

Made to stick

How to make people care? We know something about the world that we need to share. We figure out a way to communicate so that people will listen and care.

By “stick” we mean that your ideas are understood and remembered, and have a lasting impact—they change your audience’s opinion or behavior.

Know what your listeners care about, so you can tailor your communication to them.

Use repetition, repetition, repetition.

PRINCIPLE 1: **SIMPLICITY**

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 an individual could spend a lifetime learning to follow it. (Quote from Jesus: “Do to others what you want them to do to you”)

PRINCIPLE 2: **UNEXPECTEDNESS**

We need to violate people’s expectations. We can use surprise – an emotion whose function is to increase alertness and cause focus – to grab people’s attention.

We must generate **interest** and **curiosity**

We need to systematically “open gaps” in their knowledge – and then fill those gaps.

PRINCIPLE 3: **CONCRETENESS**

We must explain our ideas in terms of human actions, in terms of sensory information.

Naturally sticky ideas are full of concrete images.

Speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our idea will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience.

PRINCIPLE 4: **CREDIBILITY**

Sticky ideas have to carry their own credibility.

PRINCIPLE 5: **EMOTIONS**

How do we get people to care about ideas? We make them **feel** something.

We are wired to feel things for people, not for abstractions.

PRINCIPLE 6: **STORIES**

We tell stories. Hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight stimulator, preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively.

To summarize:

A Simple, Unexpected Concrete, Credible Emotional Story

Ask yourself: Is this idea simple? Is it unexpected? Concrete? Credible? Emotional? A story?

If you want to spread your ideas to other people, you should work within the confines of the rules that have allowed other ideas to succeed over time. You want to invent new ideas, not new rules.

It's hard to make ideas stick in a noisy, unpredictable chaotic environment. If we're to succeed, the first step is: Be simple. What we mean by "simple" is **finding the core of the idea**.

"Finding the core" means stripping an idea down to its most critical essence.

The first sentence, called the lead, contains the most essential elements of the story.

Finding the core and writing the lead both involve forced prioritization.

Core messages help people avoid bad choices by reminding them of what's important.

Simple messages are **core** and **compact**.

Compact ideas help people learn and remember a core message.

Only ideas with profound compactness are valuable. So, to make a profound idea compact you've got to pack a lot of meaning into a little bit of messaging. You use flags. You tap the existing memory terrain of your audience. You use what's already there.

If a message can't be used to make predictions or decisions, it is without value, no matter how accurate or comprehensive it is.

A great way to avoid useless accuracy, and to dodge the Curse of Knowledge, is to use analogies. *A pomelo is like a grapefruit. Skin damage is like aging.* Analogies make it possible to understand a compact message because they invoke concepts that you already know.

The most basic way to get someone's attention is this: Break a pattern. Humans adapt incredibly quickly to consistent patterns

Our brain is designed to be keenly aware of changes. When products require users to pay attention, something changes.

How do I get people's attention? How do I keep it? We use two essential emotions – surprise and interest. Surprise gets our attention. Interest keeps our attention.

Naturally sticky ideas are frequently unexpected. If we can make our ideas more unexpected, they will be stickier.

Unexpected ideas are more likely to stick because surprise makes us pay attention and think. If we want to motivate people to pay attention, we should seize the power of big surprises.

If you want your ideas to be stickier, you've got to break someone's guessing machine and then fix it.

Make sure you target an aspect of your audience's guessing machines that relates to your core message.

1. Identify the central message you need to communicate –find the core.
 2. Figure out what is counterintuitive about the message (what are the unexpected implications of your core message?) Why isn't it already happening naturally?
 3. Communicate your message in a way that breaks your audience's guessing machines. Then, once their guessing machines have failed, help them refine their machines
-

How do we get people's attention? And how do we keep it? What makes people interested?

Curiosity happens when we feel a gap in our knowledge.

We need to **open** gaps before we **close** them. Our tendency is to tell people the facts. First, though, they must realize they need these facts.

