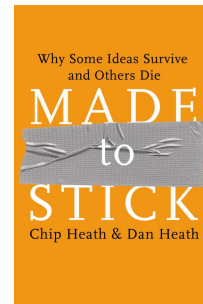


## STORIES AS INSPIRATION: THE STORY OF JARED

What follows is an excerpt from the book *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath, published by Random House in 2007. The passage below appears in the “Story” chapter of the book.



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In the late 1990s, the fast food giant Subway launched a campaign to tout the healthiness of a new line of sandwiches. The campaign was based on a statistic: Seven subs under six grams of fat. As far as statistics go, that’s pretty good—a spoonful of alliteration helps the medicine go down. But “7 under 6” didn’t stick like Subway’s next campaign, which focused on the remarkable story of a college student named Jared Fogle.

Jared had a serious weight problem. By his junior year in college, he had ballooned to 425 pounds. He wore size XXXXXXL shirts, the largest size available in big-and-tall clothing stores. His pants had a 60-inch waist.

Jared’s father, a general practitioner in Indianapolis, had warned his son about his weight for years without much success. Then, one December day, Jared’s roommate, a premed major, noticed that Jared’s ankles were swelling. He correctly diagnosed edema, a condition in which the body retains fluid because the blood can’t transport enough liquid, a condition which often leads to diabetes, heart problems, and even early heart attacks. Jared’s father told him that, given his weight and health condition, he might not live past 35.

By the spring break after his December hospital visit, Jared decided to slim down. Motivated by the “7 under 6” campaign, Jared had his first turkey club. He liked the sandwich, and eventually he developed his own, all-Subway diet: a foot-long veggie sub for lunch and a six-inch turkey sub for dinner.

After three months of the “Subway diet,” as he called it, he stepped on the scale. It read 330 pounds. He had dropped almost 100 pounds in 3 months by eating at Subway.

He stuck with the diet for several more months, sometimes dropping as much as a pound a day. As soon as his health permitted, he began walking as much as he could, not taking the bus to classes

and even walking up stairs rather than taking the department-store escalator.

The story of how Jared's inspiring weight-loss became a national phenomenon begins with an article that appeared in the *Indiana Daily Student* in April 1999. It was written by Ryan Coleman, a former dormmate of Jared's. Coleman saw him after the diet and almost didn't recognize him. He wrote movingly about what it was like for Jared as an obese student:

When Fogle registered for a class, he didn't base his choice on professor or class time like most students. He based which classes to register on whether he could fit into the classroom seats.

When most folks worried whether they could find a parking spot close to campus, Fogle worried whether he could find a parking spot without a car already parked nearby—he needed the extra room in order to open the driver's side door so he could get out.<sup>1</sup>

The article ended with this quote from Jared: “Subway helped save my life and start over. I can't ever repay that.” This may have been the first time that a fast-food chain was credited with a profoundly positive life change.

Then, a reporter at *Men's Health* magazine, who was writing an article called “Crazy Diets that Work,” happened to see the Indiana student newspaper article about Jared, and he included a blurb about the “subway sandwich diet.” The article didn't mention Jared's name or even where he had bought the sandwiches—it simply referred generically to “subway sandwiches.”

The key link in the chain was a Subway franchise owner named Bob Ocwieja, who spotted the article and thought it had potential. He took time out of his schedule to track down the creative director at Subway's Chicago ad agency, a man named Richard Coad, suggesting that he check out the article. Coad says, “I kind of laughed at first, but we followed up on it.”

Jared is the hero of the weight-loss story, but Ocwieja and Coad are the heroes of our idea story. Ocwieja is a hero for spotting potential in a story, and Coad is a hero for spotting the same potential and spending the resources to follow up on it.

Coad and Barry Krause, the president of the advertising agency called Hal Riney, sent an intern to Bloomington, Indiana, with vague instructions to find the mystery sandwich-diet guy—and also to find

out whose sandwiches he had been eating. It could have easily turned out that Jared had been dining at Flo's Sub Shop.

