



# THE ELEPHANT IN YOUR MIND

By Dr. Douglas L. Talley

***Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard***

**by Chip and Dean Heath**

**Random House Canada, 320 pp. \$28.99**

Why is change so difficult? Why is it even harder to make it last, especially in life, ministry and business? In their book *Switch*, authors Chip and Dan Heath argue that the biggest culprit is within us: our mind.

The rational and emotional systems within our minds constantly vie for control, creating tension between the change we desire and the emotional cost that the change extracts. In order for change to last, both the mind and the heart must be affected.

The Heath brothers say that the two competing systems are like an elephant and its rider. The rider is the rational side of the mind, which establishes vision, engages in planning and provides direction. Although tugging on the reins will force the elephant to submit in the short term, the rider gets exhausted if the battle for control continues for very long.

The elephant is the emotional side that provides the energy to accomplish things, including making lasting changes. Because the elephant dwarfs its rider, it will win any disagreement that arises. The elephant lives more for the moment than the rider does, so the elephant has a tendency to hijack the change process.

In order to make changes stick, the authors recommend a three-part framework:

## **1. Direct the Rider**

Since big problems rarely involve big solutions, the rider must learn to approach change by focusing on a series of smaller, quick fixes that lead to the ultimate goal. So then change becomes a sequence of baby steps rather than one giant step. This usually requires some planning to map out each step along the path toward the goal. One key element to this process is limiting the number of options to prevent the rider from getting overwhelmed and returning to the status quo as a familiar way out. Identifying the desired destination is important to focus the rider's attention on the horizon so that details and analysis do not bog down the progress.

## **2. Motivate the Elephant**

The biggest way to change behavior is not to expose the problem or identify the solution, but rather to get the emotions involved. So instead of thinking yourself into a new way of acting, you feel yourself into a new way of acting. Our feelings are influenced by taking small steps that give us a sense of accomplishment and progress. As we think of small wins and realize them, we are engineering hope, and hope is elephant fuel, according to the authors.

The Heaths reference Carol Dweck's book *Mindset* ([http://leadersthatlast.org/reviews/mindset\\_review.pdf](http://leadersthatlast.org/reviews/mindset_review.pdf)) because it is critical to adopt a growth mindset if change is to occur. Not only does a growth mindset help us

reframe failure as a natural part of the change process, but also it prepares the mind for the possibility of change.

### **3. Shape the Path**

The environment we live and work in may not be conducive to change. So the problem may not be personal, but rather environmental. For example, using smaller plates and bowls while on a diet, or setting out workout clothes out in advance if on a new exercise regimen are ways of adjusting one's environment to encourage change. Find ways to tweak your environment to make implementing the change easier.

Habits are behavior on autopilot and expend virtually no energy. By preloading a decision and tweaking the environment to reinforce it, the rider is motivated to take baby steps and create what the Heaths call an "instant habit." This lessens the work involved in implementing change because it gives the elephant a path to run on instead of requiring that the rider exert more pressure on the reins. It also invites others who support the change to get vocal and this has a herding affect on the elephant.

I had never thought of self-control or willpower as an exhaustible resource before reading this book. The approach to change that I had been taught was that you just hunker down and make it happen, and since I am fairly self-disciplined, that is what I would do—or at least try to do. The Heaths explain that the bigger the change, the more it will sap a person's self-control. As a person's mental muscles fatigue, old patterns regain control and sabotage the change at hand.

We often think of change as an event. We identify what we want to change and think announcing it will make it happen. Change is a process, and the Heaths help us understand key components and the role they play so that we can position ourselves and our ministry or business for greater effectiveness.

*Switch* will give you new insight into the change process and it provides enough illustrations to help you understand how to design a change process for your life or ministry. The Heaths do an excellent job of blending theory and practical understanding in a way that brings the change process to life. This book also makes an excellent staff study and can increase your staff's capacity for implementing change effectively.

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