

**A Book Report on**  
***Made to Stick***  
*(Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die)*  
**By Chip Heath & Dan Heath**

(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

**Preface:** Mark Twain once observed, “A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on.” His observation rings true: Urban legends, conspiracy theories, and bogus public-health scares circulate effortlessly. Meanwhile, people with important ideas – businesspeople, teachers, politicians, journalists and others – struggle to make their ideas “stick.”

Why do some ideas thrive while others die? And how do we improve the chances of worthy ideas? In *Made to Stick*, accomplished educators and idea collectors Chip and Dan Heath tackle head-on these vexing questions.

*Made to Stick* is a book that will transform the way you communicate ideas. Provocative, eye-opening, and often surprisingly funny, *Made to Stick* shows us the vital principles of winning ideas – and tells us how we can apply these rules to making our own messages stick.

**What Led to *Made to Stick*:** In 2004, brothers Chip and Dan Heath, realized that both of them had been studying how ideas stick for about ten years. Chip had researched and taught what made ideas stick and Dan had tried to figure out pragmatic ways to make ideas stick. Their expertise came from very different fields, but both had zeroed in on the same question: Why do some ideas succeed while others fail? They poured over hundreds of sticky ideas and saw, over and over, the **same six principles at work**:

**Principle 1: Simplicity** – How do we find the essential core of our ideas? A successful defense lawyer says, “If you argue ten points, even if each is a good point, when they get back to the jury room they won’t remember any.” To strip an idea down to its core, we must be masters of exclusion. We must relentlessly prioritize. Saying something short is not the mission – sound bites are not the ideal. Proverbs are the ideal. We must create ideas that are both simple and profound. The Golden Rule is the ultimate model of simplicity: a one-sentence statement so profound that an individual could spend a lifetime learning to follow it.

**Principle 2: Unexpectedness** – How do we get our audience to pay attention to our ideas, and how do we maintain their interest when we need time to get the ideas across? We need to violate people’s expectations. We need to be counterintuitive. For our ideas

to endure, we must generate interest and curiosity. How do we keep students engaged during the forty-eighth history class of the year? We can engage people's curiosity over a long period of time by systematically "opening gaps" in their knowledge and then filling those gaps.

**Principle 3: Concreteness** – How do we make our ideas clear? We must explain our ideas in terms of human actions, in terms of sensory information. This is where so much business communication goes awry. Mission statements, synergies, visions – they are often ambiguous to the point of being meaningless. Naturally sticky ideas are full of concrete images because our brains are wired to remember concrete data. In proverbs, abstract ideas are often coded in concrete language: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our idea will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience.

**Principle 4: Credibility** – How do we make people believe our ideas? When the former surgeon general C. Everett Koop talks about a public-health issue, most people accept his ideas without skepticism. But in most day-to-day situations we don't enjoy this authority. Sticky ideas have to carry their own credentials. We need ways to help people test our ideas for themselves – a "try before you buy" philosophy for the world of ideas. When we're trying to build a case for something, most of us instinctively grasp for hard numbers. But in many cases this is exactly the wrong approach. In the sole U.S. presidential debate in 1980 between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, Reagan could have cited innumerable statistics demonstrating the sluggishness of the economy. Instead, he asked a simple question that allowed voters to test for themselves: "Before you vote, ask yourself if you are better off today than you were four years ago."

**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 entire impoverished region. We are wired to feel things for people, not for abstractions. Sometimes the hard part is finding the right emotion to harness. For instance, it's difficult to get teenagers to quit smoking by instilling in them a fear of consequences, but it's easier to get them to quit by tapping into their resentment of the duplicity of Big Tobacco.

**Principle 6: Stories** – How do we get people to act on our ideas? We tell stories. Firefighters naturally swap stories after every fire, and by doing so they multiply their experience; after years of hearing stories, they have a richer, more complete mental catalog of critical situations they might confront during a fire and the appropriate responses to those situations. Research shows that mentally rehearsing a situation helps us perform better when we encounter that situation in the physical environment. Similarly, hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight simulator, preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively.

