

# Switch: A Book Summary

By nature, we all like the status quo, certainty and control over every situation. But life has become extremely complex, fast-changing and uncertain. That means the only constant in our professional and personal lives is change. Change is hard and at times it goes against our basic human nature, but it's also what enables us to grow and move forward.

Switch, written by Chip & Dan Heath, presents various illustrations of how to successfully manage change at an organizational level. The Switch framework is based on a behavioral psychology mental model called *The Happiness Hypothesis* originally presented by psychologist Jonathan Haidt. Chip & Dan Heath open by debunking three of the most common misconceptions people have about change. Each misconception is parsed apart further by three supporting principles (for a total of nine principles).

## Three Surprises About Change

So, what's the formula for successfully implementing change? To change your own behavior or the behavior of anybody else, you need to do three things – you've got to direct the Rider (reach the rational part), motivate the Elephant (reach the emotional part), and shape the Path (clear the way). If you manage to do all three at once, big changes can happen even if you don't have a lot of power and resources.

### The Rider

The rational part of the brain is the one that deliberates, analyzes and looks into the future. It's also called the reflective or conscious system. If the Rider isn't sure what direction to go in, he leads the Elephant in circles. It's called analysis paralysis. From the outside, such a situation **might seem like resistance, but might be only a lack of clarity**. If you want people to change, they need crystal clear directions of how you will get to the goal.

### The Elephant

If you reach only the Rider, but not the Elephant, you get direction without motivation. The Rider can drag the Elephant down the road for a while, but that effort can't last long, because the Rider gets exhausted. **That exhaustion is oftentimes misperceived as laziness**. The only way for a change to last is to have an emotional drive. That's why people's emotional side needs to be engaged and they must believe they are competent enough to make the change. The emotional part of human nature is the part that is instinctive and feels pain and pleasure.

### The Path

**What many times looks like a people problem is only a situation problem**. The situation, including the surrounding environment or set of circumstances, is called the Path. When you properly shape the Path, you make change more likely to happen and more likely to be sustained for the long term, no matter what's happening with the Rider and Elephant.

This book summary has been adapted by UPD Consulting from the articles [Switch – How to change things when change is hard – Book Summary](#) by Blaz Kos and [Switch by Chip & Dan Heath](#) by Sam Davies

## Direct the Rider

The Rider is the rational part of a human being. The thinker and planner, striving to plot a course for a better future. Riders are typically visionaries, willing to make short-term sacrifices for long-term payoffs. Without the proper direction, the Rider can also easily get caught in analysis paralysis focusing on the problems instead of solutions.

Rider Strengths	Rider Weaknesses
Thinker	Paralysis in uncertainty
Planner	Limited reserves of discipline
Visionary	Focused on problems, not solutions
Future-oriented	Project - solution magnitude

You must very precisely show the Rider **where to go, how to act, and what destination to pursue**. The Rider is a clever tactician, and when you give them a map with clear directions, they'll follow it perfectly.

Three principles you can use to properly direct the Rider:

1. **Find the bright spots** – Investigate what's already working and clone it
2. **Script the critical moves** – Provide crystal clear guidance with specific behaviors
3. **Point to the destination** – Know where you're going and why it's worth it

## Follow the Bright Spots

Bright spots are the exception to the rule; they're proof that under the right circumstances a particular outcome can be achieved. It's also evidence that things can get better if approached appropriately. When identifying bright spots, you want to figure out what's working in a challenging situation and how you can replicate it.

Imagine that during the night the problem or bad behavior you're suffering from somehow miraculously disappears. Use the following prompts to help you find the bright spots:

1. When you wake up in the morning, what's the first small sign that the problem is gone? What would you do differently then? It's not about describing the miracle itself, but about identifying the tangible signs (vivid signs of progress) indicating that the miracle happened.
2. Think back to the last time you saw a bit of this miracle, even if just for a short period of time? What were the circumstances? Describe the environment, people involved, and any other contextual details you can think of.

