

# How to Change Things When Change is Hard

by Gary Tomlinson

“Learning from the school of hard knocks can be very informing, but often the tuition is too high! We should learn from other people’s experiences.” The purpose of this column is to share great business wisdom from the experiences of authors like Jim Collins, Michael Gerber, Gary Harpst, Michael LeBoeuf, Ron Willingham, Randy Pennington and others. Because when you combine great business education with your own business experiences the outcome you’ll receive is far greater than the sum of its parts.

The wisdom of Chip and Dan Heath’s new book; *Switch – How to Change Things When Change is Hard* has been chosen to share with you this week. “*Why is it so hard to make lasting changes in our companies, in our communities, in our own lives?* The primary obstacle is a conflict that’s built into our brains. Psychologists have discovered that our minds are ruled by two different systems – the rational mind and the emotional mind – that compete for control. The rational mind wants a great beach body; the emotional mind wants that Oreo cookie. The rational mind wants to change something at work; the emotional mind loves the comfort of the existing routine. The tension can doom a change effort – but if it is overcome, change can come quickly.”

The Heath brothers use a compelling metaphor to explain the tension between our rational mind and our emotional mind. Visualize a person riding atop a large elephant. They say that our rational side is the Rider and our emotional side is the Elephant. “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.”

The Heath brothers say if you want to change things, you’ve got to appeal to both the rider and the elephant. “The Rider provides the planning and direction and the Elephant provides the energy. So if you reach the Riders of your team but not the Elephants, team members will have understanding without motivation. If you reach the Elephants but not their Riders, they’ll have passion without direction. In both cases, the flaws can be paralyzing. A reluctant Elephant and a wheel-spinning Rider can both ensure that nothing changes. But when Elephants and Riders move together, change can come easily.

*Switch* provides a basic three-part framework that can guide you in any situation where you need to change behavior. In any change situation you need to:

- *Direct the Rider.* What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity. So provide crystal-clear direction.
- *Motivate the Elephant.* What looks like laziness is often exhaustion. The Rider can’t get his way by force for very long. So it’s critical that you engage people’s emotional side – get their Elephants on the path and cooperative.

- *Shape the Path*. What looks like a people problem is often a situational problem. We call the situation (including the surrounding environment) the “Path.” When you shape the Path, you make change more likely, no matter what’s happening with the Rider and the Elephant.

Chip and Dan Heath don’t promise that they can make change easy, but at least they can make it *easier*. Their goal is to teach you a framework, based on decades of scientific research, that is simple enough to remember and flexible enough to use in many different situations – family, work, community and otherwise. “To change behavior, you’ve got to direct the rider, motivate the Elephant and shape the Path. If you can do all three at once, dramatic change can happen even if you don’t have lots of power or resources behind you.”

“In *Switch*, Chip and Dan Heath show how everyday people – employees and managers, parents and nurses – have united both minds and as a result achieved dramatic results. In a compelling, story-driven narrative, the authors bring together decades of counterintuitive research in psychology, sociology and other fields to shed new light on how we can effect transformative change. *Switch* shows that successful changes follow a pattern, a pattern you can use to make the changes that matter to you, whether your interest is in changing the world or changing your waistline.”

You can purchase *Switch* at all major booksellers or order from Amazon. To learn more go to [www.heathbrothers.com](http://www.heathbrothers.com).

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