Those are the six principles of successful ideas. To summarize, here's our checklist for creating a successful idea: a Simple Unexpected Concrete Credentialed Emotional Story.

(You can use the acronym – SUCCEsS to help remember the six principles of successful ideas.)

**Tappers and Listeners:** In 1990, Elizabeth Newton earned a Ph.D. in psychology at Stanford by studying a simple game in which she assigned people to one of two roles: “tappers” or “listeners.” Tappers received a list of twenty-five well-known songs, such as “Happy Birthday to You” and “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Each tapper was asked to pick a song and tap out the rhythm to a listener (by knocking on a table). The listener’s job was to guess the song, based on the rhythm being tapped.

The listener’s job in this game is quite difficult. Over the course of Newton’s experiment, 120 songs were tapped out. Listeners guessed only 2.5 percent of the songs: 3 out of 120.

But here’s what made the result worthy of a dissertation in psychology. Before the listeners guessed the name of the song, Newton asked the tappers to predict the odds that the listeners would guess correctly. They predicted that the odds were 50 percent.

The tappers got their message across 1 time in 40, but they thought they were getting their message across 1 time in 2. Why? When a tapper taps, they’re hearing the song in their head. Meanwhile, the listeners can’t hear the tune – all they can hear is a bunch of disconnected taps, like a kind of bizarre Morse Code.

It’s hard to be a tapper. The problem is that tappers have been given knowledge (the song title) that makes it impossible for them to imagine what it’s like to lack that knowledge. When they’re tapping, they can’t imagine what it’s like for the listeners to hear isolated taps rather than a song. This is the **Curse of Knowledge**. Once we know something, we find it hard to imagine what it was like not to know it. Our knowledge has “cursed” us. And it becomes difficult for us to share our knowledge with others, because we can’t readily re-create our listeners’ state of mind.

The tapper/listener experiment is reenacted every day across the world. The tappers and listeners are CEOs and frontline employees, teachers and students, politicians and voters, marketers and customers, writers and readers. All of these groups rely on ongoing communication, but, like the tappers and listeners, they suffer from enormous information imbalances. When a CEO discusses “unlocking shareholder value,” there is a tune playing in her head that the employees can’t hear.

It’s a hard problem to avoid. You can’t unlearn what you already know. There are, in fact, only two ways to beat the Curse of Knowledge reliably. The first is not to learn anything. The second is to take your ideas and transform them.

This book will teach you how to transform your ideas to beat the Curse of Knowledge. The six principles presented earlier are your best weapons. They can be used as a kind of checklist. If you want to spread your ideas to other people, you should work within the confines of the rules that have allowed other ideas to succeed over time. You want to

invent new ideas, not new rules. Regardless of your level of “natural creativity,” this book will show you how a little focused effort can make almost any idea stickier, and a sticky idea is an idea that is more likely to make a difference. All you need to do is understand the six principles of powerful ideas.

## Chapter 1: Simple

It’s hard to make ideas stick in a noisy, unpredictable, chaotic environment. If we’re to succeed, the first step is this: Be simple. Not simple in terms of “dumbing down” or “sound bites.” You don’t have to speak in monosyllables to be simple. What we mean by “simple” is 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 superfluous and tangential elements. But that’s the easy part. The hard part is weeding out ideas that may be really important but just aren’t the most important idea.

**Example:** In the 1980’s the Army amended its planning process, inventing a concept called Commander’s Intent (CI). CI is a crisp, plain-talk statement that appears at the top of every order, specifying the plan’s goal, the desired end-state of an operation. At high levels of the Army, the CI may be relatively abstract: “Break the will of the enemy in the Southeast region.” At the tactical level, for colonels and captains, it is much more concrete: “My intent is to have Third Battalion on Hill 4305, to have the hill cleared of enemy, with only ineffective remnants remaining, so we can protect the flank of Third Brigade as they pass through the lines.”

The CI never specifies so much detail that it risks being rendered obsolete by unpredictable events. You can lose the ability to execute the original plan, but you never lose the responsibility of executing the CI. In other words, if there’s one soldier left in the Third Battalion on Hill 4305, he’d better be doing something to protect the flank of the Third Brigade.

