Made to Stick


Summary: There is an actual formula to making ideas “sticky” (more likely to be remembered), and the authors use the acronym SUCCESs to help you remember it: Simplicity, Unexpectedness, Concreteness, Credibility, Emotional, Stories.

The “Curse of Knowledge” is the gap between the knowledge-holder (the speaker) and the listener who has no knowledge. The speaker has a hard time remembering to phrase things in a way that make sense to someone without the knowledge. An example is tapping out a Beatles song using a pen on a desk. It makes perfect sense to the speaker, but the listener can only hear one note and often can’t see the whole picture.

Implications for Teaching:

1. All lecture content can be made “sticky” with a minimum of effort
2. Keep the Curse of Knowledge in mind as you lecture, and remember to scaffold accordingly
3. Keep ideas simple with overarching analogies and charts
4. Generate a curiosity gap in students: they recognize that they don’t know something, but should.
5. Avoid abstractions and conceptual thinking until ideas are understood at a concrete level first
6. Use demonstrations and real examples to make ideas seem credible and also rooted in reality
7. Transform analytical ideas into something that hits them in the gut (or the heart) to make it memorable (example: a lab safety video could be boring, but if you show a cow eyeball dissolving in acid, they remember it better)
8. Stories have a unique power to inspire and engage; isolate the “learning” you want them to master, and wrap it around a narrative