ANY INTELLIGENT FOOL CAN MAKE THINGS BIGGER, MORE COMPLEX, AND MORE VIOLENT. IT TAKES A TOUCH OF GENIUS – AND A LOT OF COURAGE – TO MOVE IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

E.F. Schumacker
INTRODUCTION

This book is not about design. It’s not about lifehacking. It’s not about time-management. It’s about getting inspired by a multitude of tools and examples from various industries that have implemented the ‘Less is Beautiful’ theme. My target audience is the professional operating within the business community or government and who’s looking for ways to gain more results with less effort.

Nowadays you can follow a course ‘write a book in 3 days’, ‘start your own business in a week’ or ‘speak Spanish in 7 days’. You might consider these to be great examples of ‘less is more’. But I disagree with that opinion. Should you wish to integrate the ‘Less is Beautiful’ principles in your private or professional lives, this will hardly be as easy as it seems. Real simplicity, daring to stop activities or letting go of control is very difficult to achieve and requires a lot of perseverance. You have to work very hard to detect and conquer complexity and fixed thinking patterns. It took me several months (& probably some ideas were already boiling for years) to write this book. I’m very proud that you have the fruits of my labour in your hands.

You will discover 69 tools and examples of how widely divergent industries approach the ‘Less is Beautiful’ theme. The collection of these diverse examples, summarised in 300 words and a beautiful, simple design, make this book unique. Chances are big that you will already know some of the examples, because several books have been written about some famous companies like Apple, Google and Philips. And they’ve certainly earned a place in this book, but in addition I’ve interviewed and corresponded with a lot of people whose companies are only known in a very specific industry, yet deserve to be shared with the general business world.

But why does an international speaker on Creativity and Innovation write a book about ‘Less is Beautiful’? The reason is very simple. Most people associate creativity only with new products and services. But that’s only a small piece of the pie. Creativity is becoming more and more important - certainly in times of crisis - in order to add more added value using less resources (time, money, people). You need to be creative to stop projects that are no longer adding any value, to simplify complex processes and let go of rules in order to regain the trust from your employees, clients and other stakeholders.

I can write a lot more about the reasons why I’ve written this book but, ‘Less is Beautiful’. Enjoy!
DOING LESS WITH LESS IS THE NEW REALITY!
BUT HEY, IF YOU USE CYRIEL INSIGHTS, YOUR
OUTLOOK WILL BE BEAUTIFUL.
THE FUTURE IS LOADED WITH FUN ON YOUR
WAY TO BUSINESS HAPPINESS...

RENÉ C.W. BOENDER
Brain agent & author Great to Cool & Cool is Hot
‘Less is beautiful’ is a sentence born at the Ideas Island from Fredrik Härén, author and speaker originally from Sweden, but now residing and working in Singapore, yet giving presentations all over the world. I’ve had the opportunity to be the first guest on his third Ideas Island. More about this great Ideas Island initiative further on in this book.

While we were chatting at ‘the inspiration bench’ and talking about my book project with the former title ‘Lss = mr’, Fredrik told me the story of how IT-programmers use the term ‘beautiful code’ if the programming code is simple and clear (no unnecessary lines or complex formulas).

And that’s how ‘Less is beautiful’ was born, since this book should also be simple and clear (and beautiful). My deepest gratitude to Fredrik for the inspiration and the opportunity to fine-tune the concept during my stay at the Ideas Island.

HOW SHOULD YOU READ THIS BOOK?
It’s very simple.

• Every chapter opens with a framing of the topic.
• Every page is a different story that focuses on a certain part of the theme and can be read on its own. So the order in which you read this book is not important.
• There’s a tweet on every page with a question or an insight.
• On the left-hand page you will find a small drawing with a lot of empty space, so feel free to write down your own notes or use the empty space as room for reflection.
• At the end of the book, you’ll find a list with ‘Sources of Inspiration’.
• The icons help you to swiftly navigate through the book.
THE BEAUTY OF ‘LESS’ LIES IN THE CONSIDERATION, EFFORT AND HONESTY THAT IT IMPLIES. LESS IS ACHIEVED THROUGH THE HARD WORK OF EDITING, POLISHING, WINNOWING - ALL ACTIVITIES THAT REQUIRE US TO THINK ABOUT ONE ANOTHER THROUGH EMPATHETIC EYES.