Commander’s Intent manages to align the behavior of soldiers at all levels without requiring play-by-play instructions from their leaders. When people know the desired destination, they’re free to improvise, as needed, in arriving there.

The Army’s Commander’s Intent forces its officers to highlight the most important goal of an operation. The value of the Intent comes from its singularity. You can’t have five North Stars, you can’t have five “most important goals,” and you can’t have five Commander’s Intents. Finding the core is analogous to writing the Commander’s Intent – it’s about discarding a lot of great insights in order to let the most important insight shine.

There are two steps in making your ideas sticky – Step 1 is to find the core, and Step 2 is to translate the core using the SUCCEs checklist.

**Burying the Lead:** News reporters are taught to start their stories with the most important information. The first sentence, called the lead, contains the most essential elements of the story. A good lead can convey a lot of information. After the lead, information is presented in decreasing order of importance. Journalists call this the “inverted pyramid” structure – the most important info (the widest part of the pyramid) is at the top. The inverted pyramid is great for readers. No matter what the reader’s attention span – whether she reads only the lead or the entire story – the inverted pyramid maximizes the information she gleans.

“Burying the lead” occurs when the journalist lets the most important element of the story slip too far down in the story structure. The process of writing a lead – and avoiding the temptation to bury it – is a helpful metaphor for the process of finding the core. Finding the core and writing the lead both involve forced prioritization.

Prioritization rescues people from the quicksand of decision angst, and that’s why finding the core is so valuable. Core messages help people avoid bad choices by reminding them of what’s important.

**Simple = Core + Compact:** Simple messages are core and compact. We know that sentences are better than paragraphs. Two bullet points are better than five. Easy words are better than hard words. It’s a bandwidth issue: The more we reduce the amount of information in an idea, the stickier it will be.

For thousands of years, people have exchanged sound bites called proverbs. Proverbs are simple yet profound. A definition of a proverb is a short sentence drawn from long experience. Take the proverb: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” What’s the core? The core is a warning against giving up a sure thing for something speculative. The proverb is short and simple, yet it packs a big nugget of wisdom that is useful in many situations.

We’ve seen that compact ideas are stickier, but that compact ideas alone aren’t valuable – only ideas with profound compactness are valuable. So, to make a profound idea compact you’ve got to pack a lot of meaning into a little bit of messaging. And how do you do that? You tap the existing memory terrain of your audience. You use what’s already there. You make it easier for your audience to learn a new concept by tying it to a concept that they already know. Psychologists call this a Schema. They define schema as a collection of generic properties of a concept or category. Schemas consist of lots of prerecorded information stored in our memories. If someone tells you that she saw a great new sports car, a picture immediately springs to mind, filled with generic properties. You know what “sports cars” are like. You picture something small and two-door, with a convertible top perhaps. If the car in your picture moves, it moves fast. Its color is almost certainly red. Schemas help us create complex messages from simple materials.

**The Power of Simplicity:** Metaphors and proverbs both derive their power from a clever substitution. They substitute something easy to think about for something

difficult. The proverb “A bird in hand is worth two in the bush” gives us a tangible, easily processed statement that we can use for guidance in complex, emotionally fraught situations.

Proverbs are the Holy Grail of simplicity. Coming up with a short, compact phrase is easy. On the other hand, coming up with a profound compact phrase is incredibly difficult. What we’ve tried to show in this chapter is that the effort is worth it – that “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 this: Break a pattern. Humans adapt incredibly quickly to consistent patterns. Consistent sensory stimulation makes us tune out: Think of the hum of an air conditioner, or traffic noise, or the smell of a candle, or the sight of a bookshelf. We may become consciously aware of these things only when something changes. The air conditioner shuts off. Your spouse rearranges the books.

Our brain is designed to be keenly aware of changes. Smart product designers are well aware of this tendency. They make sure that, when products require users to pay attention, something changes. Warning lights blink on and off because we would tune out a light that was constantly on. Car alarms make diabolical use of our change sensitivity.

