

WHAT STICKS...AND WHAT DOESN'T

STICKY

Politics

President Bush's "**axis of evil.**" Combining the zip of President Reagan's "evil empire" with the scale of the enemy confronted in World War II, this phrase had all the hallmarks of a sticky idea. It was simple, unexpected, concrete—and, when it was first uttered only months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it tapped into the country's greatest fears.

Health

The Atkins diet. The secret here was Atkins's "epic unexpectedness," say the Heaths: "Eat a diet of bunless bacon cheeseburgers and lose weight." The idea caught on with the speed of an urban legend. Everyone seemed to know someone who'd lost 30 pounds. Only after its founder died of a heart attack did the Atkins craze begin to fade.



Marketing

Subway's Jared campaign. How's this for sticky? A 425-pound college kid with a 60-inch waist loses 200 pounds—200 pounds!—by eating sub sandwiches. The campaign's namesake may be slightly overexposed seven years later, but in 2000, Subway's "Jared" ads boosted sales by nearly 20 percent.



Business

Johnson & Johnson's corporate credo. "We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services." To the Heaths, this is that rare mission statement—concrete and emotional—that gives workers an idea of what their priorities should be in their own jobs, whether they're janitors or surgeons.



UNSTICKY

Bush's "**mission to Mars.**" It may have been a noble idea, but Bush's space speech left him looking like a JFK wannabe. The reason: "a lack of credibility," say the Heaths. Announced just before his 2004 State of the Union with a war on and the economy in the tank—"not even Bush's closest advisers seemed to believe he was serious."

The revised **food pyramid.** Spend five minutes on the Department of Agriculture's website, and it's clear the new nutritional recommendations are anything but sticky. "Can anyone make sense of this?" ask the Heaths. "It's not concrete and certainly not simple. In fact, in its latest incarnation, it's not clear why it's a pyramid."



A dot-com-era **Super Bowl ad** featuring a marching band getting devoured by wolves. This commercial had nothing to do with the company's mission and nothing to do with its products. It was just an attention-grabber. The Heaths can't remember what it was advertising. Most likely, neither can you.

ExxonMobil's guiding principle. "ExxonMobil Corporation is committed to being the world's premier petroleum and petrochemical company. To that end, our goal is to continuously achieve superior financial and operating results while adhering to the highest standards of business conduct." The Heaths call this "idea Teflon—completely unsticky." It's vague and forgettable.