IRENE ETZKORN
Chief Clarity Strategist at Siegelvision
WHY MORE IS TOO MUCH
If you’re not paying attention for one minute on the internet, you will miss 1,500 blogposts, 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 simply too much.

At Starbucks, you can choose from 87,000 combinations. That’s probably more than you can try out in your whole life. Another example are the comparison sites. The only purpose of these sites is to compare different websites with one another (eg 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 (eg snakewool.nl or comparethecomparisonsites.com).

Barry Schwartz mentions in his book The Paradox of Choice that some choice is undoubtedly better than none but too many choices can lead to the paradox of choice. And that can lead to extra stress, fear of making a wrong choice and even depression.

For those reasons, sometimes more is too much. And at those very instants, you can apply one of the three principles to gain more with less: start to stop, simplify and let go. These three principles are interconnected with each other and you will notice that certain elements of the tools and examples within this book can be applied to several principles. For instance, a simple process can only be reached by reducing complex elements.
SHELLS OR STARFISH

The starfish is a story by Rob Bell. His son is playing on the beach when a giant, beautiful starfish comes floating by. His son looks up and wants to grab it, like any kid would. Rob yells over: “Go get it buddy”, but his son yells back: “I can’t.” Rob says: “Sure you can, just run into the water and grab it.” His son replies in frustration: “But Dad... I CAN’T.” Rob says: “Why not?” and his son answers: “My hands are full of tiny shells.”

You see, Rob’s son had been picking up all these little shells until his hands were full... so full that when the big starfish (= big opportunity) came passing by, he couldn’t reach out and grab it. He was too afraid to let go of the shells already in his hands.

The giant starfish was right there... right within his reach, but he just couldn’t let go in order to seize it.

Life and business are the same. There are times when you need to make sure you’re not clinging to the small shells, as this renders you unwilling to release and make room for what is bigger. Your hands can only hold so much. It’s hard to let go, after all, you’ve spent a lot of time collecting... but if you don’t, you’ll most likely regret it.
Expiration dates for food are very normal and widely accepted, but shouldn’t it be interesting to introduce expiration dates for rules? Most rules are generated when change is happening or when something goes wrong. In those instances, we’re very good—in a business context—in creating a new set of rules to cope with that particular change or problem. And most rules are very relevant and useful at that specific moment.

But the world isn’t a place where nothing ever happens. Quite the contrary, and Heraclitus already said in 500 BC that ‘The only constant is change’, which certainly applies to these times.

One might expect a wide range of flexible rules to keep pace with the ever changing world, but most rules hardly change at all. The majority of the rules we have today, originate from decades or in some cases even centuries ago. For instance, the QWERTY keyboard was deliberately designed in 1868 to slow you down to avoid pesky typewriter jams and in the US, the imperial system (inch, foot, yard, miles) is still in place based on the stature of people from the Middle Ages.

For that reason, I suggest that we start with expiration dates for rules (and maybe also laws). Every rule has a lifespan of maximum 5 years, after which it has to be evaluated. It is a moment of reflection to verify whether the rule is still relevant and whether the benefits still outweigh the disadvantages of installing the rule. If the answer is yes, then the rule can be reinstalled for a new period of 5 years. If not, it will be revoked.
THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

It is only logical to assume that having some choice is good, having more is better. More possibilities to benefit from and if you don’t care, just ignore the 200 varieties of cereal that you haven’t tried. Yet Barry Schwartz has done research and has found this assumption to be 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. When that occurs, people become paralyzed by the mere number of options, get stress, are afraid to make a wrong choice, all of which can even lead to depression.