This chapter focuses on two essential questions: *How do I get people’s attention?* And, just as crucially, *How do I keep it?* We can’t succeed if our messages don’t break through the clutter to get people’s attention. Furthermore, our messages are usually complex enough that we won’t succeed if we can’t keep people’s attention.

To understand the answers to these two questions, we have to understand two essential emotions – surprise and interest – that are commonly provoked by naturally sticky ideas.

- *Surprise* gets our attention.
- *Interest* keeps our attention.

Unexpected ideas are more likely to stick because surprise makes us pay attention and think. Surprise makes us want to find an answer – to resolve the question of why we were surprised – and big surprises call for big answers. If we want to motivate people to pay attention, we should seize the power of big surprises. Going for a big surprise, though, can cause a big problem. It’s easy to step over the line into gimmickry.

Using surprise in the service of a core message can be extremely powerful. To be surprising, an event can’t be predictable. Surprise is the opposite of predictability. If you want your ideas to be stickier, you’ve got to break someone’s guessing machine and then fix it.



So, a good process for making your ideas stickier is: (1) Identify the central message you need to communicate – find the core; (2) Figure out what is counterintuitive 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, counterintuitive dimension. Then, once their guessing machines have failed, help them refine their machines.

Common sense is the enemy of sticky messages. When messages sound like common sense, they float gently in one ear and out the other. And why shouldn't they? If I already intuitively "get" what you're trying to tell me, why should I obsess about remembering it? It's your job, as a communicator, to expose the parts of your message that are uncommon sense.

We began this chapter with two questions: How do we get people's attention? And how do we keep it? Some of the most successful ways to keep people's attention is through mystery. Mysteries are powerful because they create a need for closure. You've heard of the *Aha!* experience, right? Well, the *Aha!* experience is much more satisfying when it is preceded by the *Huh?* experience. This causes curiosity. Curiosity is the intellectual need to answer questions and close open patterns. We want to answer these questions, and that desire keeps us interested.

**The "Gap Theory" of Curiosity:** In 1994, George Loewenstein, a behavioral economist at Carnegie Mellon University, provided the most comprehensive account of situational interest. It is surprisingly simple. Curiosity, he says, happens when we feel a gap in our knowledge.

Loewenstein argues that gaps cause pain. When we want to know something, but don't, it's like having an itch that we need to scratch. To take away the pain, we need to fill the knowledge gap. We sit patiently through bad movies, even though they may be painful to watch, because it's too painful not to know how they end.

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. We can point out that someone else knows something they don't. We can present them with situations that have unknown resolutions, such as elections, sports events, or mysteries. We can challenge them to predict an outcome (which creates two knowledge gaps – What will happen? and Was I right?).

To make our communications 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

Language is often abstract, but life is not abstract. Teachers teach students about battles and animals and books. Doctors repair problems with our stomachs, backs and hearts. Companies create software, build planes, distribute newspapers; they build cars that are cheaper, faster or fancier than last year's. Even the most abstract business strategy must eventually show up in the tangible actions of human beings. It's easier to understand those tangible actions than to understand an abstract strategy statement.

Abstraction makes it harder to understand an idea and to remember it. It also makes it harder to coordinate our activities with others, who may interpret the abstraction in very different ways. Concreteness helps us avoid these problems. Concreteness is an indispensable component of sticky ideas.

**What Makes Something “Concrete”?** If you examine something with your senses, it's concrete. A V8 engine is concrete. “High-performance” is abstract. Most of the time, concreteness boils down to specific people doing specific things.

Concrete language helps people, especially novices, understand new concepts. Abstraction is the luxury of the expert. If you've got to teach an idea to a room full of people, and you aren't certain what they know, concreteness is the only safe language.

Have you ever read an academic paper or a technical article or even a memo and found yourself so flummoxed by the fancy abstract language that you were crying out for an example? Or maybe you've experienced the frustration of cooking from a recipe that was too abstract: “Cook until the mixture reaches a hearty consistency.” Huh? Just tell me how many minutes to stir! Show me a picture of what it looks like! After we've cooked the dish a few times, then the phrase “hearty consistency” might start to make sense. We build a sensory image of what that phrase represents. But the first time it's as meaningless as  $3 + 2 + 1$  would be to a three-year-old.

