The Change Equation:
Three Actionable Pathways to Create Effective Change

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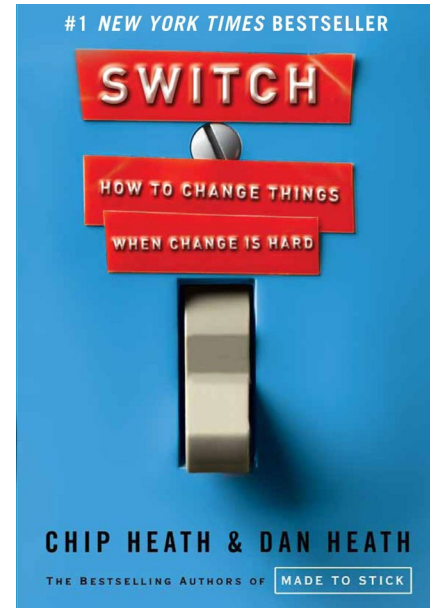Mark Cannon, PhD – Professor, Vanderbilt University

1

A look ahead

- "Switch" Overview
- Defining Change
- Rider, Elephant, Path
- Goal setting
- Case-based scenario
- Key takeaways

"Switch" Overview

- Change efforts are often unsuccessful and/or weak

- Simple, memorable metaphor that captures three key predictors of effective change
  - The Rider, the Elephant, and the Path

Change /tʃeɪndʒ/

(n.) alter and modify something or some-one to be different. Replace something with something new or different.

How do you feel emotionally about change?
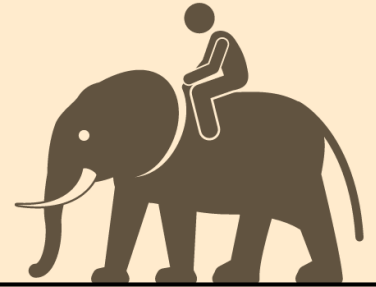
Traditional Change Management

- Lacks bottom-up support

- Resistance not factored in

- Implementation usually lacks a "human" component

- Plan not adjusted along the way

- Leader engaging in "us and them" dialog

Rider

The Rational Mind
- Thinks, reasons, plans, deliberates, analyzes, directs, and forecasts into the future
- Provides the planning and direction
- Slow to act

DIRECT THE RIDER
- Follow the bright spots
- Script the critical moves
- Point to the destination

Elephant

The Emotional Mind

- Feels, reacts, pursues instant gratification, and takes the course of least resistance
- Usually wins when in conflict with the rational mind because of its side and ability to wear down the rider
- Impulsive and susceptible to habit
- Provides the energy
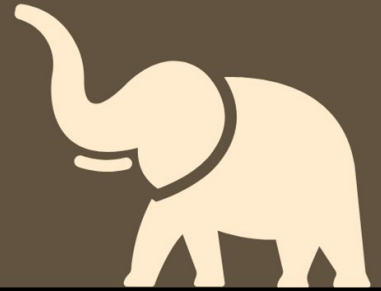
MOTIVATE THE ELEPHANT

- Find the feeling
- Shrink the change
- Grow your people

Path

The environment

- Situational characteristics that may facilitate or hinder change

SHAPE THE PATH

- Tweak the environment
- Build habits
- Rally the herd

Why is change hard?

- People wear themselves out
  - Making decisions when tired is not ideal
  - Indecision slows progress - Shrink the change and/or grow your people
  - Once you break through to feeling things change

- What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity
  - Clarity dissolves resistance

- Prospects for effective change are greatly enhanced when **ALL** addressed
  - Most change efforts suffer from neglecting one or more of them

Effective Change

- Direct the rider
  - Indecision slows progress
  - Provide planning and direction
  - Define goals - not just the ultimate goal but each step - script your critical moves

- Motivate the Elephant
  - Let them dream your dream
  - Generate enthusiasm & energy for the destination by a series of goals

- Shape the path
  - Tweak the environment

"Ambiguity is exhausting to the rider because the rider is tugging on the reins of the elephant, trying to direct the elephant down a new path. When the road is uncertain the elephant will insist on taking the default path, the most familiar path. Why? Because uncertainty makes the elephant anxious"

Effective Change

- Focus on the bright spot
  - Investigate what's working and how to get more of it