When you're analyzing the bright spots, the idea is to carefully replay the scene when things were working like you hoped, from your own behavior and feelings to the environment around you and interactions with other people. The bright spots are the best guidance to what exactly needs to be done differently. **Anytime you find a bright spot, your core mission is to clone it. Find what's working and how to do more of it.**

## Script the Critical Moves

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. But 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. While you can't script every move—that would be like trying to foresee the seventeenth move in a chess game. At a certain point too many choices debilitate, not liberate, the Rider. It's the critical moves that count.

Any successful change requires a translation of ambiguous goals into concrete behaviors. Until you can ladder your way down from a change idea to a specific behavior, you're not ready to lead a switch. **You must provide crystal clear guidance on what exactly people (or you) should start doing, stop doing or continue doing.** When you want someone to behave in a new way, explain the "new way" clearly. Don't assume the new moves are obvious. The clarity will in turn dissolve resistance.

## Point to a Destination

When you describe a compelling destination, you're helping to correct one of the Rider's great weaknesses—the tendency to get lost in analysis. Show the Rider where you're headed with destination postcards—pictures of a future that hard work can make possible— and they'll show the Elephant why the journey is worthwhile. Then get moving and don't worry too much about the middle; because the middle is going to look different when you get there.

**REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: DIRECT THE RIDER**

In 2004, Donald Berwick, a doctor and the CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), analyzed patient care with the kinds of analytical tools used to assess the quality of cars coming off a production line. He discovered that the “defect” rate in healthcare was as high as 1 in 10. This was shockingly high — many other industries had managed to achieve performance levels of one error in 1,000 cases (and often far better). Berwick knew that this high medical defect rate meant that tens of thousands of patients were dying every year unnecessarily.

Berwick figured that hospitals could benefit from the same kinds of rigorous process improvements that had worked in other industries. So, in December 2004, when he spoke to a large convention of hospital administrators, he said, “Here is what I think we should do. I think we should save 100,000 lives. And I think we should do that by June 14, 2006 — 18 months from today. Soon is not a number. Soon is not a time. Here’s the number: 100,000. Here’s the time: June 14, 2006, at 9 a.m.”

Following the speech, IHI proposed six very specific interventions to save lives. Two months after Berwick’s speech, more than a thousand hospitals had enrolled. Once a hospital enrolled, the IHI team helped its staff embrace the new interventions.

Eighteen months later, hospitals that enrolled in the 100,000 Lives Campaign had collectively prevented an estimated 122,300 avoidable deaths and, as importantly, had begun to institutionalize new standards of care that continue to save lives and improve health outcomes every day.

Berwick succeeded because he directed the Riders in his audience with clear, specific, tangible goals and a concrete timeline. Also, he stayed laser-focused on specific procedural interventions and did not exhaust the Riders with endless behavioral change. Berwick and the IHI team also helped the Riders embrace change by providing specific instructions and support to hospitals as they adopted the new protocol. The Riders in Berwick’s audience had enough direction and support to reach their destination.

## Motivate the Elephant

The Rider can plan for a better future and sacrifice short-term risks for bigger long-term gains. The Elephant, on the other hand, wants instant gratification. On top of that, the Elephant wears rose-tinted glasses. However, the Elephant is very lousy at evaluating the situation or himself, because he always tends to take the rosiest possible interpretation of the facts (the opposite of the Rider).

Motivating the Elephant with the right feeling is many times also represented with the saying “start with why.” The Elephant also needs to believe that they’re capable of conquering the change. And that can be achieved only by shrinking the change or growing the people or, preferably, both.

