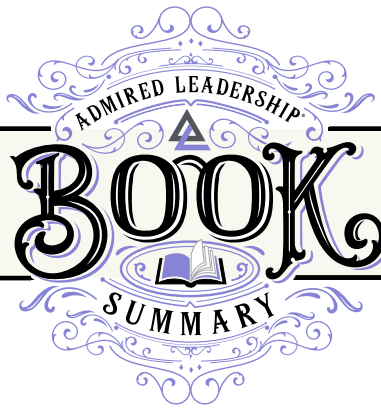




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



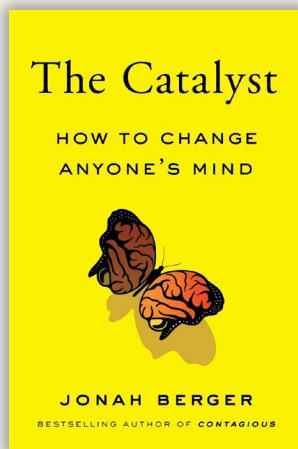
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# The Catalyst

How To Change Anyone's Mind

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Jonah Berger has spent the past fifteen years dissecting what makes people choose. From large decisions to small choices, what people value and what affects them has been at the core of his research and teachings as a marketing professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. In **The Catalyst**, Berger examines the walls that appear as we attempt to push, prod, and convince each other to buy products or see the world in another way. Rather than finding more ways to increase the volume of information, Berger describes five key roadblocks to change and the catalysts that help reduce them.

## The Five Catalysts

- **R**eactance
- **E**ndowment
- **D**istance
- **U**ncertainty
- **C**orroborating Evidence

Together, these create the acronym, **REDUCE**.

## KEY POINTS AND CONCEPTS

### Reactance

"The hardest part of learning something new is not embracing new ideas, but letting go of old ones." (p. 15)

**Case Study:** Smoking Prevention in Florida. After determining that years of advertising demonstrating the dangerous side effects of smoking were ineffective, Chuck Wolfe tried a new strategy. “Wolfe’s team landed on a devastatingly simple idea. Something they had never done before. They stopped telling kids what to do.” (p. 27) Wolfe formed the Teen Tobacco Summit, where teens took the lead in understanding manipulation by the tobacco industry and the adverse effects of smoking themselves. By not demanding anything from teens, the campaign allowed its target market to make decisions about smoking using available information. “Within a couple years it cut teen smoking rates in half. It was the most effective large-scale prevention program. Ever.” (p. 28)

“Restriction generates a psychological phenomenon called reactance. An unpleasant state that occurs when people feel their freedom is lost or threatened.” (p. 23)


“To avoid reactance and the persuasion radar, then, catalysts allow for agency. They stop trying to persuade and instead get people to persuade themselves.” (p. 26)

**Providing a Menu:** Instead of demanding a certain response, which causes individuals to reject communication entirely, offering different paths allows a person to retain their agency and therefore remain open to change.


### Endowment

“People are attached to the status quo. To ease endowment, catalysts surface the costs of inaction and help people realize that doing nothing isn’t as costless as it seems.” (pp. 225-226)

**Case Study:** Financial Advising for Conservative Customers. After working with a particularly risk adverse client, financial advisor Gloria found that her client, Keith, was not receptive to risk because of his fear of losing his investments. Instead of barraging Keith with the potential gains available in the future, “Gloria started an imaginary clock on January 1. Then, for every phone call or meeting she had with Keith in the months that followed, she mentioned how much money Keith had lost by sticking to the status quo.” (p. 75) With time, Keith came to understand that his inertia was costing him, and he made the switch to a more diversified account.