This is how concreteness helps us understand – it helps us construct higher, more abstract insights on the building blocks of our existing knowledge and perceptions. Abstraction demands some concrete foundations. Trying to teach an abstract principle without concrete foundations is like trying to start a house by building a roof in the air.

**Concrete is Memorable:** Concrete ideas are easier to remember. Take individual words, for instance. Experiments in human memory have shown that people are better at remembering concrete, easily visualized nouns (“bicycle” or “avocado”) than abstract ones (“justice” or “personality”). Naturally sticky ideas are stuffed full of concrete words and images.

What is it about concreteness that makes ideas stick? The answer lies with the nature of our memories. Many of us have a sense that remembering something is a bit like putting it in storage, like a cerebral filing cabinet. However, memory is not like a single filing cabinet, but more like Velcro (hooks & loops). Our brains host a truly staggering number



of loops. The more hooks an idea has, the better it will cling to memory. Our childhood home has a gazillion hooks in our brain. A new credit card number has one, if it's lucky.

But if concreteness is so powerful, why do we slip so easily into abstraction? The reason is simple: because the difference between an expert and a novice is the ability to think abstractly. 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're willing to make the effort we'll see the rewards: Our audience will understand what we're saying and remember it.

**Making Ideas Concrete:** How do we move toward concrete ideas for our own messages? We might find our own decisions easier to make if they are guided by the needs of specific people: our readers, our students, our customers.

Of the six traits of stickiness that we review in this book, concreteness is perhaps the easiest to embrace. It may also be the most effective of the traits.

To be simple – to find our core message – is quite difficult. Crafting our ideas in an unexpected way takes a fair amount of effort and applied creativity. But being concrete isn't hard, and it doesn't require a lot of effort. The barrier is simply forgetfulness – we forget that we're slipping into abstractspeak. We forget that other people don't know what we know.

## Chapter 4: Credible

Let's pose the question in the broadest possible terms: What makes people believe ideas? Let's start with the obvious answers. We believe because our parents or our friends believe. We believe because we've had experiences that led us to our beliefs. We believe because of our religious faith. We believe because we trust authorities. These are powerful forces – family, personal experience, faith, authorities.

**The Power of Details:** A person's knowledge of details is often a good proxy for her expertise. But concrete details don't just lend credibility to the authorities who provide them; they lend credibility to the idea itself. By making a claim tangible and concrete, details make it seem more real, more believable.

The use of vivid details is one way to create internal credibility – to weave sources of credibility into the idea itself. Another way is to use statistics. Since grade school, we've been taught to support our arguments with statistical evidence. It's important to note that 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. When it comes to statistics, our best advice is to use them as input, not output. Use them to make up your mind on an issue. Don't make up

your mind and then go looking for the numbers to support yourself – that’s asking for temptation and trouble.

We’ve seen that we can make our ideas more credible, on their own merits, by using compelling details or by using statistics. A third way to develop internal credibility is to use a particular type of example, an example that passes what we call the Sinatra Test.

**The Sinatra Test:** In Frank Sinatra’s classic “New York, New York,” he sings about starting a new life in New York City, and 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 a given domain. For instance, if you’ve got the security contract for Fort Knox, you’re in the running for any security contract (even if you have no other clients). 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.

**Testable Credentials:** There’s one remaining source of credibility that we haven’t discussed. And it may be the most powerful source of all. One of the most brilliant television ad campaigns of all time was launched by Wendy’s in 1984 – **Where’s the Beef?** The claim Wendy’s had made in this commercial was that its burgers had more beef than their competition. This message didn’t draw on external credibility like an authority figure or celebrity. It didn’t draw on internal credibility like quoting a statistic like “11 percent more beef!” Instead, the commercials developed a brand-new source of credibility: the audience. Wendy’s outsourced its credibility to its customers. The spots implicitly challenged customers to verify Wendy’s claims: *See for yourself!* This challenge – asking customers to test a claim for themselves – is a “testable credential.” Testable credentials can provide an enormous credibility boost, since they essentially allow your audience members to “try before they buy.”

