

BOOK REVIEW

**WHO MOVED MY CHEESE? AN AMAZING WAY TO DEAL
WITH CHANGES, DR. SPENCER JOHNSON, VERMILION
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Who moved my cheese is an astounding write up on changes and how changes affect four interesting characters in a maze where all look for cheese; with cheese being used as an object of desire viewed by different character from different perspective. Since its arrival, this book is being used by men and women alike to deal with changes in their personal as well as professional life, in small as well as big organizations featuring users like universities, business entities, hospitals and even by the US military.

The writer, Dr. Spencer Johnson, is an internationally recognized speaker and author of the One minutes series: The One minute Sales Person, The One minute Mother, The One minute Father, The One minute Teacher and One Minute for Yourself. Other than his one minute series he has written best sellers i.e. The Precious Present, a perennial gift favorite; Yes or No, a guide to better decisions; and Value Tales ©, the popular children's book. His insights have helped many people discover and realize simple truth about life, and achieve greater success with less stress. His work is just like the stroke of a genius when it comes to representing complex issues in simple form and with simple solution.

There are three sections in this book. With the first section featuring a reunion of some sort where former class friends gather and talk about their trying to deal with changes that takes place around them. Second phase is the core of the entire book, where "who moved my cheese" story is told. Last comes the "discussion" session where the participants of this gathering try to bring in the cheese story in their life and start all over again. Dr. Johnson uses a mere straight forward cheese-change story with no reference whatsoever to the theoretical aspects of management of changes. The

book does not even cross 100 pages with the center story being only about 72 pages long. This again accounts for Johnson's sticking to simple but profound thoughts and artwork. There is hardly any direct theoretical aspect covered in this book, however this book can serve as an excellent supplement for courses like, Organizational Behavior, management courses, like Principles of Management, Human Resource Management or Change Management. It can be very useful even in training/workshop that focuses on Stress and change.

In this book the writer depicts four characters. Two mice and two little people who live in a maze searching for "cheese". The two mice are named: Sniff and Scurry. The two little people are named "Hem" and "Haw". All four characters live in a maze looking for cheese. Here, maze and cheese are metaphorically used to represent as follows: maze, where you spend time to look for what you want or your cheese, the object of your desire which can be career, money, love etc. As the story progress, readers will be able to identify themselves with any of the four characters. One may find himself/herself like Sniff who sniffs out changes early or Scurry who scurries into action, Hem who denies and resist changes as he fears it will lead to something worse or Haw who learn to adapt in time when he sees changes leads to something better. All four characters live in this maze looking for their own special cheese.

In the first section, the story starts off with the cheese story being narrated by a character named "Michael" amidst his group of friends Angela, Nathan, Carlos and others. All of them were facing difficulties in terms of change taking place in their life. It was Michael who learned the cheese story

and shared with his friends how it changed and shaped the fate his business and its employees.

In the second section, “The Story of Who Moved My Cheese” there goes the story of Sniff and Scurry and Hem and Haw each looking for cheese to nourish them and make them feel contented. Being mice Sniff and Scurry represents simple rodent brains with good instincts looking for hard nibbling cheese just like other mice do. However, Hem and Haw, the two little people possessing the complex brain of today’s people with passion and opinions of their own, were looking for a cheese with capital C to feel happy.

Every morning all four of them would put on their jogging shoes and get ready to search for cheese in the complex maze with many a dark allies with no cheese at all. For the mice it meant using a trial and error method to find out cheese. If there were no cheese in one corridor of the maze that could not be sniffed out by *Sniff*, they would simply move on to the other, keeping in mind the corridors where they did not find any. Often they bumped into the wrong wall but again *Sniff* would use his great nose and *Scurry* would lead the way to move into action. Although shown as mice both of these characters represent the simpler part of the human nature that acts on instinct and good speed.

The two little people *Hem* and *Haw* also used their complex brain to remember the old ways and sometimes they would be successful and sometimes their complex thought simply blurred their way of thinking.

However as the story goes, the two mice and little people all found their way after many a days hard work the way to cheese station C, with sufficient cheese of their taste. For the two mice when they found cheese station C, they took off their shoes and hung up across their shoulders incase of emergency. This gesture depicts those of us who are always cautious, looking out for action again despite an apparently favorable condition.