- Everything is hard before it is easy

- What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem

- Move from inactionable to-dos and projects to well defined doable next actions

Decision Paralysis

- Limit choices
  - People become terrified of making the wrong choice
 - Gina's Pappagallo Story

"Switch" Scenarios

- Popcorn
  - People eat more when given a bigger container
  - Solution? Give a smaller container

- Uber
  - Designated drivers / shared rides were not a thing in the U.S. in the 1980s
    - Brought over from Scandinavia by Jay Winsten, a Harvard public health professor.
    - Made popular on prime time TV - *Cheers, Who's the Boss?, etc.*
    - Became easier with Uber/Lyft
  - Solved the unknown wait time by showing where your ride is
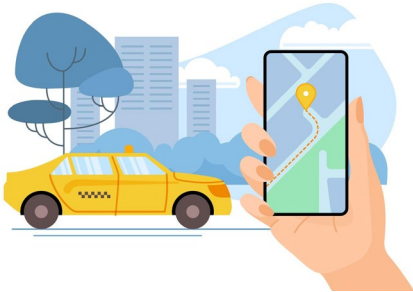
Sterile Cockpit

- Have trouble meeting deadlines? - Remove distractions

  - Try quiet days/hours

  - No meeting day

  - Silencing Outlook sound to focus without email distraction

SMART GOALS EXPLAINED

S — SPECIFIC
Be clear and specific so your goals are easier to achieve. This also helps you know how and where to get started!

M — MEASURABLE
Measurable goals can be tracked, allowing you to see your progress. They also tell you when a goal is complete.

A — ACTIONABLE
Are you able to take action to achieve the goal? Actionable goals ensure the steps to get there are within your control.

R — REALISTIC
Avoid overwhelm and unnecessary stress and frustration by making the goal realistic.

T — TIMEBOUND
A date helps us stay focused and motivated, inspiring us and providing something to work towards.

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Destination postcard

Vivid picture from the near term future that shows what could be possible

- Prioritize categories for the reachable goal

Example - receiving a promotion
- Not as organized as you should be, set a reachable goal

Software Implementation

Institution planned to upgrade to a new software aimed at providing efficiencies and transparency.

What went well?

- Had a developed plan including internal stakeholders and external professionals. Held meetings in advance. Strong effort to get enterprise buy-in. Had a great team who were all-in.

What went poorly?

- Meetings became emotional. Attendees focused on their problems without seeing big picture. Those who didn't prepare felt like they were set up for failure.
- Cut communications once launched

Software Implementation

What could've helped?

- "Destination Postcard" to focus on the bright future rather than the current experience - remind everyone of the J Curve
  - Reinforce how it'll be great and why
  - Updates along the way - these were done but could we have do it better?
- Increased transparency in communications (i.e. how are issues being resolved?)
- Have resources instead of connections turned off

Key takeaways

- Direct the rider
- Motivate the elephant
- Change the path - consider a destination postcard
- Set SMART goals

Change is hard but you can do it!
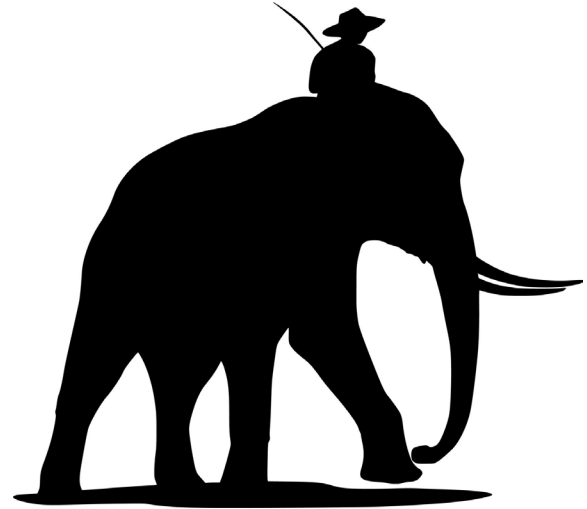
Questions or comments?

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Resources

- **GROW Model**

  - **Goal:** What we want to achieve

  - **Reality:** The circumstances we're dealing with (or how we perceive them)

  - **Options:** How we might move from our Reality to our Goal

  - **Way Forward:** What action we want to take