SUCCESS Framework

Idea In Short

As a consultant, how do you make an idea stick? How can you ensure that your clients follow up on your recommendations after you've closed out the engagement? The idea is to make message stick with the audience. As Mark Twain noted:

> A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on

The merits in lies reside in the fact that they are sticky. However, people with important ideas, consultants included, struggle to make their ideas stick. Malcolm Gladwell in his book Tipping Point used the phrase The Stickiness factor to explain why some ideas and product innovations are more likely to spread and thrive. In Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die, Chip Heath and Dan Heath write about six principles to make your ideas stick and help you get your point across.

Whenever we start a new client engagement, there is always a lot of energy and hope to find insights and recommendations with enormous impacts. Every consultant wants to create an impression and leave a lasting impact on the client organization. However, as consultants, many of us struggle with how to communicate ideas effectively and get our ideas to make a difference. You need a tried and tested approach that can you can leverage to achieve the impact you're seeking. The New York Times best-seller, Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die by Chip Heath and Dan Heath – contains such a framework to make ideas stick. I find this framework extremely compelling for consultants to drive home their recommendations. Want your clients to follow up on your recommendations and initiate actions? Ensure that your recommendations and messaging adhere to these principles:

1. Simple
2. Unexpected

3. Concrete
4. Credible
5. Emotional
6. Stories

Simple

The art of simplifying is to distill exhaustive analyses and findings in a central idea formulated in terms that anyone can understand. The message should be sharp, factual, direct and to the point. Furthermore, your message not evoke any misunderstandings or provide conduits for stakeholders to distort the original meaning. A great example how companies have achieved simplicity can be found in Southwest Airlines' slogan The Low Fare Airline. While a complex comparative breakdown of their prices would be instantly forgotten, a catchy statement like this one will stick. In consulting engagements, strip your message down to its core elements. This makes your recommendations easier to absorb. Chip and Dan write:

> 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 the individual could spend a lifetime learning to follow it.

Less is more

As a consultant, you:

- Performed a lot of analyses that you're proud of
- Want your client to know how hard and diligently you and your team have worked for them
- Want your client to know the project in depth and breadth you've explored

In short, you want to share it all.

Lex parsimoniae

However, when you throw them all at your clients, they will feel overwhelmed (remember the idiom, drinking from a firehose?). Despite all your efforts to ground your recommendations in the client context, you can't expect them to absorb everything and see things from your perspective. That's the curse of knowledge. Usually, people get confused and disoriented when you present them too many things at once. Usually, such acts turn them off and they won't follow up on your recommendations. So, you should communicate your ideas succinctly:

- Single out your most important aspect of your message that you want your client stakeholders to internalize
- Make the message super-easy for them to follow, understand and share further internally
- Eliminate jargon and any language that may cause confusion or allow distortions

Be a master of exclusion. Less is more. Ruthlessly prioritize and focus on the vital few. Create messages that are both simple and profound.

Unexpected

When confronted with the unexpected, your brain jolts out of autopilot and into manual control. The unexpected receives our full attention.

> Imagine a flight attendant giving the standard pre-flight safety demonstration. How much attention would he get? But, what if he were to suddenly break from the normal briefing and declare that while there may be fifty ways to leave your lover, there is only one way to leave the plane? You guessed it: all eyes (and ears) would be on him.

Shatter your customers' expectations with something counter-intuitive. Then, delight them with great insights that showcase value. When you do something unexpected, the surprise grabs their attention and they'll remember you. Chip and Dan write:

> We need to violate people's expectations. We need to be counterintuitive. ... But surprise doesn't last. For our idea to endure, we must generate interest and curiosity. ... We can engage people's curiosity over a long period of time by

> systematically "opening gaps" in their knowledge — and then filling those gaps.

Here's how you can make your message unexpected the right way:

- Identify your core message
- Find an insight that's counter-intuitive about it
- Communicate your message like a mystery: pique their curiosity before providing the answer when they can't figure it out

Concrete

Abstract terms convey a message about as well as tapping on a table conveys a melody. On the other hand, using clear, concrete terms drives a message home. For example:

- A retail worker hasn't just delivered outstanding customer service; they've given a customer a refund on a shirt even though it was purchased at another branch
- The fox hasn't altered his tastes to suit his means; he's convinced himself that the grapes he can't reach are too sour

Use concrete terms that appeal to the senses, so people will remember it better i.e. stick. Chip and Dan write:

> How do we make our ideas clear? We must explain our ideas in terms of human actions, in terms of sensory informational. In proverbs, abstract truths are often encoded in concrete language: A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.