Knowledge gaps create interest. But to prove that the knowledge gap exists, it may be necessary to highlight some knowledge first. "Here is what you know. Now here is what you're missing".

Unexpectedness, in the service of core principles, can have surprising longevity.

Abstraction makes it harder to understand an idea and to remember it. It also makes it harder to coordinate our activities with others, who may interpret the abstraction in very different ways. Concreteness helps us avoid these problems. Concreteness is an indispensable component of sticky ideas.

What makes something "concrete"? If you can examine something with your senses, it's concrete. A V8 is concrete. "High performance" is abstract. Most of the time, concreteness boils down to specific people doing specific things. Concrete language helps people understand new concepts.

Using concreteness as a foundation for abstraction is not just good for mathematical instruction; it is a basic principle of understanding. Concreteness helps us construct higher, more abstract insights on the building blocks of your existing knowledge and perceptions.

Concrete ideas are easier to remember. *Naturally sticky ideas are stuffed full of concrete words and images.*

What is it about concreteness that makes ideas stick? The answer lies with the nature of our memories.

Concreteness makes targets transparent.

What makes people believe ideas? We believe authorities. Example: “Approved by the Dalai Lama” and “heartily endorsed by the Security Council”. Celebrities and other aspirational figures make up the second class of “authorities”.

Who is behind these messages? Should I trust them? What do they have to gain if I believe them?

Asking customers to test a claim for themselves is a “testable credential”. Testable credentials can provide an enormous credibility boost, since they essentially allow your audience an enormous credibility boost, since they essentially allow your audience members to “try before you buy”.

How do we get people to believe our ideas? We’ve got to find a source of credibility to draw on.

How do we make people care about our messages? The good news is that to make people care about our ideas we don’t have to produce emotion from an absence of emotion. In fact, many ideas use a sort of piggybacking strategy, association themselves with emotions that already exist.

The most basic way to make people care is to form an association between something they don’t yet care about and something they do care about.

Appeal to self-interest: What matters to people? People matter to themselves. It will come as no surprise that one reliable way of making people care is by invoking self-interest.

Self-interest is important. Always structuring our ideas around self-interest is like always painting with one colour.

How can we get people to care about our ideas? We get them to take off their Analytical Hats. We appeal to their self-interest, but we also appeal to their identities – not only to the people they are right now but also to the people they would like to be.

An emotional idea makes people care.

Checklist:

Simple

Unexpected

Concrete

Credible

Emotional

Story

Stories are almost always Concrete. Most of them have Emotional and Unexpected elements. Make sure the stories are simple – they reflect your core message. Stories have the amazing dual power to stimulate and to inspire.

Getting a message across has two stages: The Answer stage and the Telling Others stage. In the Answer stage, you use your expertise to arrive at the idea that you want to share.

For an idea to stick, for it to be useful and lasting, it's got to make the audience:

1. **Pay attention**
2. **Understand and remember it**
3. **Agree/Believe**
4. **Care**
5. **Be able to act on it**

Surprise them by breaking their guessing machines – tell them something that is uncommon sense.

Create curiosity gaps – tell people just enough for them to realize the piece that's missing from their knowledge. Or create mysteries or puzzles that are slowly solved over the course of the communication.

Make the message simpler and use concrete language.

Sticky=understandable, memorable, and effective in changing thought or behavior.

Success checklist:

1. **Simple:** Find the core Share the core
2. **Unexpected:** Get attention: surprise. Hold attention: interest.
3. **Concrete:** Help people understand and remember. Help people coordinate.
4. **Credible:** Help people believe. Use convincing details. Use testable credentials. "Try before you buy".
5. **Emotional:** Make people care. Use the power of association. Appeal to self-interest. Appeal to identity.
6. **Stories:** Get people to act. Stories as simulation (tell people how to act) Stories as inspiration (give people energy to act)

Pay attention: **Unexpected**

Understand and remember: **Concrete**

Believe and agree: **Credible**

Care: **Emotional**

Act: **Stories**

)

END