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# How to Change Minds – Book Notes from The Catalyst

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This month in the [Pastor's Book Club](#), we are breaking down [The Catalyst](#). In addition to a breakdown and discussion guide you can use with your team, there's a video with ministry insights. Learn more about The Pastor's Book Club [here](#).

Imagine how hard it is for a hostage negotiator to get someone to change their mind. The stakes are high there.

Even though it's not usually that dramatic, people don't want to change. Isaac Newton famously noted that an object in motion tends to stay in motion, while an object at rest tends to stay at rest. Inertia is real.

Some people think that if you just push people, give more information, more facts, more reasons and arguments, or more force, people will change. But people are resistant to change

They push back.

Whether you're working on a sermon, trying to convince people to join a small group, or writing the church newsletter, there are some principles in this book are really going to help you.

In chemistry, chemists use catalysts, special substances that speed up chemical reactions. They do this not by increasing heat or pressure, but by providing an alternate route. In other words, faster change with less energy.

Being the catalyst is equally powerful in the social world. It's not about trying to be a better persuader or be more convincing. It's about changing minds by removing barriers.

Push people and they will snap. Tell them what to do and they probably won't listen.

Catalysts start with this basic question: "Why hasn't the person changed already? What's blocking them?"

### *Reactance*

Berger starts with story of Chuck Wolfe, who was asked to get teens to stop smoking in Florida. The recommendations and the warnings weren't working. In fact, many times when we tell people to STOP doing something, they start doing it more. That's what happened when TIDE asked people to stop eating TIDE pods. Even Rob Gronkowski getting involved couldn't make people listen.

Chuck Wolfe took a different approach. Instead of trying to persuade people he let people persuade themselves. They stopped telling kids what to do and just started laying out the facts, particularly the ones about how the cigarette manufacturers were manipulating and influencing politics, TV, movies, and teenagers themselves.

"Here's what the industry is doing...you decide what you want to do about it," was their message. They trusted people to make their own decisions.

And it worked.

People have an anti persuasion radar, and they're constantly scanning for influence attempts. If they find one, they set up countermeasures, such as avoidance and ignoring the message.

Pushing, telling, even encouraging people to do something often backfires. They need to see their behavior as freely driven, as their idea.

No one likes feeling someone is trying to influence them. After all, when's the last time you changed your mind because someone told you to?

### Endowment

Even though new things are better, people will still cling to the old. For example, many people use their old phones even though they know new ones will work much better. The hassle to change, even if there's a promise of improvement, just isn't worth the effort.

Change is hard because people tend to overvalue what they have, what they already own, or what they are already doing.

Duke University students were willing to pay around \$200 for Final Four tickets, but students who already had tickets wanted \$2,000 to sell them. What we have is worth more to us.

Research suggest the potential gains of doing something have to be 2.6 times larger than the potential losses to get people to take action

When things aren't terrible, or if they are just okay but not great, it's hard to get people to budge. In most of our churches, services are filled with people who are doing okay. That's a challenge for any preacher.

To combat this, we have to convince people of the cost of doing nothing.

Cortez had to burn the ships.

The IT department has to say, "we're not supporting the old system after this date."

Inaction has to be removed from the table.

## Distance

If you already believe X, the truth about Y probably won't convince you.

That's why one person's truth is another's fake news.

And exposure to the truth doesn't always help because of confirmation bias. In fact, studies show that exposure to the truth can often lead to increased misperception.

It's why two sets of fans who watch the same football game will have a different perspective on play, no matter the outcome.

Making a moderate appeal and going after the middle may be a better approach. That's what worked in Oklahoma when they were deciding whether to re-legalize alcohol after Prohibition. As you're preaching, what action step would appeal to most of the people?

Another approach you could take is finding the subset of people most likely to embrace or support your position. You may not need to convince everyone, just the subgroup that needs it most. If you're trying to lead a big change in your church, getting a small group of the right people involved may be the wise, first step.

You could also ask for less. Instead of pushing people to do something they don't want to do, you could ask them to agree to a small, related ask that moves them in the right direction. That puts the final task within the zone of acceptance.

"When trying to change minds, the tendency is to go big. We want to shift people's perspective right away. We're looking for that silver bullet pitch that will immediately get someone to quit drinking soda or switch political parties overnight. But look closer at big changes, and they're rarely that abrupt.

Instead, they're often more of a process. A slow and steady shift with many stages along the way." – The Catalyst, Page 112

## *Uncertainty*

We devalue things that are uncertain.

People hate uncertainty. It's worse than known negatives.

The more ambiguity there is around a product, service, or idea, the less valuable that thing becomes.

Uncertainty is good for maintaining the status quo, but terrible for changing minds. It acts like a pause button in the decision-making process.

How to combat uncertainty:

- Trialability: How easy to experiment with something? Can you imagine buying a car without test-driving it? What about joining a small group?
- Freemium: This was the approach Dropbox took when launching. Can people start using right away and take more steps when they are ready?
- Reduce up-front cost: Zappos was among the first to offer free shipping. How might this apply to something like mission-trip participation?

The real barrier isn't money, but uncertainty.

## *Corroborating Evidence*

People don't have strong feelings about pine trees, prime numbers, or serif fonts. Those are weakly held attitudes. You've got an opinion, but it's probably not that important and it's relatively easy to change.

Politics or your favorite sports team...that's a different story.

Are we talking about pebbles or boulders?

If an opinion is important to you, it takes more evidence to change. We discount info that we disagree with, so more proof is required for more certainty.

You are more likely to accept an opinion from “Another you” someone who is like you, in terms of likes/dislikes, concerns/values. This is why you laugh more when you’re with people who are like you are also laughing.

Actions, even ones like donations, are shaped by social influence. People are more likely to donate if they know someone who has already done so.

### ***Pastor’s Book Club***

To read the full breakdown of The Catalyst, check out the [Pastor’s Book Club](#). Each month, you’ll get a book breakdown of an important business book and a ministry insight video you can share with all of your leaders.