FOMO = Fear Of Missing Out. A syndrome that can be found more and more among the younger generations. It’s the fear of living your life, only to notice one day that you have chosen the wrong path.

DO YOU ALSO SUFFER FROM ‘FOMO’ BECAUSE OF PAST BUSINESS DECISIONS?
COMPARE THE COMPARISON SITES

The variety of products and services is so vast that we already have a lot of sites to compare the different websites for insurances, energy, cars, books, dentists and yes, even diapers. But the story of these infinite possibilities does not end here. Now you even have some comparison sites to compare the comparison sites ... if you really want to be sure?!

CHOICE.com is an Australian costumer advocacy group where you can get expert, unbiased consumer information. From phones to fridges, and prams to GPS, products are put through their paces to ensure you get the best deal.

HOW ABOUT COMPARING THE COMPARING SITES? #EXAMPLES #TOOMUCH SNAKEWOOL.NL AND COMPARTHECOMPARISON SITES.COM
Have you ever been in a meeting where you couldn’t bring any added value to the topics? Or that lasted too long? Or where the discussions didn’t lead to an actual decision or understanding? Most likely the answer is yes. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that companies spent more than $37 billion every year on unnecessary meetings. And that’s just the financial cost of the salaries, not mentioning the negative effects on motivation, stress, burnouts, ...

In addition, one can also discern a clear correlation between the level in hierarchy and the number of meetings. Most top managers/executives spend more time in meeting rooms than with their employees or clients. Everybody is complaining about the abundance of meetings, but it appears to be difficult to change the situation.

Possible reasons are:

• Having meetings is a habit (a new department, product or process often leads to a periodical meeting)
• People associate the number of meetings with their status (more meetings means being more important)
• Lack of courage - people don’t dare to take decisions and try to spread the guilt (if something goes wrong) over a group of people
• Uncertainty - the goals or challenges are not clear, so let’s organise a meeting
• It’s more comfortable to sit in a meeting than to do hard work
• We don’t know any alternatives for a meeting (but they certainly exist)

Do you really need to be present at that meeting? #JustSkipIt and see if they missed your contribution.
“Zen is not some kind of excitement, but concentration on our usual everyday routine.” - Shunryu Suzuki

Leo Babauta (author of the Zen Habits blog - more than 260,000 subscribers) is a source of inspiration to find simplicity in the daily chaos of our lives. It’s about clearing the clutter, so we can focus on what’s important, create something amazing and find happiness. In one of his blogs, he shares some principles from Zen monks:

- Do one thing at a time (don’t multitask and focus on one thing).
- Do it slowly and deliberately (make your actions deliberate, not rushed and random).
- Do it completely (don’t move on to the next task until you’re finished).
- Do less (if you fill your day with tasks, you will be rushing from one thing to the next without contemplating on what you’re doing).
- Put space between things (don’t schedule things too close together - leave room in your schedule).
- Develop rituals (if it’s important enough to have a ritual, it’s important enough to be given your entire attention, and to be done slowly and correctly).
- Designate time for certain things (there’s a time for bathing, a time for work, a time for cleaning, a time for eating).

The different chapters in my book begin with a short story of a wise Zen master. Check out Presentation Zen from Garr Reynolds about simple ideas on presentation design and delivery.

SMILE, BREATHE AND GO SLOWLY.
The purpose of a rule is to standardize certain actions to improve your work or living conditions. Most rules are indeed very relevant and useful, but some organizations and governments have become experts in creating rules which are not all equally relevant. And we're not very good at scrapping rules and laws. Apparently, the last time a French law was scrapped was in 1789. Ever since, they have but accumulated them. In France, schools have to follow an 80-page document stipulating that children in day-care centres can eat a quarter of a hard-boiled egg per meal, in nurseries half an egg and in primary or secondary schools one and a half eggs. Even the French baguette must obey a rule that its length should not exceed 50-55 cm. But France is not the only country with crazy rules. They exist everywhere:

- In Victoria, Australia, only a licensed electrician is allowed to change a light bulb.
- In Alabama, it is illegal to be blindfolded while driving a vehicle.
- In England, it is an act of treason to place a postage stamp bearing the British monarch upside down.
- In Miami, Florida, it is illegal to skateboard in a police station.
- In Florida, unmarried women who parachute on Sundays can be jailed.
- In Singapore, chewing gum is illegal.

