

 [image](#)

- [Home](#)
- [UCD Uncensored](#)
- [From the Field](#)
- [Tool School](#)
- [Participants](#)

[< Back to UCD uncensored](#)



With Elephant, Rider, Path, behavior change isn't rocket science

We know going to the gym is good for us. And yet many of us don't do it. We know head injuries can be fatal, yet we often ride without helmets. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt introduced an analogy that explained this 'irrational' behavior—elephant and rider.

In his 2010 book *The Happiness Hypothesis*, he describes a duality in us. We all have an 'elephant' and an 'elephant rider' inside of us. The rider, which represents rational thinking, is often seen as being in control of the elephant, a person's irrational and emotional side. But Haidt says this is simply not true—our emotions dominate our rational logic, just like the elephant can overrule the rider at will.

Borrowing from Haidt's proposition, Chip and Dan Heath, a professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business and a Senior Fellow at Duke University's Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE), respectively, developed a third part of the scenario: the 'path,' which represents the external environment.

“To change behavior, you've got to direct the rider, motivate the elephant, and shape the path. If you can do all three at once, dramatic change can happen, even if you don't have lots of power or resources behind you.”

Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard. Chip & Dan Heath

Before trying to change behaviors, understand the barriers

We know that in sanitation, change is just as hard as it is anywhere else. That's why it helps to understand where the barriers to behavior change are – is it the elephant, rider, or path? Once we know, the action plan seems almost obvious.

The power of the elephant

Kory Russel (Co-Founder, [re.source Sanitation](#)) has a story that shows how powerful the elephant can be.

“In Mozambique, people were drinking contaminated water from traditional wells. The solution seemed obvious—give them easy access to clean water. So multiple wells were dug at convenient locations to provide uncontaminated water. Here's the kicker. After all this, people continued to walk further to drink the contaminated water. Why? It was the elephant. The people had an emotional connection to the traditional well water because they had grown up with that taste. An emotional connection so strong that it overcame the fact that they knew it was contaminated, and that they had to walk further. The new water just didn't taste right.”

Engaging the rider

Ada Oko Williams (Senior WASH Manager, [WaterAid](#)) was trying to promote a community led approach to sanitation in Senegal.

“The Senegalese government was aiming to implement a national standard rural toilet. The catch was that it cost 400 dollars per household. It was clearly unaffordable, yet the government could not see any other option. So I took the Senegalese government on a journey to Nigeria to introduce them to a community led approach to sanitation, where the focus was on optimizing with low cost solutions. It opened their eyes to the prospect of being able to tackle open defecation without needing a 'national standard' product. The rider was engaged. And the mindset changed.”

Finding the path

In Enugu, Nigeria, Ada was working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to promote individual toilets.

“The right emotions were engaged, and people were aware of the benefits of having a toilet. But the path was a nightmare. People had to go to the plumbing store to get the pipes. Go somewhere else to buy the basin. Somewhere else again to buy the bricks. Then you needed to look for a builder. This was a no-brainer. It was the path that needed fixing.”

In Haiti, Kory was collaborating with [SOIL](#) to get people to dry flush—use cover materials like ash or sawdust in a container-based sanitation system.

“They just weren't using enough. There was no emotional barrier here, nor was there a lack knowledge. It was just the lack of cover material – the path was the barrier. So the solution was to distribute additional cover material through collection stations. And as soon as the path was shortened, the behavior changed. Simple, right?”

How ERP leads to change on the ground

User centered design firm 17 Triggers implements the ERP model in its projects by always asking three questions:

- Did we inspire the elephant?
- Does the rider know what to do?
- Did we shape the path to make change easy?

Lillian Diaz, CEO of 17 Triggers explains how the ERP model created change on the ground.

“We’ve done a lot of sanitation work in the last five years, supporting leading NGOs, social enterprises, and the Cambodian Ministry of Rural Development—and rural access to sanitation went up from 31.8% in 2010 to 53% in 2016. ERP has been a big factor in both stimulating the desire for latrines and boosting supply by applying ERP to the supply chain.”

To inspire the elephant and get people talking about owning a latrine, 17 Triggers shocked the market with a campaign that evoked strong emotions of shame and disgust via TV and radio spots. Of course the end users were not the only elephants to motivate. The campaign featured toolkits for NGOs and government stakeholders, along with games and puzzles that could be used at village events. There were also elephants in the village chiefs, for whom recognition meant everything. So a video was made to acknowledge and celebrate their role.

To direct the rider and shape the path for latrine business owners, sales agents and community volunteers, there were easy-to-use training and sales tools for door-to-door and group sales.

What’s the big picture for sanitation?

There are currently about 2.4 billion people living without sanitation worldwide. The six founding organizations of the [Container-Based Sanitation Alliance \(CBSA\)](#) are currently serving at least 65,000 users per day. While an impressive number, there is still a huge gap to bridge. The CBSA was formed in part to address the need for tools and evidence that will enable the replication of their model around the world. How can ERP help?

Elephant:

As sanitation practitioners, we need to think of how we can package our products and services in a way that feels aspirational and has an edge. We must make the entire chain of participants, not just end users, emotionally invested in that change.

Rider:

The right knowledge can change everything. We need to gather high quality knowledge and share it effectively among all stakeholders. This will change mindsets first, and then behaviors will follow.

Path:

We need to think of all the touchpoints where we can engage our user. By creating better product and service models, by using technology innovations, we can make sanitation more accessible to our targets.

That’s all the theory you need for ERP. Now let’s get on that elephant and hit the path.

[< Back to UCD uncensored](#)

 [image](#)

Stay Connected

Keep learning and keep connected!

If you were a participant, we would love for you to continue to reach out and stay in touch with your fellow participants. If you want to know more information about the event or get in touch with the organizing crew, drop us a line at UCDinSanitation@gatesfoundation.org and one of the team will get back to you as soon as possible.

Follow the Gates Foundation

-  [Facebook](#)
-  [Instagram](#)
-  [Twitter](#)