

# Less is more

by Cyriel Kortleven



If you're not paying attention for one minute on the internet, then you miss 1.500 blog posts, 98.000 tweets, 600 new YouTube movies and 168 million emails. We live in a society with an abundance of products and services, connections, technologies, information but sometimes it's too much.

At Starbucks, you can choose from 87.000 combinations. That's probably even more than you can try out in your whole life. Another example is the comparison sites. The only purpose of these sites is to compare different websites with each other (e.g. to buy a car or insurance or even diapers). But now, you already have comparison sites of comparison sites to help us make the right choice (E.g. [www.snakewool.nl](http://www.snakewool.nl) or [www.comparethecomparisonsites.com](http://www.comparethecomparisonsites.com)).

For me as an international speaker on creativity and innovation, the 'less is more'-principle brings awareness at the other side of innovation. Innovation is mostly associated with the new and the future. But we also need to spend attention to free up resources like time, energy and awareness and the 'less is more' principle focuses on that part.

It is only logical to think that if some choice is good, more is better. More possibilities to benefit from and if you do not care, just ignore the 200 versions of cereal that you have not tried. Yet Barry Schwartz has done research and has found that this assumption is wrong. Although some choice is undoubtedly better than none, more is not always better than less. Too many choices can lead to the paradox of choice. At that moment, people get paralyzed by the number of options, get stress, are afraid to make a wrong choice and it can even lead to a depression. There are three principles you can apply to gain more with less: start to stop, simplify and let go.

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**CONT.**

# START TO STOP

## 1. Skip a meeting this week

In every organization, people sometimes complain about the meetings and, this is a correlation between the level of your function and the number of meetings. Meetings cost billions of dollar (salaries, travel time, accommodation) and a lot of those meetings are not efficient or effective. A lot of times, just a little part of the meeting is relevant for you and other ways of communicating might be a lot more interesting.

The next time when you have to go to a meeting with not a lot of relevance for you, just skip it. If the company still functions (maybe even better because you spend time to things that were really important) than you know that that meeting is irrelevant (at least for you).

## 2. Make list of useless rules in your organization

One of the results of having meetings is the useless rules. A lot of rules have been very relevant in the past but not anymore because the world has changed (new competitors, new technologies) but most of the time, nobody dares to abolish the rule. This is because we do this procedure already so many years - certainly in bigger companies because nobody knows who invented the rule.

Put a big flipchart paper in a central place (not visible for visitors but accessible for all employees) and let employees write down rules that are not relevant anymore (and most of the time distracting people from the real work). If more people find the same rule irrelevant than it might be interesting to abolish that rule.

### 3. Create a quit list

We are very good in making to do lists and it looks like those lists always get longer. It might be very interesting to start a quit list. This is a list where you note down all the activities that you don't want to do anymore. Take a few minutes to write down things that you're still doing but don't want anymore. Take the most important one - the one that takes the most energy and give yourself four weeks to make sure that you take the necessary actions (stop, delegate, communicate) to check this action from your quit list.

# SIMPLIFY

### 1. Summarize your day in a tweet

As high-educated people, we have a tendency to use complex words and jargon. Sometimes it's very good to be forced to go to the essence - a very hard but rewarding exercise. Twitter is a great example (if you use it right) to communicate the essence of something. If you should summarize your day (or week or job or even life) in one tweet which 140 characters would you use?

### Build routines to get inspired

It looks like a contradiction but sometimes it helps to build a routine (a pattern) to get inspired. A lot of times, we don't plan time to get inspired and just continue the retrace. One inspiration moment for me is Friday morning (at that moment my cleaning lady is coming). I leave the house, to let her focus on her job and allow myself to get lost in social media (twitter, a selection of blogs and some LinkedIn groups). The purpose is to find at least three elements that I can integrate or use in my presentations (or writing).

# LET GO

## Allow slack time

Most people know the story of how Google gives every employee 20% 'free' time to spend on new ideas and innovation (HP and 3M were already doing similar programs – back in 1948). Several new products and services of the new products originate from the 20% 'innovation' time. Tom DeMarco describes this very well in his book 'Slack' which means the degree of freedom required to effect change. If you work too efficiently, there's no room for flexibility and innovation anymore and business becomes busyness. So don't plan your agenda 100% full but allow time to be surprised or act on sudden opportunities.

## Introduce Mr. Iddi

A lot of times organizations are busy with finding the department or person to blame when something goes wrong. In essence, there's nothing wrong with finding the cause of a problem - to make sure that it will not happen again and real learning can happen. But in many cases, a lot of energy is lost during this crusade to find the 'guilty' (with accusations, deception and a lot of other negative energy).

Most of the time it is a problem that results from a coincidence of different actions and is not it due to one guilty person. What would happen if we could transform all this negative energy in a positive exploration to make sure that the problem will not happen again? It is possible. From the moment something goes wrong, Mr. IDDI is the guilty one. IDDI stands for 'I Didn't Do It' and it's no longer necessary to invest energy in finding the wrongdoer. The focus can switch to positive solutions and ideas to make sure that the situation won't repeat itself.

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LESS IS MORE

**Cyriel is working on his new book 'Lss s mr'** that will be ready in September 2013. You can subscribe to his mailing list (max 6 times / year) to get updated about this book-project @ [www.cyrielkortleven.com](http://www.cyrielkortleven.com)