

Why some ideas thrive and others die

Barry Mitzman

Professor of Strategic Communication

Director, Center for Strategic Communication

Seattle University

“A lie can get halfway around the world
before the truth can even get its boots on.”

--Mark Twain

DSB Task Force

Successful strategic communication

- An interactive process
- Depends on cultural context
- Must be agile

Table 1. Lessons Taught from Successful Strategic Communication Activities

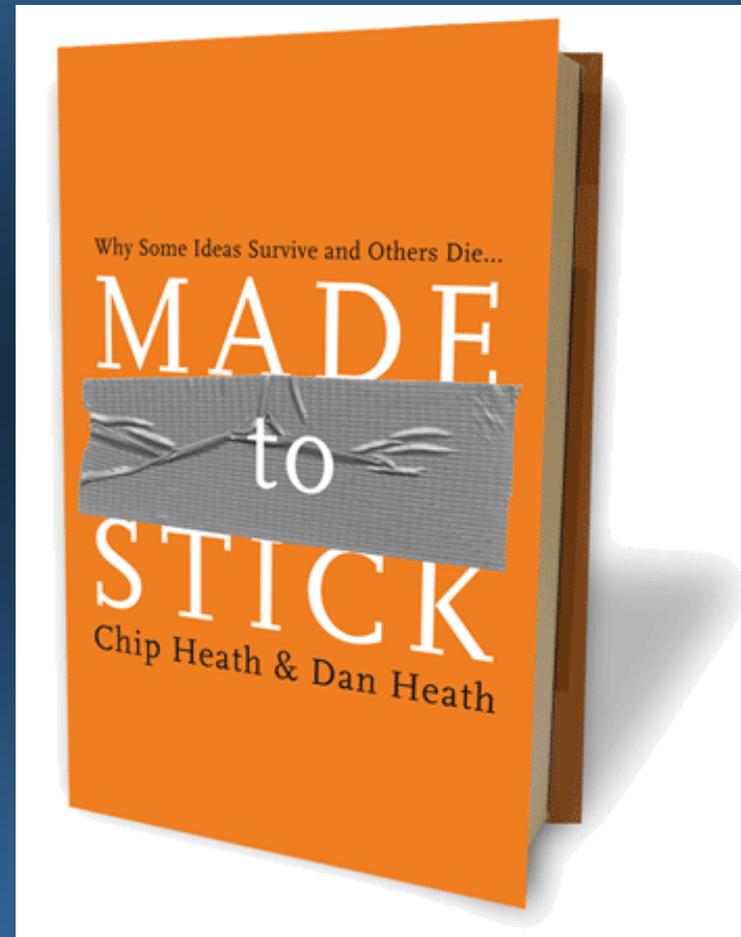
Actions trump words	Relationships are critical
Partners count	Coordination is critical
Messenger authority	Trusted voices
Language matters	Images matter
Speed counts	Endurance counts

Successful strategic communication

- Takes various forms:
 - Words
 - Images
 - Gestures & rituals
 - Policies
 - Actions
- Regardless of form, it carries a message that must be:
 - Heard
 - Understood
 - Believed
 - Remembered
 - Acted upon

In a word...