How do we get people to believe our ideas? We’ve got to find a source of credibility to draw on. It’s not always obvious which wellspring of credibility we should draw from. In this chapter we’ve seen that the most obvious sources of credibility – external validation and statistics – aren’t always the best. A few vivid details might be more persuasive than a barrage of statistics. An antiauthority might work better than an authority. A single story that passes the Sinatra Test might overcome a mountain of skepticism.

## 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.

Everyone believes there is tremendous human suffering in Africa; there’s no doubt about the facts. But belief does not necessarily make people care enough to act. Everyone

believes that eating lots of fatty food leads to health problems; there's not doubt about the facts. But the belief doesn't make people care enough to act.

This chapter tackles the emotional component of stickiness, but it's not about pushing people's emotional buttons, like some kind of tearjerker. Rather, the goal of making messages "emotional" is to make people care. Feelings inspire people to act.

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. We all naturally practice the tactic of association.

**Appealing to Self-Interest:** We make people care by appealing to the things that matter to them. 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. He says, "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. For example:

- You Can Laugh at Money Worries if You Follow This Simple Plan
- Give Me 5 Days and I'll Give You a Magnetic Personality...Let Me Prove It – Free
- The Secret of How to Be Taller
- How You Can Improve Your Memory in One Evening
- Retire at 55

Caples says companies often emphasize features when they should be emphasizing benefits. An old advertising maxim says you've got to spell out the *benefit of the benefit*. In other words, people don't buy quarter-inch drill bits. They buy quarter-inch holes so they can hang their children's pictures.

If you've got self-interest on your side, don't bury it. Don't talk around it. Even subtle tweaks can make a difference. You don't have to promise riches or sex appeal and magnetic personalities. It may be enough to promise reasonable benefits that people can easily imagine themselves enjoying.

Self-interest is important. There's no question that we can make people care by appealing to it. But it makes for a limited palette. Always structuring our ideas around self-interest is like always painting with one color. It's stifling for us and uninspiring for others.

How can we make people care about our ideas? We get them to take off their Analytical Hats. We create empathy for specific individuals. We show how our ideas are associated with things that people 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

The power of **Story** is twofold: It provides simulation (knowledge about how to act) and inspiration (motivation to act). Note that both benefits, simulation and inspiration, are geared to generating action. In the last few chapters, we've seen that a credible idea makes people believe. An emotional idea makes people care. And in this chapter we'll see that the right stories make people act.

Stories are strongly associated with entertainment – movies and books and TV shows and magazines. When we hear a story, we simulate it. Why does mental simulation work? It works because we can't imagine events or sequences without evoking the same modules of the brain that are evoked in real physical activity. Mental simulation is not as good as actually doing something, but it's the next best thing. And to circle back to the world of sticky ideas, what we're suggesting is that the right kind of story is, effectively, a simulation. Stories are like flight simulators for the brain.

A story is powerful because it provides the context missing from abstract prose. It's back to the Velcro theory of memory, the idea that the more hooks we put into our ideas, the better they'll stick.

**The Inspirational Story:** We wanted to understand what made inspirational stories stick. We poured over hundreds of these stories looking for underlying similarities. We came to the conclusion that there are three basic plots:

1. **The Challenge Plot** – The story of David and Goliath is the classic Challenge Plot. A protagonist overcomes a formidable challenge and succeeds. There are variations of the Challenge Plot that we all recognize: the underdog story, the rags-to-riches story, the triumph of sheer willpower over adversity. The key element of a Challenge Plot is that the obstacles seem daunting to the protagonist. Challenge Plots inspire us to act.
2. **The Connection Plot** – The Bible's story of the Good Samaritan is a good example of the Connection Plot. This is what a Connection Plot is all about. It's a story about people who develop a relationship that bridges a gap – racial, class, ethnic, religious, demographic, or otherwise. Where Challenge Plots involve overcoming challenges, Connection Plots are about our relationships with other people. If you're telling a story at the company Christmas party, it's probably best to use the Connection Plot. If you're telling a story at the kickoff party for a new project, go with the Challenge Plot.
3. **The Creativity Plot** – The third major type of inspirational story is the Creativity Plot. The prototype might be the story of the apple that falls on Newton's head, inspiring his theory of gravity. The Creativity Plot involves someone making a mental breakthrough, solving a long-standing puzzle, or attacking a problem in an innovative way. Creativity Plots make us want to do something different, to be creative, to experiment with new approaches.