I'm not sure whether all of these laws still apply today, but these rules and laws sometimes force public bodies and private businesses to go to absurd and costly lengths to respect them. The key principle is to bring back common sense and hence save an enormous amount of money (and frustrations).

MAKE A LIST OF 3 CRAZY RULES OR GUIDELINES WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION AND TAKE ACTION TO GET THEM SCRAPPED.
EVERYBODY SPEAKS BODY LANGUAGE

Your body language - posture, gestures, facial expressions - can reveal a lot about your own feelings and intentions towards others. This communication mostly happens on an unconscious level, but you can train yourself in becoming aware of your own body language and observing others.

Patryk & Kasia Wezowski are the founders of the Centre for Body Language and they explained to me how you can discover a great deal about people by observing their micro expressions. Micro expressions are very short facial muscle movements that reflect your emotions. It is quite interesting that those very small (most of the time unconscious) expressions can reveal so much more - like an opinion about a product or person. They can also be used to determine whether somebody is telling the truth or not. After all, an individual’s spoken word and his body language can contradict one another.

The Centre for Body Language created software that learns us how to recognize facial expressions. It even predicted the outcome of the last Presidential Election in the US by measuring the feelings of people towards the presidential candidates. Learning to recognize these expressions can be very interesting for almost anyone who regularly interacts with other people.

Do you pay attention to the micro expressions of your client during a meeting? #bodylanguage
THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE

Generally speaking, we tend to provide too much information and show our expertise. This is called the Curse of Knowledge - you assume that your listener is also an expert in your domain (or at least very interested in it). In most situations, that’s not the case and our memory is very limited. Research shows that our conscious mind will remember approximately 7 things (give or take 2), which of course depends upon the task and the expectations that are set.

If you find yourself at a network meeting, those present will meet several new people, so make it easy for them. Don’t overwhelm them with details of your work, but make sure they will remember the most important thing about you.

WHAT’S THE ONE THING OTHERS SHOULD REMEMBER ABOUT YOU (OR YOUR COMPANY)?
Client: Goodmorning Sandwicht guy: Goodmorning, what can I do for you?
Client: I would like to order a tuna sandwich.
Sandwich guy: What bread would you like: Italian, white, wheat or honey oat?
Client: White please.
Sandwich guy: 6-inch or footlong?
Client: 6-inch.
Sandwich guy: Do you want butter on it?
Client: No butter please.
Sandwich guy: Do you want to have it toasted?
Client: Yes.
Sandwich guy: Vegetables?
Client: Yes everything except tomatoes.
Sandwich guy: What sauce would you like: mayonnaise, mustard, sweet onion, … ?
Client: Sweet onion.
Sandwich guy: Black pepper?
Client: Yes please.
Sandwich guy: Take away or eat in?
Client: Take away.
Sandwich guy: Pay with cash or credit card?
Client: Cash please.
Sandwich guy: Do you want a discount card - buying 10 sandwiches is one for free?
Client: Yes, sure.

Any idea how many decisions a client has to make when he orders something from your organisation?
MORE STUFF... MORE SPACE... MORE STRESS

‘We buy things we don’t need with money we don’t have to impress people we don’t like.’ Dave Ramsey

Most people still have some unpacked boxes with stuff that have moved (maybe several times) from your previous apartment or house to your new location. And chances are that you do no longer know the exact content of the box, let alone that you’re ever going to use it again. All that stuff leads to more debts, a bigger environmental footprint and more stress, because eventually you’re going to have to do something about it.

The self storage industry is the fastest growing segment of the commercial real estate industry and appears to be recession resistant. There are almost 50,000 facilities in the US and around 12,000 throughout the rest of the world. In 2012 the self storage industry generated over $22 billion in revenues in the US alone.

