

## How to use the change management book *Switch* to help your quality writing project

We thoroughly recommend the change management book *Switch: How to change things when change is hard* by Chip and Dan Heath.

Here's a quick summary of the key points in *Switch* and how you can use them to transform the way your organisation communicates.

### The analogy that sits at the heart of the book

The Heath brothers start with the analogy set out in *The Happiness Hypothesis* by Jonathan Haidt.

Haidt likens our emotional side to an Elephant, with our rational side being its Rider. Perched on top of the Elephant, the Rider holds the reins and seems to be the leader. But the Rider's control can't be relied upon because the Rider is so small relative to the Elephant. Any time the huge Elephant and the Rider disagree about which direction to go, the Rider is going to lose.

The Heaths' hypothesis is that to achieve change, we have to do three things.

1. Direct the Rider (remember that what looks like resistance might be a lack of clarity for the Rider).
2. Motivate the Elephant (and what looks like laziness is often exhaustion from the Elephant's subconscious resistance to, or fear of, change).
3. Shape the Path.

Their evidence in support of these steps is compelling. 'We can say this much with confidence: When change works, it tends to follow a pattern. The people who change have clear direction, ample motivation, and a supportive environment.' (*Switch*, page 255)

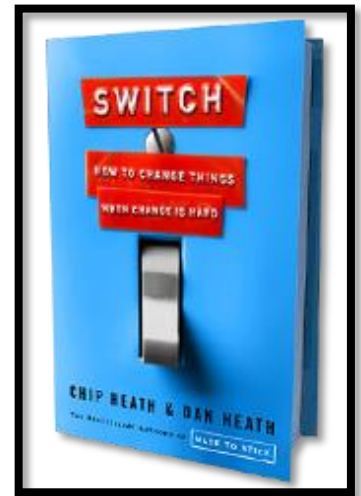
Let's look at those three steps in more detail.

### 1. Direct the Rider

**Follow the bright spots.** 'Bright spots are your best hope for directing the Rider.'

The Heaths suggest that instead of starting from scratch, more or less in a vacuum, you actively look for what's already working and use it.

You will always find at least a few individuals who will share your point of view. Perhaps they are the 'go-to' person for others when they need help with a document. Perhaps you can find small projects or initiatives where a document, or some webpages, or a form have been redrafted because of complaints or some other need. Who did that work? Once you start talking about your vision and frustrations, and actively looking for people to support the cause, you'll be surprised at what you find!



The Rider will feel comfortable in the midst of bright spots. They represent the proof, certainty, or evidence of the change needed.

**Script the critical moves.** ‘Any successful change requires a translation of ambiguous goals into concrete behaviours.’

This chapter talks of decision paralysis caused by people seeing the big goal as too hard, ambiguous, or complex. It’s your job to create a well-scripted master plan in which the key components are clearly documented and well resourced. Use the Rewrite for Change™ Model and the example project plans in Part 2 to script your critical moves. The Rider will take comfort from the rigour and clarity of the plan. Then you can ‘shrink the change’ (see next page) to make sure the script is carried out.

**Point to the destination.** ‘Change is easier when you know where you’re going and why it’s worth it.’

Once you have launched your project, you must talk about it—a lot. Publicise your big project goals. For example: ‘By the end of this year we’ll have reduced error rates on our application form down to single digits and our client communication survey will show an increased level of client satisfaction...’ Don’t forget to say why: ‘...so we are easier to do business with.’

## 2. Motivate the Elephant

**Find the feeling.** ‘In all successful change efforts the sequence is not analyse—think—change. It’s see—FEEL—change.’

The Heaths make it clear that people are rarely persuaded to make big changes based on rational argument and facts alone. The Rider has very little real control over the Elephant, even when the logic of a request or argument is seemingly overwhelming. The Elephant has to *feel* the need for change. The rubber gloves story in *Switch* (page 12) is a great example of a feeling, rather than logic, being the catalyst for instant change. And Attila the Accountant’s ‘gut check’ transformed him in an instant when he saw and felt the challenges of the not-for-profit organisations he was dealing with (page 115).