Elephant Strengths	Elephant Weaknesses
Initiator of change	Wants instant gratification
Persistence through obstacles	Wears rose-tinted glasses
	Can be quickly demoralized, needs reassurance
	Hates to fail

Successful change leaders speak to the Rider (rational self) as well as to the Elephant (emotional self). There are three things you can do to motivate the Elephant:

1. **Find the feeling** – Knowing something won't ignite a change, feeling something will
2. **Shrink the change** – Break down the change until it no longer spooks the Elephant
3. **Grow your people** – Install the growth mindset and properly prepare for failure

## Find the Feeling

There's a big difference between knowing how to act and actually being motivated to act. In one study, John Kotter and Dan Cohen observed that, in almost all successful change efforts, the sequence of change is not ANALYZE-THINK-CHANGE, but rather SEE-FEEL-CHANGE. However, after analyzing a problem our first instinct is to teach and educate people, instead of trying to appeal to their feelings and senses. Successful changes most often occur when someone is presented with evidence that makes them feel something new. It might be a disturbing look at the problem (running away from pain) or a hopeful glimpse of the solution (seeking pleasure).

Positive illusions pose an enormous obstacle with regard to change. With rose-tinted glasses on, it's much harder to orientate yourself. You don't really have a very clear picture of where you are and where you're going. It seems like there's no need for change. That's why in many critical change situations, it's mandatory to create a sense of crisis to initiate change; or create a burning platform, in other words. The crisis most often convinces people that there's no other option but to move. The problem is that situations that require change are rarely as dramatic as a crisis, and they kill creativity and flexibility. The crisis approach might be useful when quick and specific action is needed. In other cases, appealing to positive emotions brings better results.

To motivate the Elephant, you must find the right feeling. Most often it must be a positive feeling, but sometimes resorting to a negative one is the only option.

- **Negative feelings:** They sharpen your focus and motivate you, but they are the same thing as putting on blinders, which kills creativity and flexibility. They might help when quick and specific action is needed.
- **Positive feelings:** To solve bigger, more ambiguous problems, you need to encourage positive feelings of creativity, hope and an open mind. You need to find a way to instill hope, optimism and excitement in people.

## Shrink the Change

The Elephant is easily demoralized, spooked or derailed. When the task is too big, the Elephant will resist. That's why the Elephant needs constant reassurance, on every step of the journey. It's much more motivating if they're partly finished with a very long journey than if they're at a starting point of a much shorter one. That means a sense of progress is critical for being motivated enough to see a change through. Make sure you remind yourself or others of what has already been conquered when it comes to the change. Don't focus only on what's new and different and about to come, but also on the progress that's already been made.

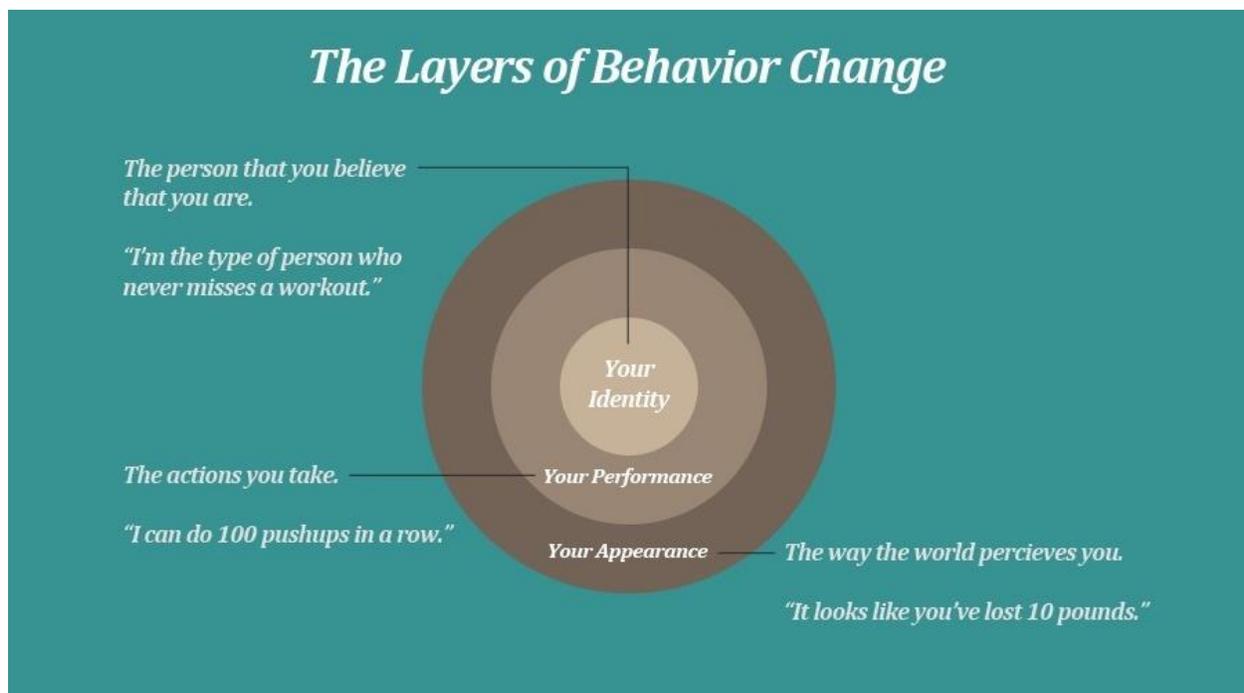
The Elephant hates doing things that don't have an immediate payoff. To get the Elephant moving, you must assure it that the change or task won't be so bad. But once you get the Elephant moving, you can keep him moving strongly as long as constant reassurance is provided.

