College of Business Review by Dr Edward Wright

Title: Switch – How To Change Things When Change Is Hard

Publisher: Broadway Books

Length: 305 pages

Price: $15.47; $9.99 for Kindle

Reading time: 6 hours

Reading rating: 8 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 3 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

The Heath brothers, (Chip - a professor at Stanford University, and Dan - a senior research fellow at Duke University) follow their previous best seller, “Stick” with an even more highly acclaimed new book titled “Switch”. Its basic premise is that behavioral change can be best accomplished by aligning our emotional and rational minds and following a proven pattern toward transformation.

“Switch” is not the dry, dusty stuff of academia. It is written in a popular style with frequent examples of application in our everyday world. The Heaths do a nice job of using metaphors and storytelling to help us understand why change is often so difficult. For example, the rational mind is presented as the Rider; the emotional mind as the Elephant. “Perched on top of the Elephant, the Rider holds the reins and seems to be the leader”. However, while the Rider might hold the Elephant on track for a brief while, it is a terrible mismatch. When change fails, it is usually because the Elephant wears the Rider down to get the gratification so sorely wanted. Accomplishing change requires direction from the Rider but also the motivation from our feeling, Elephant side. To get both our rational and emotional minds behind change requires a “gut-smacking” goal – one that stirs emotions as much as it appeals to logic.

The Heaths dispel conventional wisdom about why people when attempting change. What is often attributed to resistance is frequently caused by the situation or a lack of clarity. Does your boss fail to look you in the eye? Perhaps his computer should be moved behind him. Want a healthier diet? It is much easier to switch behavior to buying 1% milk than to “eat healthier”.

Keeping the Elephant motivated also comes from confidence. The authors discuss techniques for improving one’s confidence toward accomplishing change goals. One method is to “shrink” the challenge (break it down into small steps). Another is to grow the person by reframing their self-identity (i.e. -I aspire to be the kind of person who would make this change).

In addition to keeping the Rider pointed in the right direction and the Elephant motivated, the Heaths discuss shaping the “Path” to create an environment supporting the change.

Situational changes may be easy to make and often result in desired behavioral changes. Are the nurses who dispense medication making errors due to being interrupted too often? Try having them wear bright colorful vests as a signal to others for privacy during this critically important task.

An interesting technique for building new habits is described as “outsmarting ourselves”. Decisions to change include “action triggers” such as setting an alarm, laying out exercise clothes for morning, or agreeing to meet a friend to work on a project. Action triggers “protect goals from tempting distractions, bad habits, or competing goals.” The authors cite the use of action triggers as increasing the chance of success with difficult goals “from 22 to 62 percent”.

Overall, this is an excellent book for understanding organizational change management or self-help. It is remarkable for its simplicity. A brief outline follows:

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|  |  | HOW TO MAKE A SWITCH | | | |  |  |  |  |
| DIRECT THE RIDER | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \*FOLLOW THE BRIGHT SPOTS: Investigate what is working and clone it. | | | | | | |  |  |  |
| \*SCRIPT THE CRITICAL MOVES: Think in terms of specific behaviors. | | | | | | |  |  |  |
| \*POINT TO THE DESTINATION. Change is easier when you know where to go and why it's worth it. | | | | | | | | | |
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| MOTIVATE THE ELEPHANT | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \*FIND THE FEELING: Make people feel something for the change. | | | | | | |  |  |  |
| \*SHRINK THE CHANGE: Break down the change into easy to accomplish steps. | | | | | | | |  |  |
| \*GROW THE PEOPLE: Create a sense of identity and instill a learning mind-set into the group. | | | | | | | | |  |
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| SHAPE THE PATH | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \*TWEAK THE ENVIRONMENT: When the situation changes, behavior changes. | | | | | | | |  |  |
| \*BUILD HABITS: Look for ways to encourage new habits. Use action triggers. | | | | | | | |  |  |
| \*RALLY THE HERD: Behavior is contagious. Help it spread. | | | | | |  |  |  |  |

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