Always anticipate people’s emotional reactions to the change you want. Writing is a personal thing and it’s hard to change writing habits without the person feeling criticised. A clear plan (the Path) may appease the Rider, but for the Elephant, incentives work better than coercion. That means providing personal and professional motivation to allow the Elephant to carry the Rider along the Path. And whenever you can, it means finding ways to create a change of heart fast. What’s your equivalent of the rubber gloves story for your people?

**Shrink the change.** ‘If you want a reluctant Elephant to keep moving, you’d better shrink the change.’

Changing the way people think about writing, so that they change their writing style, is a huge goal. It feels big and hard to anyone. Old habits, combined with poor examples and old templates, plus disbelief that change is possible, are likely to derail your master plan if you aren’t careful.

To overcome these obstacles, make sure people have just one or two concrete behavioural goals at any one time that will contribute to the big result. For example, in the first 2 months all writers

might be expected to apply the first three elements of the new plain language standard to every document they write. Managers might be required to look for evidence of those three elements in every document they review and make brief notes on team progress. All staff might also be required to review a colleague's work at least once and make helpful suggestions based on the first three elements of the standard. These goals are specific, practical, and achievable. Yet they are also part of the project team's master plan.

**Grow your people.** 'Cultivate a sense of identity.' 'Instil a growth mindset in your team.'

The Heaths' story about Lovelace Hospital (page 154) is a beautiful example of how fostering pride in identity is supremely motivating to the Elephant. Once a positive identity is acknowledged and cultivated, people will naturally grow to become the best version of that identity.

Drawing a line in the sand, declaring that your organisation values absolute clarity in communication, and using slogans like 'Plain Language—the way we write at AJ Park' quickly fosters a sense of identity. For AJ Park it meant that their new brand statement ('the clear leaders in IP') became a reality.

Look for the lesson about 'failure in the middle' (pages 162–3) and give your people what they need to move forward when things get tough. As the Heaths point out: 'Everything is hard until it is easy.'

### 3. Shape the Path

**Tweak the environment.** 'What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem.'

As the Heaths point out on pages 180–1, we have a strong inclination to attribute people's behaviour to 'the way they are', rather than the situation they are in.

If there are many complaints about incident reports at your place, are all the writers at fault? Or is the problem the report template they must use? Making sure you create an environment conducive to change will smooth the path for your people. When you hit a snag, meet resistance, or feel as though progress is stalled, look for bumps in the path and do what you can to change them.

**Build habits.** 'Habits are behavioural autopilot. And that's why they are such a critical tool for leaders.'

As the Romano story shows (pages 203–7), one of the subtle ways in which our environment acts on us is by reinforcing (or deterring) our habits. The Train, Support, Expect, Measure components of the Rewrite for Change™ Model are all geared toward helping to establish, reinforce, and build habits. (See Part 2 of this book.)

**Rally the herd.** 'Behaviour is contagious. Help it spread.'

Coining the term 'peer perception', the Heaths point out that a wealth of empirical evidence shows we imitate the behaviour of others, whether consciously or not: 'So if you want to change things, you need to pay close attention to social signals, because they can either guarantee a change effort or doom it' (page 228).

Cachon's on-time reviewers and Winsten's designated drivers give plenty of clues about how to rally your herd (pages 231–4).

**Keep the switch going.** ‘Change isn’t an event. It’s a process.’

Using analogies from parenthood and Amy Sutherland’s success in training her husband, the Heaths humorously point out that real change takes time and plenty of positive reinforcement. They remind us again that change follows a pattern: Direct the Rider, Motivate the Elephant, and Shape the Path. But they also point out that the type of people making successful changes does not follow a pattern. In other words, if you have a cause, your determination to change, combined with the Heaths’ proven pattern and the Rewrite for Change™ Model, will work for you.

Buy or find out more about *Switch* at [heathbrothers.com/books/switch/](http://heathbrothers.com/books/switch/)

*This article was written by Lynda Harris, author of Rewrite: How to overcome daily sabotage of your brand and profit. See [www.rewritebook.com](http://www.rewritebook.com) and [www.write.co.nz](http://www.write.co.nz)*