1. The best way to shrink the change is to **limit the investment** you're asking for
2. Another way to shrink the change is to think of **small wins** that are within reach

These two ways are the best solution for engineering early success. Celebrating every incremental victory gives hope, and in turn, fuels for the Elephant. Even a small success can be extremely powerful in helping people believe in themselves. Your initial challenge is to get the Elephant moving, even if the movement is very slow in the beginning.

## Grow Your People

One way to motivate people is to make them feel "big" and powerful in comparison to the challenge. When you build people up, they develop the strength to act. The best way to grow people is to influence their identity. The good news is that people are receptive to developing new identities and that new identities grow from small positive beginnings. If you show people why it's worth caring for something new, they will make the caring part of their new self-image. The bad news, on the other hand, is that a new identity can take root quickly, but living up to it is awfully hard.



The hard part leads to the fact that every change needs to go through a period of failure and apathy. There's no way to learn new things without failure. That means you can't learn to be an inventor, scientist, blogger, manager or anything else, without failing. We all know that, but the big problem is that the Elephant hates to fail even if there's no situation that's 100% failure. The answer to this problem is that you must create the expectation of failure. Not the failure of the change itself, but failure on the path to the final destination. And by far the best way to deal with failure is to possess the growth mindset. When you know that everything is hard before it's easy and that you can improve at anything, it's much easier to deal with failure. Almost every project looks like a failure in the middle. If

the team manages to persist through angst and doubt, sooner or later a momentum of growth and fast progress takes place.

#### REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: MOTIVATE THE ELEPHANT

In 2007, two Harvard University researchers, Alia Crum and Ellen Langer, published a study of hotel maids and their exercise habits. A hotel maid cleans, on average, 15 rooms a day, and each room takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Take a moment and imagine an hour in the life of one of these maids — walking, bending, pushing, lifting, carrying, scrubbing and dusting. What they are doing, in short, is exercising. But the maids didn't seem to recognize what they were doing as exercise. At the beginning of the study, 67 percent of them reported that they didn't get any exercise at all.

Crum and Langer were curious about what would happen if the maids were told that they were exercise superstars. One group of maids got the good news: They received a document describing the benefits of exercise, and they were told that their daily work was sufficient to get those benefits. Meanwhile, maids in another group weren't told that their work was a good form of exercise.

Four weeks later, the researchers checked in with the maids and were astounded to find that the maids who'd been told that they were good exercisers had lost an average of 1.8 pounds. That's almost half a pound a week, which is a pretty substantial rate of loss. The other maids hadn't lost any weight. Many possible explanations have been offered for why the maids lost weight — the placebo effect, or perhaps the news triggered some mind-body connection that jump-started their metabolism — but the most likely explanation is that hearing the news that they really were exercisers was tremendously motivating. I'm not a sloth — I'm an exerciser! Think about how you would feel in their shoes. What if a scientist came to you and said that, unbeknownst to you, your job was an aerobic wonderland? With every click of the mouse, you burn eight calories! Every time you check fantasy-football stats, you run a mile! Wouldn't you feel a rush of satisfaction? Hey, look how good I'm doing!