The two little people, however, changed their life style when they found this seemingly endless supply of rich, nutritious cheese with no idea whatsoever as to who put those cheese in that station. Instead of running into cheese station C, they took their time to get there and upon reaching their destiny, they put up their suits and running shoes and start wearing slippers! Ultimately they

moved their house very close to the cheese station C, decorating their walls with pictures of cheese, admiring them and they also put up the writing “Having cheese makes you happy”. Interestingly as the story goes in each turning point the mice wrote down similar realization in their walls.

This so called sure supply of cheese made both *Hem* and *Haw* very arrogant and eventually they began to think the cheese as *their* cheese with no notice of changes around them. Sniff and Scurry on the other hand continued their daily routine of sniffing out even the subtle changes if any that are taking place and get down to the business of having cheese.

Hence when one fine morning when *Sniff* and *Scurry* arrived at cheese station C, finding no cheese there they simply put on their running shoes which they always carried around their shoulders in case of emergency and simply went for searching new cheese. Truly these two represents those of us who are always alert and prepared for contingency and simply accepts changes and tries to solve accordingly by getting into action.

As for *Hem* and *Haw*, their reaction to finding no cheese was simply stupendous. They could not believe at all that there was no cheese left. *Haw* wrote on the wall “ The more important your cheese is to you, the more you want to hold onto it.” They never thought before as to who put cheese in the maze in the first place, but now they started blaming this unknown identity, grudging for unfairness of this action. They waited every day that situation would change, who ever took their cheese would put it back there again.

This indeed symbolizes those of us not bothering to analyze our situation until the bad day arrives. For what causes/brings in the good days, absence of these eventually leads to the bad days. People like *Hem* and *Haw* take a lot of time to realize change and spends too much on back ground analysis and not moving into action required. Nevertheless it was *Haw* who realized that in order to find new one must move forward and dare venture into unknown territory if to be spared from hunger and stressful uncertainly. “ If you do not change you become extinct”. This realization is what made *Haw* move forward. After many trials he won his new cheese station N that was found much earlier by the two mice Sniff and Scurry.

What Dr. Spencer has tried and became successful in depicting is the human nature through Hem and Haw. People like Hem are never likely to change and they search through past again and again to feel the by gone golden time of i.e. business or good fortune. They eventually become extinct and have to be left out of the business. Not only they are unable to see and handle and accept changes but also they refuse any help offered to them. That is why we see in the story Hem refusing Haws offering to have new cheese from cheese station N.

On the other hand there is Hem, who although lately realized that changes do take place and by sticking to the old place it leads to extinction only. They learn from their experience that changes do not take place suddenly but gradually if one is watching over their cheese like Sniff and Scurry. Hems writing over the wall “ Smell the Cheese often so you know when it is getting Old” corroborates this fact. Hem was venturing into the uncertainty with much fear, then again he learned to dream about his success to overcome his fear.

Hems writings on the wall depicting simple but hard truths like: “ movement in a new direction helps you find new cheese”, “ When you move beyond your fear, you feel free”, Imagining Myself enjoying new cheese leads me to it before I find it”, “ The quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you find new cheese”, “ It is safer to search in the maze than remain in a cheese less situation”, “ Old belief do not lead you to new cheese”, “ When you see that you can find and enjoy new cheese you change course” etc. confirms the simple truth of survival. That is, nothing but change is permanent. Hence one should always anticipate and be ready for changes and actually “enjoy new cheese” when it takes place.

The third and final section “ A discussion” that takes place between the narrator and his friends

sort of associates themselves with one of the character of the story. People identified themselves with Sniff, Scurry, Hem and Haw. People cannot seem to well adapt themselves with changes for sometimes they are too obvious and simple to reckon with and sometimes they forget that not responding to changes as it is deemed essential is often the permanent cause to disaster and failure. To overcome fear of change by laughing at ourselves and finding out whom I represent in the story makes the story easy to accept. I am sure once someone reads it, no one would want to become Hem.

The good thing about this book is that it uses a combination of metaphor and realty. The story was told by a human and staged in the backdrop of a maze with little mice and little people on the stage. This draws the attention of the reader still keeping the subject simple but informative. In the end again the discussion that takes place between the storyteller and his friends sort of guides the reader to link realty and metaphor.

This book forces people to look at the obvious. As I mentioned that it’s not a great book on theory learning. However it has the simple but truly wonderful way of looking at the obvious that is recognition of changes taking place in the vicinity. The book is a success in teaching people the facts about life and I would definitely suggest anyone aspiring to be successful go through this book at least once for it certainly is “maze time” the time to change.

REFERENCE

Johnson, Dr. Spencer, *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way Too Deal With Changes* Vermilion Publishing House, London.