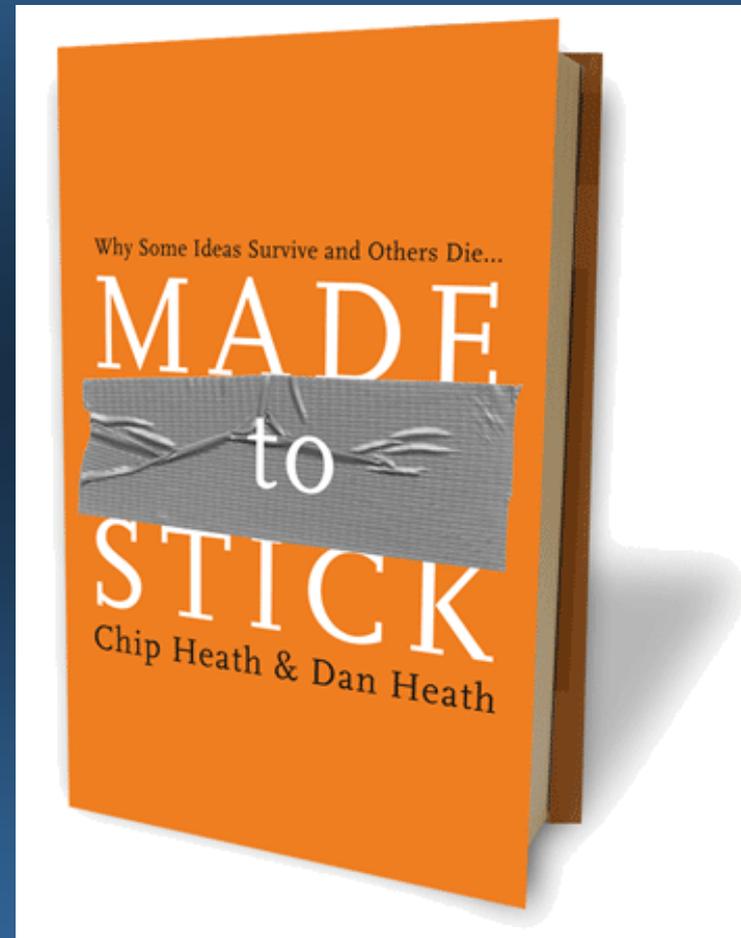
- Successful strategic communication is “sticky”
 - Understandable
 - Memorable
 - Effective in changing thought or behavior



Sticky messages

Adhere to six principles
of SUCCESSs

- Simple
- Unexpected
- Concrete
- Credible
- Emotional
- Stories



Simple

- Commander's intent
 - “If we do nothing else during tomorrow's mission, we must _____.”
 - “The single, most important thing that we must do tomorrow is _____.”
- Southwest Airlines: “THE low-cost airline.”
- James Carville, 1992: “It's the economy, stupid.”

Simple

- Find the core message and lead with it
- Keep it compact
- Use generative analogies based on previous schemas
 - The movie *Alien*: “*Jaws* on a spaceship”
 - *Snakes on a Plane*

Simple: generative analogies

- A medium-sized bag of “butter” popcorn at a typical movie theater contains 37 grams of saturated fat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that a normal daily diet contain no more than 20 grams.
- A medium-sized “butter” popcorn at a typical movie theater contains more artery-clogging fat than a bacon-and-eggs breakfast, a Big Mac and fries for lunch, and a steak dinner with all the trimmings—combined.
 - Center for Science in the Public Interest

Unexpected

- Surprise gets attention, can change perceptions, expectations
- Example: tire chains at Nordstrom
- Gap theory of curiosity
- Attribution theory

Concrete

- Vivid messages are memorable
- Memory is like velcro
- Learning from subtraction
- Blue eyes, brown eyes

Concrete

- “Our mission is to become the international leader in the space industry through maximum team-centered innovation and strategically targeted aerospace initiatives.”
- “We will put a man on the moon and return him safely by the end of the decade.”
 - President John F. Kennedy

Credible

- Authorities—and anti-authorities
- Power of details—the Darth Vader toothbrush
- Human scale principle
- Testable credentials

Emotional

- Help one child, or help many?
- Appeals to self-interest
- Appeals to fairness, other group values
- Appeals to identity

Stories

- Power of mental simulation
- Sources of inspiration—e.g., Jared
 - Challenge plots—David vs. Goliath, Rosa Parks, Lance Armstrong
 - Connection plots—good Samaritan
 - Creativity plots—Newton & the apple

Barriers to effectiveness

- Deep cultural knowledge needed
- Curse of knowledge obscures message
- Challenge reinforces DSB recommendations
 - Public-private partnerships
 - People-to-people contacts
 - Listening and interactivity
 - Investments in cultural and language training
 - Technology investments to enhance agility, viral capabilities