And here's the main thing — it almost certainly would change the way you behave from that moment forward. Once you realized that exercise could come from little things, maybe you'd be on the lookout for ways to get a smidgen more active. Similarly, the maids, getting a jolt of enthusiasm from the good news, might have started scrubbing the showers a little more energetically than previously. Maybe they started making multiple trips back to their carts as they changed linens. Maybe they took the stairs rather than the elevator to lunch.

The maids succeeded in losing weight because the news that they already were exercising motivated the Elephant to exercise just that little bit more. Then, when they exerted that extra bit of effort, they found themselves, in four short weeks, closer to the goal line than they ever imagined. And, in a positive upward spiral, that sense of progress — I lost a substantial yet sustainable amount of weight in just a month! — further motivated the Elephant because the Elephant in us is easily demoralized. It needs reassurance, even for the very first step of the journey.

## Shape the Path

We all tend to make the error of judging people's behavior solely based on the way they are, rather than to see the environment they are in. Many times, what looks like a people problem is actually a situation problem. By shaping the path, you remove the friction from the trail and put signs on the road that they're getting close to the goal.

The good news is that no matter your position, you always have some control over the situation. There are three ways you can shape the path:

1. **Tweak the environment** – Change the situation, make the right behaviors a little bit easier and the wrong behaviors a little bit harder
2. **Build habits** – Look for ways to encourage positive habits
3. **Rally the Herd** – Behavior is contagious, help it spread

## Tweak the Environment

Tweaking the environment is about making the right behaviors a little bit easier and the wrong behaviors a little bit harder. By tweaking the environment, you basically outsmart yourself. It's that simple.

Think of what you can do at three points of the change situation: pre-event, event and post-event, to tweak the environment in your favor, to shape the path in a way that will lead you to perform positive habits. Make the old behavior harder, and the new behavior easier at all three points.

## Build Habits

Habits are behavioral autopilots. New habits present the essence of every change. The good (and the bad news) about habits is that they're contagious. They're incredibly sensitive to the environment and culture, because people want to fit in. Habits are not only contagious, they also get formed inevitably, whether intentionally or not. That's why they're so powerful. The problem occurs because many of the habits are created unwittingly and don't really support your mission.

That's why habits must be intentionally created, based on two factors:

1. The habit needs to **advance the mission**
2. The habit needs to be relatively **easy to embrace**. If the habit is too hard to embrace, it creates its own independent change problem.

One way to encourage new habits is by installing action triggers. Action triggers encourage you to execute a certain action when you encounter a situational trigger (also called a reminder). They won't make you do things you truly don't want to do, but they have a profound power to motivate people to do things they know they need to do.

The second way to encourage new habits are checklists. Checklists are very powerful at educating people and they show people an ironclad way of doing something new. They help people avoid blind spots in a complex environment. Write down habits that are easy to perform. Install action triggers for those habits. Help people follow them with checklists and watch the change grow.

## Rally the Herd

In ambiguous situations, we look at other people around us for cues on how to behave. It's also called social pressure. Behavior is contagious at the individual, group and social level. For example, you change your idea of what is an acceptable body type by looking at the people around you. That's why obesity is contagious. Drinking is also contagious. And the list of socially contagious things goes on and on, from marriage to shaking hands and investing in different companies.

When you're leading the Elephant on an unfamiliar path, his tendency will be to follow the Herd. That's why your job is to rally a Herd that will support your mission. Because in the end, social signals from the Herd can either guarantee a change effort or doom it.