The intern was not exactly sure what he was supposed to do. His tentative plan was to show up in Bloomington, look through the Yellow Pages, and start dropping by the town's sub shops. Fortunately for the intern, the operation never got that complex.

The first sub shop the intern visited was a Subway franchise close to campus. He launched into his description of the mystery eater, and about one sentence into the description, the counter worker said, "Oh, that's Jared. He comes here every day."

The intern returned victorious. Jared was real, and he'd shed pounds by eating at Subway. The agency thought: *We've got a great story on our hands*

And that's when the Jared story hit another hurdle. Krause called Subway's marketing director to unveil the tale of Jared. The marketing director was not impressed. He had just started his job at Subway, having previously worked for another fast food company. "I've seen that before," he said. "Fast foods can't do healthy." The marketing director preferred to launch a campaign focused on the taste of Subway's sandwiches.

To satisfy Krause, though, the director ran the Jared campaign idea by Subway's lawyers. The lawyers, predictably, said a Jared campaign couldn't be done. It would appear to be making a medical claim that might create a liability, blah blah blah. The only way to avoid any liability was to run disclaimers like, "We don't recommend this diet. See your doctor first."

The idea seemed dead. But Krause and Coad were not ready to give up. Subway, like many franchise-based firms, runs ad campaigns at two levels—national and regional. While the national Subway office had vetoed Jared, some Subway franchisees expressed interest in the story and were willing to run the ads using regional advertising money.

Then came another hurdle: Franchisees didn't usually pay to make the actual commercials, they just paid to run the commercials in their local regions. The commercials were usually funded by the national office. So who would pay for the Jared commercials?

Krause decided to make the spots for free. He said, "For the first and only time in my career, I gave the go-ahead to shoot an ad we weren't going to be paid for."

The ad first ran on January 1, 2000—just in time for the annual epidemic of diet-related New Year's resolutions. The ad showed Jared in front of his home. "This is Jared," said the announcer. "He used to weigh 425 pounds,"—we see a photo of Jared in his old 60-inch-waist pants—"but today he weighs 180 thanks to what he calls

the Subway diet.” The announcer describes Jared’s meal plan, then concludes, “That, combined with a lot of walking, worked for Jared. We’re not saying this is for everyone. You should check with your doctor before starting any diet program. But it worked for Jared.”

The next day, Krause said, the phones started ringing in the morning and didn’t let up. *USA Today* called, ABC and Fox News called. On the third day, Oprah called. Krause said, “I’ve talked to a lot of marketers over the years who wanted to get media attention. No one ever got anywhere by lavishing calls on Oprah. The only time I’ve succeeded in my career with Oprah was with Jared, and Oprah called *us*”

A few days later, the national office of Subway called Krause, asking to run the ad nationally.

Subway’s sales in 1999 were flat. In 2000, sales jumped 18%, and they jumped another 16% in 2001. At the time, other (much smaller) sandwich chains such as Schlotzky’s and Quiznos grew at about 7% per year.<sup>ii</sup>

THE JARED STORY has a morsel of simulation value. It makes it relatively easy to imagine what it would be like to embrace the Subway diet—the lunch order, the dinner order, the walking in-between. But this story is not so much a flight simulator as it is a pep talk. This huge guy lost 200 pounds on a diet he invented! Wow! The story provides a good kick in the pants for anyone who’s been struggling to lose that last 10 pounds.

Just as with the nurse story that opened the chapter, this story too has emotional resonance. Even skinny people uninterested in dieting will be inspired by Jared’s tale. He fought big odds and prevailed through perseverance. And this is the second major payoff that stories provide: inspiration. Inspiration drives action, just like simulation does.

By the way, note how much better this campaign functions than the “7 under 6” campaign. Both campaigns are mining the same turf—they both highlight the availability of nutritious, low-fat sandwiches. They both hold out the promise of weight loss. But one campaign was a modest success and one was a sensation.

