

STICKINESS

Some messages immediately take on a life of their own, while others immediately fade away. Sticky messages get at “the heart of the matter.” They are fundamental, easily transmissible and often shift people’s thinking.

The quality and nature of the message is critical. It must make them remember it and act on it. Minor tinkering with your message can dramatically affect its stickiness. To find out if a message is sticky, you must test it out!

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF STICKY MESSAGES

1. **Simplicity.** What is the one idea that will carry the day? Not ten, not three, *one*. To develop a simple message, you must relentlessly exclude and prioritize. Simple messages are not necessarily brief sound bites. Many proverbs serve as excellent sticky messages.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

2. **Unexpectedness.** Sticky messages are counterintuitive. They surprise people, but that’s not all. They also generate further interest and curiosity. Open gaps in people’s knowledge, and they will want to fill them.

It ain’t over until it’s over. (Yogi Berra)

3. **Concreteness.** Sticky messages are specific and full of concrete messages. Speaking concretely is the only assurance that your audience will understand the message in the same way you do.

Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. (Thomas Edison)

4. **Credibility.** Sticky messages carry their own credibility. They can be tested and verified by the audience. Unless you are an acknowledged expert, you must assure that the message is self-verifying.

Are you better off today than you were four years ago? (Ronald Reagan, 1980)

5. **Emotions.** Messages that make an emotional connection to people will stick much more than others. Messages that incite anger or disgust are much more effective than ones that make a logical argument.

Antismoking campaign that shows teenagers stacking 1,800 body bags in front of a tobacco company office: “Do you know how many people tobacco kills every day?”

6. **Stories.** Stories help people remember how others behaved, and, by extension, tell the audience how they should behave. Stories are incredibly rich tools for sharing experiences and teaching lessons.

Sources

- Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Random House, 2007
- Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Little, Brown & Co., 2000.