*“People are attached to the status quo. To ease endowment, catalysts surface the costs of inaction and help people realize that doing nothing isn’t as costless as it seems.”*



“While doing nothing often seems costless, it’s often not as costless as it seems. The status quo may be fine—decent, even. But compared to something better, it’s worse.” (p. 77)

**Burn the Ships:** Using the example of Hernan Cortes burning his boats to force his army to invade and conquer, burning the ships refers to the act of removing choice in order to overcome indecision or inertia. “Compared to the situations more people face on a daily basis, this tactic of burning ships is extreme. And selfish. But similar, less drastic versions can be applied to a broad set of situations in which people are stuck in the status quo. Not completely taking the old option off the table, but making people realize and bear more of its true costs.” (p. 79)

“Catalyzing change isn’t just about making people more comfortable with new things; it’s about helping them let go of old ones.” (p. 82)

## Distance

“Too far from their backyard, people tend to disregard. Perspectives that are too far away fall in the region of rejection and get discounted, so catalysts shrink distance, asking for less and switching the field.” (p. 225)

**Case Study:** Political Canvassing. When asking Miami voters how they felt about transgender rights, most held unwavering opinions either for or against the issue. Rather than becoming defensive or offended by those with different beliefs, canvasser Virginia closed the distance in views with a technique called deep canvassing. “Rather than inhabiting someone else’s shoes, deep canvassing encourages voters to find a parallel situation from their own experience... Deep canvassing uses this to reduce prejudice.” (pp. 119-120)

**Ask for Less:** While asking someone to come over to your way of thinking may be too much of a reach, especially if they have an opposing view, starting with a smaller step will often lead to a greater acceptance over time. People have “zones of acceptance” within their periphery that determine what they will and will not agree with. As people’s perspective changes, their zone changes accordingly.

“Because when people move their position on the field, their zones and regions move with them. Consequently, rather than being squarely in the region of rejection, the final ask is now more in people’s zone of acceptance.” (pp. 110-111)

## Uncertainty

“Seeds of doubt slow the winds of change. To get people to unpause, catalysts alleviate uncertainty.

- Easier to try means more likely to buy.” (p. 225)

**Case Study:** Shoesite and online shopping. Online shoe store founder Nick Swinmurn found that customers were reluctant to purchase online despite the ease of finding their ideal products due to the uncertainty of shopping online. In order to overcome what has been called the “**uncertainty tax.**”

- Swinmurn became the first to offer free shipping on all of his shoes. The result was that the roadblock of loss fear was overcome and Shoesite flourished.

**The Uncertainty Tax:** “People are risk averse. They like knowing what they are getting, and as long as what they are getting is positive, they prefer sure things to risky ones.” (p. 137)

This loss aversion is so dramatic that “research suggests the potential gains of doing something have to be 2.6 times larger than the potential losses to get people to take action.” (p. 67) To overcome this, marketers must remove the perceived roadblocks of risk so that individuals count risk as either negligible or acceptable.

## Corroborating Evidence

“Some things need more proof. Catalysts find corroborating evidence, using multiple sources to help overcome the translation problem.” (p. 225)



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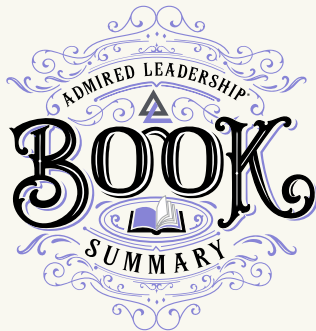


**Case Study:** Drug Interventions. It is difficult to those addicted to drugs to see past their own perspective to the problems they are causing for themselves and others. By corroborating with friends, family, and other loved ones, interventions are oftentimes successful because “a group carries the necessary weight to break through. If a bunch of friends and family members are all sitting there saying there’s a problem, it’s harder to think they’re all bias and misguided. Even though the addict might disagree, the fact that they’re all consistent makes it harder not to at least consider what they are saying.” (pp. 186-187)

“When someone hears a recommendation, they try to make sense of it. To sort out what the recommendation means. Does it say something about the thing being recommended, or does it just say something about the recommender themselves?” (p. 183) This is why offering multiple testimonies is so important.

**The Science of When:** Testimonies and recommendations spread out tend to lose their effectiveness and are dismissed. However, by concentrating on a message from multiple sources over a short period of time, the effectiveness of the message is greatly heightened.

Berger, J. (2020). **The Catalyst: How to Change Anyone’s Mind.** New York: Simon & Schuster Publishing Company.



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