Accordingly, speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our idea will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience. This will help make your message and intent stick. Similar to the fox in the aforementioned Aesop's fable, we remember the idea of feeling bitter when we don't get what we want from the concept of sour grapes. According to Prospect Theory, imagining sourness appeals to our sense of taste and is easier than bitterness from not getting what we want.

Credible

Ideas only spread if they're believable. Only credible stories stick. One tried-and-true method is to have your story backed by experts. People trust stories told by real, trustworthy people. Another way of adding credibility to a story is to use facts and figures to illustrate the point – as in the anti-war campaign that claims the world's combined current nuclear arsenal has 5,000 times the explosive power of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. Show that your stuff really works, and your clients will trust you more. The fastest way to establish credibility is to us an authority figure, as illustrated in Robert Cialdini's principle of Authority. Chip and Dan write:

> How do we make people believe our ideas? ... 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.

But what if you cannot find an industry / subject matter expert to endorse your recommendation? Here are 5 ways to go about it:

- **Use an Anti-authority** – Show living proof to show that your recommendation works
- **Provide extensive details** – More insights, analyses, details = more credibility
- **Utilize Statistics** – Surface data that illustrates the point you're making
- **Pass the Sinatra Test** – Look for one proof that'll convince all your customers that you're great
- **Present Testable Credentials** – Allow customers to test your idea for themselves

Always think about a try it yourself approach. Help your clients test out your recommendations for themselves before scaling them out.

Emotional

To get people to donate to starving African children, there are two possible approaches:

1. Either present facts and figures about the millions of children starving and perishing every day, or
2. Show a picture of just one child in need who could be saved by a donation

The second approach appeals directly to the emotions. Emotional message that appeal to

the heart stick. After all, we can see with our own eyes a human being who is clearly starving. It clearly inspires us to take action in a way that numbers never could. So, appeal to the heart, not the mind. Social psychological research shows that when people think rationally, they're tend to feel less empathetic. When people feel less, they're less likely to act. Emotions are bigger drivers of behavior. Chip and Dan write:

> How do we get people to care about our ideas? We make them feel something. In the case of movie popcorn, we make them feel disgusted by its unhealthiness. The statistics "37 grams" doesn't elicit any emotions. 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.

Here's how you can appeal to people's emotional side and inspire action:

- **Focus on an Individual** – We feel more for a visceral picture of a starving kid than 100 kids dying from starvation daily statistic
- **Establish an Association** – Allow people to associate something they do with something you want them to care about
- **Appeal to their Self-interest** – Tell your client what they stand to gain, not your analysis or efforts
- **Relate to their Identity** – We buy into things and concepts that appeal to our identity. Understand who your client is and what they value. Ground your recommendations using this context

Stories

Often, when trying to spread an idea, people make the mistake of banishing its origin story for brevity or slogan's sake. Instead, they resort to slogans. While slogans can be useful to make an idea stick, they may fail to inspire action. Here's where story comes in. Take the fast food chain, Subway. Subway profited immensely from the true story of Jared Fogle, a seriously overweight man who managed to slim down to a healthy weight with a simple diet of two Subway meals per day. No slogan in the world could match a story like this. Use stories to communicate your most important messages. Stories not only provide context for the client to understand your message, but also motivate them to take action. Chip and Dan write:

> How do we get people to act on our ideas? We tell stories. ... Research shows that mentally rehearsing a situation helps up 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.

To make use of this powerful tool, Made to Stick provides three story plot types:

1. **Challenge plot** – David vs Goliath; The underdog who faces insurmountable odds
2. **Connection plot** – Bridging the gap; developing relationships with others from different backgrounds
3. **Creative plot** – The Eureka moment; Solving problems in an interesting and creative way

Summary

Made to Stick explores what makes some messages stick in the public's consciousness while others go unheard or unremembered and explains how to create an idea that sticks. Based on a wide-ranging examination of psychology research, popular culture, and news headlines, they identify six criteria for shaping your message, so it resonates. As a consultant, you don't need great speaking prowess to effectively communicate your ideas. The authors show you what to do through numerous examples of messages that have succeeded and others that have bombed. Rather than sweating over an original presentation, you can follow their stickiness template or even emulate someone else's idea that worked.