

Insights from *Made to Stick* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

"When an expert asks, 'Will people understand my idea?,' her answer will be Yes, because she herself understands." - Chip & Dan Heath

Once we know something, it's hard to imagine what it was like to not know it. Psychologists call this the curse of knowledge. This 'curse' impedes our ability to share ideas effectively because it makes us believe other people share our interests and other people care about our ideas as much as we do.

To deliver messages people find interesting and memorable (despite not having our knowledge and experience), you need to modify your ideas to include the following traits:



Simple: What one thing do I want my audience to remember?

In the 1992 US Presidential election, Bill Clinton was notorious for going off point. Clinton loved policy, and he wanted to address every issue that the country was facing at the time. But Clinton's inability to prioritize policy issues made voters wary.

James Carville, Clinton's advisor, got Clinton to stay on point by writing three phrases on a whiteboard for all the campaign workers to see. One of the phrases was: "It's the economy, stupid." The United States economy was in the middle of a recession and needed to be the central talking point of every interview. The message was simple and memorable.

What's the main message you want your audience to walk away with? If you want your audience to remember anything you say, deliver fewer ideas. Two or three ideas are OK, but one idea is best.



Unexpected: How can I make my message surprising and insightful?

When a manager at Nordstrom's (a retail store in the United States) wants to explain the importance of customer service, she tells the story of the Nordstrom's employee who gift-wrapped items bought at Macy's or the story of the Nordstrom's employee who started a customer's car in the middle of a snow storm.

"Tell them something that is uncommon sense." - Chip & Dan Heath



Concrete: How can I make my message easy to understand?

When managers at Trader Joe's (a grocery store in the United States) explains their target customer, they don't say 'upscale budget-conscious customer,' they say, 'unemployed college professor.'

Use concrete language everyone understands. Leave out the jargon. Stop trying to sound smart.

"The beauty of concrete language—language that is specific and sensory—is that everyone understands your message in a similar way." - Chip & Dan Heath



Credible: How can I make my message believable?

When the directors of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange (LLDE) company tried to convince a workshop of people that their core value was 'diversity,' the audience seemed skeptical. One of the audience members said, **"everyone claims that they value diversity, but you're a dance company. You're probably filled with a bunch of twenty-five-year-old dancers, all of them tall and thin. Some of them are probably people of color, but is that diversity?"**

Peter DiMuro, the artistic director of the LLDE, responded with an extreme example, **"as a matter of fact," he said, "the longest-term member of our company is a seventy-three-year-old man named Thomas Dwyer..."** This detail—seventy-three-year-old Thomas Dwyer—silenced the skepticism in the room." - Chip & Dan Heath

Make your message credible by telling extreme anecdotes with vivid detail.



Emotion: How can I make my audience care?

In 2004, researchers at Carnegie Mellon University found that people were more likely to donate money when they heard a message about a starving seven-year-old girl in Africa than a message about 3 million starving children in Africa.

When you tell a personal story about yourself, someone you know, or someone you read about, your audience can put themselves in their shoes and feels that person's struggle and success.

"If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will." - Mother Teresa



Story: How can I keep my audience engaged?

"Telling stories with visible goals and barriers shifts the audience into a problem-solving mode.... (we) empathize with the main characters and start cheering them on when they confront their problems: "Look out behind you!" "Tell him off now!" "Don't open that door!" - Chip & Dan Heath

The most engaging stories are mysteries that keep your audience wondering:

- "What's going to happen next?"
- "How is this going to end?"