concrete ideas for our own messages? We might find it easier if we think about the needs of specific people: our readers, our students, our customers.

In 2004, Melissa Studzinski joined General Mills as brand manager for Hamburger Helper. At that time, Hamburger Helper had been in a decade-long slump, and the CEO announced that his number one goal in 2005 was to fix and grow that brand.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

Studzinski's team decided to put aside all the marketing data that had been gathered and try something new. They began to visit the homes of people (mostly moms) who used Hamburger Helper. They learned that moms and their kids didn't care about different shapes (Hamburger Helper came in 11 different shapes at the time), but cared a lot about flavor, and moms wanted the same predictable flavor their kids wouldn't reject. (HH had more than 30 different flavors at the time).

Using the concrete information they had received, they simplified the product line (which generated huge cost savings), and finished the year with an 11% increase in sales. Studzinski says, "When I've got a decision to make about the brand, I think of the women I met, and I wonder what they would do in my shoes. It is amazingly helpful to think that way."

Of the six traits of stickiness that we review in this book, concreteness is the easiest to embrace. It may also be the most effective. The barrier we have to overcome is forgetfulness—we forget that we are slipping into abstractspeak, and that others don't know what we know.

### Chapter 4: Credible

What makes people believe our ideas? There are a lot of obvious answers: because our parents or friends believe; we've had experiences that led us to believe; because of our religious faith; because we trust authorities. Given this, how do we persuade a skeptical audience to believe a new idea?

Authorities can give credibility to our ideas. Authorities come in two kinds: experts, whose walls are covered with framed credentials, and celebrities. But we don't always have access to these sources of external authority.

Since we don't always have an external authority to vouch for our message, our messages need to vouch for themselves. They need to have "internal credibility." While internal credibility can vary with the topic, there are some general principles for establishing internal credibility.

The Boyfriend's Death is a famous urban legend that begins with a couple heading out on a date in the boyfriend's car. The car runs out of gas under a tree on a deserted road. The girl suspects the guy is faking in order to make out with her, but soon realized they are really stuck. The boyfriend decides to walk to the nearest house for help, and the girl stays behind. After several hours, the girl is frightened by a creepy scratching coming from the roof of the car, maybe from a low-hanging tree branch. After several hours of anxious waiting, the girl gets out of the car to discover—cue the horror music—her boyfriend murdered and hanging from the tree above the car. His toes scrape the roof as he swings in the wind.

When people pass this legend along, they always add particular details. It's always set in a specific location, varying with the part of the country. "It happened right off Route 21."

A person's knowledge of details is often a good proxy for expertise. But concrete details don't just lend credibility to the person; they lend credibility to the idea itself. The more vivid the details, the greater the credibility boost.

Another way to boost credibility is to use statistics. But, statistics tend to be eye-glazing. How can we use them while still managing to engage our audience? Statistics are rarely meaningful in and of themselves, but they can effectively illustrate a relationship or a point.

**Beyond War** was started by a group of citizens concerned about the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. They struggled with the problem of how to make credible their belief that the arms race was out of control. The world had 5,000+ nuclear warheads; one was enough to destroy a city.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

They developed a demonstration using a bucket and BB's. At the appropriate time in the presentation, the presenter would take a BB and drop it into the empty bucket and say, "This is the Hiroshima bomb." Next he'd drop 10 BB's into the bucket. The clatter was loud, and he would say, "This is the firepower of the missiles on one nuclear submarine." Finally, he asked the attendees to close their eyes. He'd say, "This is the world's current arsenal of nuclear weapons." Then he poured 5,000 BB's into the bucket (one for every nuclear warhead). The roar of the BB's went on and on; afterwards there was always dead silence.

Here is the interesting thing: no one remembered the statistic! No one remembered that there were 5,000 nuclear warheads in the world. What stuck was the sudden realization that the problem was out of control. Statistics should help people remember the point, not the statistic itself.

A final way to develop internal credibility is to use an example that passes the Sinatra test. In one of Sinatra's songs, the chorus declares, "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere." An example passes the Sinatra test when one example alone is enough to establish credibility in an area. For instance, if you have the security contract for Fort Knox, you are in the running for any security contract. If you catered a White House function, you can compete for any catering contract. It's the Sinatra Test: If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.

