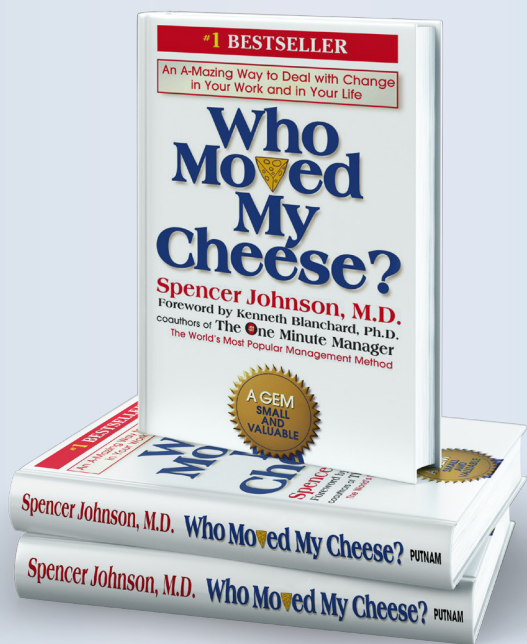


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



Who Moved My Cheese?

by Spencer Johnson, M.D.

Spencer Johnson, M.D. was one of the world's most respected thinkers and beloved authors. His 13 international bestselling books also include *An A-Mazing Way to Deal with Change*, *The One Minute Manager* co-authored with Ken Blanchard, and *The Present*. Dr. Johnson is often referred to as "the best there is at taking complex subjects and presenting simple solutions that work." He was Chairman of *Who Moved My Cheese?* LLC, a company devoted to helping people and organizations change successfully.

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Sometimes Things Change... And So Should We

The Legacy

Who Moved My Cheese? was written over two decades ago and still sells steadily around the globe. The book's riotous success was an utter surprise to the publishing world, particularly after its slow start. But author Spencer Johnson, who died at the age of 78 in 2017, knew he had something special. He worked tirelessly giving presentations and talks about the book and word began to spread about the big promise contained in the pages of this little book.

Executives started recommending it and companies started ordering the book for their employees, including Southwest Airlines who purchased nearly 30,000 copies. The book became a fixture on bestsellers lists with millions of copies sold in countries far and wide. Simple as the story may be, *Who Moved My Cheese?* has been credited with changing lives, saving marriages, and catapulting careers all over the world.

The Premise

This classic business parable aims to teach readers how to react to change in the most beneficial and meaningful way possible. The story features four characters:

- **Sniff:** a mouse who senses change early on
- **Scurry:** a mouse who springs into action as soon as change is noticed
- **Hem:** one of the Littlepeople characters who out of fear denies that change is happening
- **Haw:** the other one of the Littlepeople who adapts to change realizing it can lead to something better

These four funny characters find themselves in a Maze searching for Cheese, but changes keep happening that make finding the Cheese a challenge. The "Cheese" in the story represents the things that people look for, sometimes all of their lives: a big house, ample money, good health, peace within, freedom to do what they wish, or even just the time and energy to pursue a hobby.



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The “Maze” represents where humans spend all of their time in pursuit of Cheese. It could be the place a person lives, where someone works, or the relationships they have.

The characters represent the simple and complex parts of ourselves—both of which have advantages in different applications. Every person has their own Cheese and every person believes that getting the Cheese will lead to happiness. When we have the Cheese, we are very attached to it. When we do not, we are lost or even traumatized.

The Story

Johnson set the scene for his story by telling readers about the four little characters “who ran through a Maze looking for Cheese to nourish them and make them happy.” The mice, Sniff and Scurry and the Littlepeople, Hem and Haw, spent time in the Maze each and every day looking for their own special kind of Cheese.

Sniff and Scurry were simple-minded, as to be expected of mice. Hem and Haw were more complex with many emotions, beliefs, and desires when it comes to Cheese. Despite their differences, their early days in the Maze were very similar. They got up early every morning, outfitted themselves in jogging attire, and ran into the Maze looking for the right kind of Cheese.

Sniff and Scurry used “the simple trial-and-error method of finding Cheese.” They would rush down each corridor of the Maze and see if there was any Cheese there. If there wasn’t, they moved quickly to the next one. Sniff used his sense of smell and Scurry used his speed. The pair often went the wrong way, got lost, and had mishaps but in time, they eventually found their way.

The Littlepeople found life in the Maze more challenging as “their powerful human beliefs and emotions took over and clouded the way they looked at things.” Ultimately, however, all of the characters found what they had been searching for “one day at the end of one of the corridors in Cheese Station C.”

Things were easy for all of the characters now. They knew exactly where to find their Cheese and could easily navigate to it every day.

Even still, the mice kept up with a rigorous routine, rising early every morning as they had always done, racing their way to Cheese Station C. The mice even performed checks to make sure the Cheese supply was still ample and that nothing had changed at Station C.

The Littlepeople fell into a bit of a different routine as time passed, though. They started sleeping in a little later and took their time getting to Station C. They became comfortable and even complacent. They regarded the large stock of Cheese as their very own.

They came to believe that they deserved the Cheese, as they had worked long and hard to find it. Despite the fact that they didn’t really know where the Cheese came from or how long it would last, they felt secure that the Cheese would always be

there and for a long while, that was the case.

Hem and Haw were so comfortable in their success that they didn’t see what was slowly happening right in front of them. Their supply of Cheese was dwindling to the point of disappearing altogether.