There are several things you can do to rally the right Herd:

1. First, you have to **get all the reformers together**. They need free space and time to coordinate new behaviors and goals outside of the resistance gaze. You need to create a free space for discussion and new identity to grow.
2. Counterintuitively, you must **let the short-term organizational identity conflict happen**. For a short time, a struggle between us (reformers) and them (status quo) usually takes place. Reformers versus the rest. That's inevitable, at least in the short-term. It's part of organizational molding. And your job is to support the reformers.
3. In the end, rally the Herd. Communicate with everyone in the organization, so that you're on the same boat. When your Herd embraces the right behavior, publicize it. Praise individuals' new behaviors. Make sure the reformers find one another and **spread the new identity across your organization like a virus**.

#### REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: SHAPE THE PATH

One Saturday in 2000, some unsuspecting moviegoers showed up at a theater in Chicago to watch the Mel Gibson action flick *Payback*. They were handed a soft drink and a free bucket of popcorn and were asked to stick around after the movie to answer a few questions about the concession stand.

There was something unusual about the popcorn they received. It was wretched. In fact, it had been carefully engineered to be wretched. It had been popped five days earlier and was so stale it squeaked when you ate it. One moviegoer later compared it to Styrofoam packing peanuts.

Some of them got their popcorn in a medium-sized bucket and others got a large bucket — the sort of huge tub that looks like it might once have been an above-ground swimming pool. Every person got a bucket, so there would be no need to share. The researchers responsible for the study were interested in a simple question: Would the people with the bigger buckets eat more?

Both buckets were so big that none of the moviegoers could finish his or her individual portions. So, the actual research question was a bit more specific: Would somebody with an inexhaustible supply of popcorn eat more than someone with a smaller inexhaustible supply? The sneaky researchers weighed the buckets before and after the movie, so they were able to measure precisely how much popcorn each person ate. The results were stunning: People with the large buckets ate 53 percent more popcorn than people with the medium size. That's the equivalent of 173 more calories and approximately 21 extra hand dips into the bucket.

The study's author, Brian Wansink, PhD, runs the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University, and he described the results in his book *Mindless Eating* (Bantam, 2006). "We've run other popcorn studies, and the results were always the same," he writes. "It didn't matter if our moviegoers were in Pennsylvania, Illinois or Iowa, and it didn't matter what kind of movie was showing; all our popcorn studies led to the same conclusion. People eat more when you give them a bigger container. Period."

The researchers succeeded in getting moviegoers to eat less popcorn simply by giving them a smaller bucket — they shaped the Path by reducing the size of the container. The lesson here is that big changes can happen, and with the right strategy, you can help make them happen with a minimum of struggle.

## Keep the Switch Going

Change isn't an event; it's a process. Every process takes time, but the good thing about the process of change is that once the change starts, it seems to feed on itself. When you spot movement, reinforce it through praise and recognition. It's a snowball effect based on the mere exposure effect — the more you are exposed to something, the more you like it. Also, cognitive dissonance works in your favor when it comes to change. People don't like to think in one way and behave in another. They want their thinking and action to be congruent. That means when people start acting in a new way, it becomes more difficult for them to cognitively dislike their new destination. Because they're acting in a certain new way, they start thinking in a new way and, in the end, shape a new identity that's aligned with an organizational new mission. That strongly reinforces the new way of doing things.

# How to Make a Switch

## Direct the Rider

Principle	In a Nutshell
<b>Follow the Bright Spots</b>	Investigate what's already working and clone it
<b>Script the Critical Moves</b>	Provide crystal clear guidance with specific behaviors
<b>Point to the Destination</b>	Know where you're going and why it's worth it

## Motivate the Elephant

Principle	In a Nutshell
<b>Find the Feeling</b>	Knowing something isn't enough to cause change. Make people feel something.
<b>Shrink the Change</b>	Break down the change until it no longer spooks the Elephant.
<b>Grow your People</b>	Cultivate a sense of identity and instill the growth mind-set.

## Shape the Path

Principle	In a Nutshell
<b>Tweak the Environment</b>	When the situation changes, the behavior changes. So, change the situation.
<b>Build Habits</b>	When behavior is habitual, it's "free"—it doesn't tax the Rider. Look for ways to encourage habits.
<b>Rally the Herd</b>	Behavior is contagious. Help it spread.