There is one other source of credibility that may be the most powerful of all. We call it the "testable credential."

In 1984 Wendy's launched one of the most brilliant ad campaigns of all time. The commercial opens with three elderly ladies standing at a counter discussing a burger. Claire Peller ends the discussion with her famous line, "Where's the Beef?" Then the announcer comes on and says "Wendy's Single has more beef than the Whopper or the Big Mac."

The ads had a huge impact, increasing revenues by 31%. Wendy's claim was that their burgers had more beef, and they had to make that claim credible. Rather than calling on an expert or a celebrity, or quoting a statistic, they outsourced its credibility to its customers. The spots implicitly challenged customers to verify Wendy's claims: See for yourself—look at our burgers versus theirs. That is a testable credential.

### Chapter 5: Emotional

In the last chapter, we discussed how to convince people that our ideas are credible, how to make them believe. Belief counts for a lot, but belief isn't enough. For people to take action, they have to care.

When we talk about the emotional aspect of stickiness, we aren't talking about manipulation but inspiration. Feelings inspire people to act.

So how do we make people care about our messages? The good news is that to make people care we don't have to produce emotion from an absence of emotion. The most basic way to make people care is to form an association between something they don't yet care about and something they do care about; something that matters to them.

And what matters to people? People matter to themselves. It will come as no surprise that one reliable way of making people care is by invoking self-interest.

John Caples is often cited as the greatest copywriter of all time. In 1925 he wrote a headline for an ad promoting a correspondences music course: "They Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano... But When I Started to Play!" The ad was so successful that it is still being ripped off by copywriters 60 years later. Caples says this: *"First and foremost, try to get self-interest into every headline you write. Make your headline suggest to readers that here is something they want. This seems obvious, but the rule is violated every day by scores of writers."*

Caples says we often emphasize features instead of benefits. The most frequent reason for unsuccessful advertising is



# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

advertisers who are so full of their own accomplishments (the world's best seed!) that they forget to tell us why we should buy it (the world's best lawn!)

In 1954 Abraham Maslow surveyed the research on what motivates people and boiled down the list to these basic needs:

**Transcendence:** help others realize their potential

**Self-actualization:** realizing our own potential

**Aesthetic:** order, beauty, balance

**Learning:** understand

**Esteem:** be competent, gain approval

**Belonging:** love, family, friends

**Security:** protection, safety

**Physical:** hunger, thirst, bodily comfort

When people talk about "self-interest" they are typically talking about the last four categories. They are the most obvious and the easiest to tap into. But the "higher" needs of self-actualization and transcendence can also be very powerful. Research shows that people are often motivated to go against their self-interest when other principles are at stake.

Even Caples admits there are powerful motivations outside narrow self-interest. He tells a story about a marketer who was promoting a new educational film on fire safety that was intended to help firemen.

The marketer had been taught to appeal to basic self-interest: sex, greed, and fear.

His instinct was that greed would work best, so he came up with some ideas for free giveaways that would persuade firemen to check out the film. He began calling local units to see what would have the most appeal. When he called, he asked, "Would you like to see the film for possible purchase for your educational programs?" The universal answer was an enthusiastic "Yes!"

His second question was, "Would your firefighters prefer a large electric popcorn popper or an excellent set of chef's carving knives as a thank you for reviewing the film?"

The first two calls yielded clear answers to this question: "Do you think we'd use a fire safety program because of some #\*\$@%! popcorn popper?"

The marketer stopped asking about the free gifts.

What was going on there? Sometimes people make decisions based on an evaluation of what gives the most value. At other times they will make decisions based on identity. In this case, people ask themselves questions like: Who am I? What kind of situation is this? And what do people like me do in this kind of situation?

That's what was happening with the firefighters. Note: the offer wasn't a bribe, it was a thank-you. But from the perspective of the identity model, turning down the popper makes perfect sense. "I'm a firefighter. Firefighters aren't the kind of people who need little gifts to learn about safety. We risk our lives going into burning buildings to save people. Shame on you for implying that I need a popcorn popper!" The offer conflicted with their sense of identity.



# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

How do we make people care about our ideas? We get them to take off their analytical hats and empathize with specific individuals. We show how our ideas are connected with things that people already care about. We appeal to their self-interest, but 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.

### Chapter 6: Stories

It's well-known that a good story is very sticky. The power of a good story is that it provides inspiration. It moves people to take action.

In the late 90's Subway launched an ad campaign touting the healthiness of its sandwiches. The campaign was based on a statistic: seven subs under six grams of fat. That's a pretty good statistic, but the "7 under 6" effort didn't stick like Subway's next campaign, which focused on the story of Jared Fogle.

Most of us are familiar with the story. Jared was a college student who weighed 425 pounds. After being told he probably wouldn't live to 35, Jared decided to slim down. He created his own, all-Subway diet: a foot-long veggie sub for lunch and a 6ix-inch turkey sub for dinner. After three months, his weight had dropped to 330 pounds. He continued to lose weight after that, sometimes as much as a pound a day.

There was a lot of debate within Subway as to whether to make the ads; eventually the ad agency made the first ads for free just to get them out. Jared became an overnight sensation, and Subway sales increased dramatically. In 1999 sales were flat; in 2000 they grew 18%, and in 2001 an additional 16% (more than twice as much as its competitors). Stories work.

One of the lessons of Jared is that we don't always have to create sticky ideas. *Spotting them is often easier and more useful.* That's the secret behind the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and the series that followed. The authors learned to spot inspirational stories. In analyzing what made these stories so powerful, we found that there are basically three types of plots: the Challenge plot, the Connection plot, and the Creativity plot. More than 80% of the *Chicken Soup* stories fall into one of these categories.

The story of David and Goliath is a classic challenge plot, in which the protagonist is facing some kind of huge challenge. We are inspired by him or her, and want to work harder, take on new challenges, and overcome obstacles. Challenge plots inspire us to act.

A second plot type is the Connection plot. Think of the story of the Good Samaritan. A Connection plot is a story about people who develop a relationship that bridges a gap—racial, class, ethnic, religious, demographic, or otherwise. Connection plots are fabulous for romance stories (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Titanic*). They inspire us in social ways. They make us want to help others, work with others, love others.

The third major type of inspirational story is the Creativity plot. This involves someone making a mental breakthrough, solving a long-standing puzzle, or attacking a problem in an innovative way. It's the *MacGyver* plot.

The goal of reviewing these plots is not to help us invent stories. The goal is to learn how to spot the stories that have potential. When the Jared article hits our desk, we want to spot the crucial elements immediately. Guy faces huge obstacles and overcomes them—it's a Challenge plot.

Another kind of story that inspires people is referred to as a springboard story. Springboard stories tell people about possibilities.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

In 1996, Stephen Denning was working for the World Bank, and was put in charge of “knowledge management.” The focus of the bank was money, not information, so it wasn’t a “fast track” assignment. It was difficult: World Bank knew a lot about how to achieve results in developing nations, but that information was scattered throughout the organization. And since it was working in dozens of nations, most of the information was contained at a local level. There was no way for someone in Zambia to benefit from the knowledge of someone in Bangladesh.

Denning heard a story about a health care worker in Zambia who was involved in the struggle to fight malaria in his community and was trying to find information on how to combat the disease. The worker had found a way to log on to the Internet and had discovered the answers he needed on the website of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. (In 1996, the internet would not have been the first stop for someone in Africa looking for information). Denning realized that this was a perfect example of the power of knowledge management. Someone in charge of a vital operation needed information. He went looking for it, found it, and was able to act more effectively. But, he should have been able to tap the knowledge the World Bank already had.

Later, Denning got the opportunity to speak to a committee of senior management. He had 10 minutes on the agenda in which to introduce a new organizational strategy and win their endorsement. Not easy! First Denning explained the problem: the difficulty they had in pooling their knowledge. Then, rather than quoting authorities on how important it was, he just told the Zambia story.

Immediately afterwards two executives raced up and began to bombard him with things he should do to get the program going. They had totally embraced the idea.