Stories can almost single-handedly defeat the Curse of Knowledge. In fact, they naturally embody most of the SUCCEs framework. Stories are almost always concrete. Most of them have Emotional and Unexpected elements. The hardest part of using stories effectively is making sure that they're Simple – that they reflect your core message. It's not enough to tell a great story; the story has to reflect your agenda.

Stories have the amazing dual power to simulate and to inspire. And most of the time, we don't even have to use much creativity to harness these powers – we just need to be ready to spot the good ones that life generates every day.

## **Epilogue**

Getting a message across has two stages: the Answer Stage and the Telling Others Stage. In the Answer Stage, you use your expertise to arrive at the idea you want to share. Doctors study for a decade to be capable of giving the Answer. Business managers may deliberate for months to arrive at the Answer.

Here's the rub: The same factors that worked to your advantage in the Answer Stage will backfire on you during the Telling Others Stage. To get the Answer, you need expertise, but you can't dissociate expertise from the Curse of Knowledge. You know things that others don't know, and you can't remember what it was like not to know those things. So when you get around to sharing the Answer, you'll tend to communicate as if your audience were you.

There is a curious disconnect between the amount of time we invest in training people how to arrive at the Answer and the amount of time we invest in training them how to Tell Others. And often this disconnect is the reason why we haven't created ideas that are useful and lasting. Nothing Stuck!

## **Making an Idea Stick: The Communication Framework**

For an idea to stick, for it to be useful and lasting, it's got to make the audience:

1. Pay attention
2. Understand and remember it
3. Agree/Believe
4. Care
5. Be able to act on it

This book could have been organized around these five steps, but there's a reason they were reserved for the conclusion. The Curse of Knowledge can easily render this framework useless. When an expert asks, "Will people understand my idea?," her answer

will be Yes, because she herself understands. When an expert asks, “Will people care about this?” her answer will be Yes, because she herself cares.

The SUCCEs checklist is a substitute for the framework above, and its advantage is that it’s more tangible and less subject to the Curse of Knowledge. In fact, if you think back across the chapters you’ve read, you’ll notice that the framework matches up nicely:

- |                              |            |
|------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Pay attention:            | UNEXPECTED |
| 2. Understand & remember it: | CONCRETE   |
| 3. Agree/Believe:            | CREDIBLE   |
| 4. Care:                     | EMOTIONAL  |
| 5. Be able to act on it:     | STORY      |

So, rather than guess about whether people will understand our ideas, we should ask, “Is it concrete?” Rather than speculate about whether people will care, we should ask, “Is it emotional? Does it force people to put on an Analytical Hat or allow them to feel empathy?”

Note that SIMPLE is not on the list above because it’s mainly about the Answer Stage – honing in on the core of your message and making it as compact as possible. But Simple messages help throughout the process, especially in helping people to understand and act.

The SUCCEs checklist is an ideal tool for dealing with communications problems. Any of us with the right insight and the right message, can make an idea stick!

**Message from Gary Tomlinson:** When I read a book I find to be very educational I take the time to write a book report. This is how I learn. Then from time to time, I’ll go back and re-read the book report to refresh my memory.

This book report should not take the place of you reading the book *Made to Stick*. Everyday we communicate and we hope that our ideas are useful and lasting. This book will teach you how to communicate more effectively so that your ideas are both heard and remembered. Enjoy the education and feel free to share it with others!

*You can engage Gary at [gary@garyetomlinson.com](mailto:gary@garyetomlinson.com). To read his other book reports or book reviews visit his website at [www.garyetomlinson.com](http://www.garyetomlinson.com).*