What we have argued in this book—and we hope we’ve made you a believer by now—is that *you could have predicted in advance* that Jared was the winner, between these two campaigns.

Note how well the Jared story does on the SUCCESS checklist:

- It's simple: Eat subs and lose weight. (Perhaps oversimplified, frankly, since the meatball sub with extra mayo won't help you lose weight.)
- It's unexpected: A guy lost a ton of weight by eating *fast food*. This story violates our schema of fast food, a schema more consistent with the fat picture of Jared than the skinny picture.
- It's concrete: Think of the oversized pants, the massive loss of girth, the diet composed of particular sandwiches. It's much more like an Aesop fable than an abstraction.
- It's credible: It has the same kind of anti-authority truthfulness that we saw with the Pam Laffin anti-smoking campaign. *The guy who wore 60-inch pants is giving us diet advice!*
- It's emotional: We care more about an individual, Jared, than about a mass. And it taps into profound areas of Maslow's hierarchy—it's about a guy who reached his potential with the help of a sub shop.
- It's a story: Our protagonist overcomes big odds to triumph. It inspires the rest of us to do the same.

By contrast, let's size up "7 under 6" on the checklist. It is simple, but notice that it has a much less compelling core message. Its core message is "We've got a variety of low-fat sandwiches," versus Jared's "Eat Subway, lose weight, change your life." The first message sells drill bits, the second tells you how to hang your kid's picture.

"7 under 6" is *far* less unexpected. Jared packs a wallop because it violates the powerful schema that fast food is fatty. "7 under 6" may be attacking the same schema, but if so, it makes the point much more tangentially.

"7 under 6" is not concrete. Numbers aren't concrete. It is only credible because it hasn't set the bar very high—not many of us will be floored to hear that a sandwich has less than 6 grams of fat, so we don't need much convincing. It's not emotional, and it's not a story.

Any reader of this book could have analyzed these two multi-million dollar national ad campaigns and chosen the right one, just by laying them side-by-side on the SUCCESS checklist. (Note, though, that nonreaders might not be so savvy. The national advertising director, with a lifetime of experience in trying to make ideas stick, wanted to walk away from the Jared story.)

Another compelling aspect of the Jared tale is how many people had to work hard to make it a reality. Look at how many unlikely

events had to take place, in order for Jared to hit TV: The Subway store manager had to be proactive enough to bring the magazine article to the creative director's attention. (Would your front-line people do this?) The creative director had to be savvy enough to invest resources in what could have been a fruitless errand. (Was this really an errand with a good ROI?) The president of the ad agency had to make the spot *for free* because he knew he was onto something big. (Free?!) The national Subway marketing team had to swallow its pride and realize that it made a mistake by not embracing Jared earlier.

These are not trivial actions. This behavior is not routine. How many great ideas have been extinguished because someone in the middle—a link between the source of the idea and its eventual outlet—dropped the ball?

In the normal world, a franchise owner would have been amused by the Jared tale. He would have tacked it up on the bulletin board, on the wall of the hallway leading to the bathroom, so that he could amuse his employees. And that would have been the pinnacle of the Jared tale.

Jared reminds us that we don't always have to *create* sticky ideas. *Spotting* them is often easier and more useful. What if history teachers were diligent about sharing teaching methods that worked brilliantly in reaching students? What if we could count on nonprofit volunteers to be on the lookout for symbolic events or encounters that could inspire other people in the organization? What if we could count on our bosses to take a gamble on important ideas? You don't have to admire Subway sandwiches to admire the process of bringing a great idea to life.

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<sup>i</sup> Coleman, Ryan (1999, April 29) Indiana U.: Indiana U. senior gains new perspective on life.

<sup>ii</sup> Performance statistics for Jared are from: Sperber, Bob (2001, October 15). In search of fresh ideas. Subway. Brandweek. M54.