Denning later said telling stories violated his intuition. Why not spell out the message directly? Why not hit the listeners right between the eyes? The problem is that when you hit listeners between the eyes they tend to fight back. The way you deliver a message is a cue to how they should react. If you make an argument, you’re implicitly asking them to evaluate your argument, and then argue back. But with a story, you engage the audience, involving people with the idea, and asking them to participate with you.

These kinds of stories focus people on potential solutions to problems. Telling stories with visible goals and barriers shifts the audience into a problem-solving mode.

After Denning told the Zambia story, one of the executives at the meeting took the idea of knowledge management to the president of the World Bank, arguing it was the future of the organization. By the end of the year, the president had announced that knowledge management was one of the bank’s top priorities.

Another benefit of stories is that they almost single-handedly defeat the Curse of Knowledge. Stories are almost always concrete, so they are easy for the non-experts to understand. Most of them have Emotional and Unexpected elements. The hardest part is making sure that they are Simple—that they reflect your core message. When those things come together, things get very sticky!

### Epilogue

Each year in the second session of Chip’s “Making Ideas Stick” class at Stanford, the students participate in an exercise, a kind of testable credential to show what kinds of messages stick and don’t stick.

The students are given data on crime patterns in the United States, and then must give a one-minute persuasive speech arguing either for or against the idea that non-violent crime is a serious problem in this country.

Stanford students are smart and are good communicators. No one ever gives a poor speech. After the speeches, the listeners rate the speaker.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Made to Stick

---

The surprise comes next. The exercise appears to be over; Chip often plays a clip from Monty Python to kill a few minutes. Then, abruptly, he asks them to pull out a sheet of paper and write down, for each speaker they heard, every single idea that they remember.

The students are flabbergasted at how little they remember. Keep in mind that only ten minutes have elapsed since the speeches were given. At most, they've heard eight one-minute speeches; and yet, the students are lucky to recall one or two ideas from each presentation. A large majority of what is remembered are stories.

In communicating with the class, the students actually have two jobs. They have to decide what to say, and then how to say it. Because they possess a level of expertise that their audience doesn't, the speaker is vulnerable to the Curse of Knowledge. The most successful speakers in the classes are those who work against the tendency to make the assumption that their audience knows the same information; they do not assume knowledge on their audience's behalf. Their use of stories enabled them to avoid getting undercut by the curse.

When the least successful students shared their information, their tendency was to communicate as if their audience was them. And often, their communication went right over their audience's heads by leaving out assumed knowledge. At the very least they were not memorable, as evidenced by their classmate's comments.

The SUCCEsS checklist can help you avoid the Curse of Knowledge and communicate in a memorable, sticky way. Learning to ask yourself questions like "Is it concrete?" or "Is it emotional?" and including stories will help you to avoid common communication problems and hone in on really making your message stick. Your audience will thank you!

### The Pastor's Perspective

Every pastor and leader should meditate on and internalize the ideas in Made to Stick. Learning how to make ideas stick can transform many of our churches.

The most obvious applications are to preaching and teaching. It is sad that pastors can put so many hours into their sermon prep and have the message forgotten by lunchtime. In one survey I read, most pastors rated themselves "above average" in their speaking ability. Given the state of most churches, and their impact (or lack of), I think the surveyed pastors were overly optimistic.

Making our sermons stickier would help our people tremendously. I don't think we need to try to use every point every week, but to step back and review our sermons for "stickiness" would be wise, and can increase the effectiveness of our efforts. If your goal in preaching and communicating is to facilitate life change, as mine is, it is imperative that we preach "sticky" sermons. People can't apply what they can't remember!

Another area of ideas we can really benefit from in Made to Stick, is in casting vision. Many churches don't have a vision. For those who do, many of the vision statements I have seen are so long that no one can remember them, or are so bland that no one cares about them. If we can be Simple—identify the core, the essence, of our vision, and then communicate it in a sticky way, we will serve our people well.

Any organization will benefit from having its vision clear and memorable, and churches, especially, can develop in this area. It is sad to me that businesses are so often better than the church at this. ***We have the greatest calling, the most important mission, and the most powerful vision; but, if we can't communicate it clearly and powerfully, our people can't embrace and act on it.*** We owe it to our people, and to God, to use every tool at our disposal to enable our people, and our churches, to embrace the vision God has given. We need to make it sticky!