Sniff and Scurry, on the other hand, had taken the time to keep up with their routine and never take their Cheese for granted. They looked around Station C every day and noticed that things were changing over time. When the day arrived that there was no Cheese at all at Station C, Sniff and Scurry were not at all surprised, but Hem and Haw were aghast.

Sniff and Scurry got right to work, lacing up their running shoes and setting out in search of New Cheese.

Hem and Haw, on the other hand, felt they had been scandalized. They stormed around claiming that it wasn’t fair. They demanded to know, “Who moved my Cheese?” They were stunned in disbelief. They wondered how this could have happened. “It wasn’t right. It was not the way things were supposed to be.”

When the Littlepeople returned the next day to Station C to find that it was still empty, they began to think about their problem. They debated whether or not they deserved this, deciding that they definitely did not. They argued with one another over why this happened. Cheese was extremely important to the Littlepeople so they intended to take a long time figuring out what to do next.

Meanwhile, the mice were well on their way to finding New Cheese. Driven with the simple purpose of finding it, they explored all options, including areas of the Maze they had never seen before. Eventually they arrived at Cheese Station N, where they found a big supply of New Cheese.

As time wore on, Hem and Haw became irritable, frustrated, and increasingly worried. Haw had a flash of determination and told Hem they should get out of Station C and go in search of New Cheese. But alas, Hem discouraged him, saying they were too old to try New Cheese and didn’t need to get lost or make fools of themselves. Despondent, they returned to Station C each day to find it empty.

Finally, they decided to at least turn over every stone at Station C and make sure there really was nothing left. They got some tools and started working. They got up early, stayed long hours, and worked very hard to find Cheese at Station C. Of course, their search came up empty, but their futile efforts finally uncovered a revelation. They were doing things the same way over and over again, but nothing was getting any better. That had to change.

Haw asked himself, “Where am I more likely to find Cheese?—here or in the Maze?” He knew the answer. He visualized himself going into the Maze and was surprised when the thought put a smile on his face. He imagined that he would get lost from time to time, but his courage swelled as he realized he could find his way out of any missteps. With this newfound strength he said, “Sometimes, Hem, things change and they are never the same again. This looks like one of those times. That’s



He came to understand that this unexpected twist, this change, could lead to something better than what he had before.

life! Life moves on. And so should we.” With that, Haw ventured into the unknown to search for New Cheese while Hem remained paralyzed into inaction by his fear.

While Haw searched for New Cheese he had time to reflect on what went wrong with the Cheese in the first place. He began to realize that he could have avoided being taken by surprise if he had only been more in tune with the Cheese. If he had taken time to stop and check in with his supply of Cheese, he may have noticed it was becoming depleted. Also, he noticed that if he was taking action in this new direction, he felt much better than if he stopped and let his mind return to fear. He became free the more he moved in this new direction. He pictured all that he could gain from this new search rather than what he had lost in the old one.

He came to understand that this unexpected twist, this change, could lead to something better than what he had before. This gave him strength and energy to move ahead with more enthusiasm and speed than ever. The more he let go of the pain and regret involving the old Cheese, the more New Cheese he would find. He was sure of it.

Haw began to understand that his beliefs were changing. He used to think that it was best to avoid anything new and scary. His search for New Cheese taught him that “the fear you let build up in your mind is worse than the situation that actually exists.”

His thoughts used to be clouded with worry and he used to focus on all the things that could go wrong instead of all the things that could go right. He was coming to see that change is natural and is going to happen whether you are expecting it or not. “You can believe that change will harm you and resist it. Or you can believe that finding New Cheese will help you and embrace the change.” You get to choose which way you believe.

After a long while of searching, Haw finally arrived at Cheese Station N where he found the most abundant supply of Cheese he’d ever seen, and he found his old buddies Scurry and Sniff.

Haw thought often about his friend Hem and wondered if he would be able to convince him to change if he ever ran into him again. He decided that Hem would have to learn the lessons on his own. Everyone has to come to see the advantage of change for themselves.

The Lessons

The story of Sniff, Scurry, Hem, and Haw is laced with lessons that can be applied to someone’s professional or personal life.

Some of those lessons include:

- Keep things simple. Overcomplicating matters can lead to stagnation.
- When things change, don’t get bogged down in worry and fear. Be flexible and move forward quickly.
- When change happens, there are other opportunities out there. You just have to get out there and search for them.
- When we become too comfortable with things, we can miss the subtle cues that things are changing.
- Sometimes you need to let go and move on to stay healthy, well, and happy.
- Change does not always have to come from an external source. There are times when you should initiate the change yourself.

Even though it was originally published more than twenty years ago, Johnson’s message has never been more relevant. Change happens. Now more than ever, society is learning that we need to be adaptable, flexible, and able to handle the stress that comes along with unavoidable change. Further, some of the changes that are forced upon us can lead to a happier, healthier, more well-rounded life. Every company and indeed, every person, who wants to stay competitive and thrive in an ever-evolving future must be able to react to change in a healthy, productive way.

Of course, the messages and lessons conveyed in the story are presented in simplistic terms to the extreme. However, some would argue that this characteristic is precisely why this parable endures, being just as popular today as it was two decades ago. Historian Mitch Horowitz called it “the consummate American self-help book.”

Who Moved My Cheese? helps people release negative energy around change and find profound benefits that can impact their career and personal lives, now and well into the future. It has done just that for countless people all over the world over the course of decades. Although we all understand that not all change is good, we can all agree that our ability to learn how to live in the face of changes, small and great, leads to a more enjoyable life. Johnson’s story drives that point home in a memorable, actionable way.