

# The Power of Simplicity

By David Brewster

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I read a little 'management' book recently and was struck by how well it demonstrates the power of simplicity. The book, with the quirky title 'Who Moved My Cheese?', remains a business best-seller four years after its original release. It has sold well over 10 million copies in hard-back alone.

'Who Moved my Cheese?' was written by Spencer Johnson (of 'The One Minute Manager' fame). It is a book about change and the way we handle change. Its lessons are taught through the telling of a simple parable. We follow the fortunes of four characters (named Sniff and Scurry, Hem and Haw) as they move through the maze which is their lives.

'Cheese' is a paradox in a publishing industry which produces hundreds of business books every year. Most of these books are thick, complex and offer countless checklists for success.

In contrast, 'Cheese' is thin (only 96 pages), offers no explicit solutions to anything and makes almost no reference to business at all.

To summarise the lessons of this book would be to do it an injustice: you need to read it for yourself. But the success of Johnson's approach has a lot to teach us about how simplicity can make written communication more accessible. Consider these four characteristics:

\* 'Cheese' uses SIMPLE LANGUAGE. Through its use of parable, the book speaks to a wide audience. Although marketed primarily as a management book, it has something to teach staff at all levels as well as parents, teenagers - even politicians.

\* The book FOCUSES ON THE BASICS. It strips the topic of 'change' down to its bare essentials without clouding them in detail. Its philosophy is that while the details may be important, they can always come later. But they will be worth nothing if the fundamentals are not understood first.

\* It DOESN'T DO OUR THINKING FOR US. This book encourages us to interpret its lessons for ourselves. In this way, our conclusions are much more powerful and much more likely to stay with us.

\* Perhaps most powerful of all, the book's CONCEPTS CAN BE EASILY SHARED. Readers of 'Cheese' become members of an informal 'club'. They share a new 'language' and can readily compare each others' individual approaches to change using the simple cheese and maze analogy.

'Getting the message across' - to our market, to our customers, to our co-workers, to our staff - is a

fundamental part of business. Johnson's success proves yet again that keeping things simple is an effective way to have more of your audience understand what you are trying to say.

We should never underestimate the power of simplicity.

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