MAKE A LIST OF THINGS IN YOUR OFFICE THAT YOU DON’T NEED ANYMORE AND GIVE IT AWAY TO SOMEBODY WHO CAN REALLY USE IT.
THE ULTIMATE SWISS ARMY KNIFE

‘Everyone has been asked which singular item he or she would bring to a deserted island. Now, with the ultimate Swiss army knife, containing 87 tools, you won’t have to think twice about your answer. Perfect for the adventurist or light traveller, this one of kind Swiss army-style multi-tasking tool has everything from a flashlight to a fish-scaling tool.

The 87 piece ultimate Swiss army knife contains a wide assortment of screwdrivers, openers, wrenches, magnifiers, compasses, blades, saws, rulers, tweezers and of course a toothpick, so you can pick your teeth clean after you’ve either gutted a moose in the woods or created a submarine singlehandedly. You can do it all with this tool!’

PS: You will probably need at least 21 minutes to find the right tool.

This Swiss army knife could be used as a metaphor for the complexity that we sometimes create in our own organisation. Certainly in larger companies, it can be a big challenge to find certain information on the intranet or to locate the right person to help you. We try to capture everything in enormous database but need a capacious manual to operate the search engine.

SOMETIMES IT’S TOO MUCH. DO YOU HAVE ULTIMATE SWISS COMPLEX PROCESSES IN YOUR COMPANY?
THE SMALLEST THING IN THE UNIVERSE

If this book would be focused on physics, then the title might have been something like: ‘Less is Everything’. It’s amazing that almost everything in the universe consists of atoms. Scientists will probably correct me and say that atoms are made up of neutrons, protons and electrons. And the first two are made up of quarks, hence atoms aren’t the smallest thing in the universe. And we’ve only just begun to explore these very very very small parts in the last decades and many things in the universe remain a mystery to us.

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is one of the largest and most complex experimental facilities ever built. This research facility will allow mankind to explore the smallest elements ever discovered in the universe. The LHC was built by CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research) in collaboration with over 10,000 scientists and engineers from over 100 countries. It is located in a tunnel (27 kilometres in circumference) as deep as 175 metres beneath the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva, Switzerland. Physicists hope that the LHC will help answer some of the fundamental questions that remain unanswered in physics. In brief, these concern the basic laws governing the interactions and forces among the elementary objects, the deep structure of space and time, and in particular the interrelation between quantum mechanics and general relativity.

A field of science where current theories and knowledge are unclear or break down altogether.

And just some other fun facts that are quite small (everything is relative because these examples are huge compared to an atom):
- The smallest person on this planet is a 72-year-old Nepalese man who measures 54.6 cm (21.5 inches).
- Chinese master potter Wu Ruishen has created a mini teapot, weighing a mere 1.4 grams.
- The world’s smallest post service is provided by Leafcutter designs who will create a handmade mini letter (based on your personalized letter). The receiver will need a magnifying glass to read it.

And if you think that you’re too small to have an impact, try sleeping with a mosquito.

SMALL THINGS CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT. WHAT SMALL ACTION ARE YOU GOING TO DO TODAY?
Stop doing things is the first principle towards applying ‘Less is Beautiful’. In our society, starting something is more appreciated, because it means that you take action and wish to accomplish something. But the path towards your objectives will not be reached by doing the wrong things. And chances are that at that very moment, you are engaged in certain things you no longer want to do. Maybe a relationship that drains out more energy than you draw from it; a product or service that you still offer to your clients, although it no longer fits in the organisation’s future plans or a project that has already absorbed an enormous amount of time and money, whilst it should have ended a few months ago.

You need a great deal of courage to stop doing things that are no longer adding any value. Sometimes you do not need to come to a full stop with the activity at hand, as merely reducing it will suffice. The motive behind this full stop or reduction can vary greatly: money (the costs outweigh the revenues), time (free time will be available for new things), energy (negative thoughts and stress will abate).

But how can you decide which activities should be stopped or reduced? What definitely helps, is allowing yourself some time to reflect and see the big picture. You need an overview before you can determine whether a certain activity still delivers any added value or not. The Do Want matrix is one of the tools in this book that provide an excellent means to get an overview of how you use your resources (time, money and attention) and give insight in what you need to do and let go to realize change. And then focus comes in: what’s the most important thing that should be achieved? Your focus has to be very clear (for those within your organisation as well as for outsiders) before you can truly stop and reduce activities that are not 100% in line with your mission.

And you need a lot of perseverance to remain committed to the essence of what you wish to achieve. If you want to be the cheapest supplier, then cost-awareness should be reflected in everything you do. All your internal processes are aligned in the same direction to lower the costs and deliver the cheapest product or service to your clients. The devil is in the details. In order to deliver the best value, every aspect in your company will be different from the cost-focused company. And yet again from the organisation that intends to be innovative or customer-centric or that aspires a different positioning in the market. Trying to excel at everything for anyone is the best recipe to create complexity.
JUST WALK

A little bear cub was confused about how to walk.
“What do I do first?”, he asked his mother.

“Do I start with my right foot or my left? Or with both front feet and then my back feet? Or do I first move both feet on one side and then the other side?”

His mother replied: “Just stop thinking and start walking.”
CREATE YOUR OWN QUIT-LIST

Most people have a to-do list. It’s a very effective time-management tool to keep track of your activities. But maybe even more crucial is a Quit list. It’s easy to do things right (and check off your to-do list), but it’s a lot harder to do the right things. And that means knowing your objectives and daring to focus. And stop doing things you shouldn’t do. Take a few minutes to write down things you’re still doing, but no longer have a desire towards. Take the most important one - the one that consumes the most energy and give yourself 4 weeks to ensure you take the necessary actions (stop, delegate, communicate) to check this action from your Quit list.

New Year is a typical moment to make resolutions on what you’re going to do differently in the new year (eat healthy, save more, ...) but not a lot of people stick to these resolutions and they are a lot of times a source for frustration instead of motivation. Make a list of un-resolutions - what are you not going to do next year. And if you really want to go for something, remember the quote ‘Focus is a matter of deciding what things you’re not going to do’ [John Carmack]

CREATE A QUIET LIST TO HELP YOU FOCUS ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS.
The removal of intermediaries in a supply chain or ‘cutting out the middleman’ is a trend that’s been going on for several years. Instead of relying on traditional distribution channels, which had some kind of intermediate (such as a distributor, wholesaler, broker or agent), companies may now deal with every customer directly - a big drop in the cost of servicing customers directly. Sometimes, the process is initiated by the consumers in case of high market transparency (another trend that’s been gaining more importance).

This trend has already had a strong impact on certain industries: computer hardware and software (Dell was one of the first players to start delivering to end users), travel agencies, bookshops and music stores. Other industries where this trend is growing: real estate, recruitment and education. In those markets, a lot of innovation comes from the intermediaries who have to create added value in order to survive.

What does your industry look like? Are there market players who aren’t bringing enough added value to the supply chain and how can we bypass those players?

Can you cut out a distribution channel that doesn’t add enough value? #stopdoingthings
FLYING HIGH BY OFFERING LESS

The airline industry is a very complex business, which of course provides an excellent opportunity to present some great ‘Less is Beautiful’ examples.

Southwest Airlines founded their business upon a one-plane-fits-all approach (instead of having different types of planes) and made the bold decision to focus on direct nonstop flights and serving a snack rather than full meals.

Ryanair is the low-costs airline that cut back on expenses in their processes: reduced onboard service; non-reclining seats, and using secondary airports instead of the traditional airline hubs. Other proposed measures to further reduce frills include (but haven’t been approved yet): eliminating two toilets to add six more seats; redesign the aircraft to allow standing passengers; pay for the toilet and charge extra for overweight passengers.

WHAT ARE THE CRAZY INITIATIVES AT YOUR WORK TO LOWER THE COSTS?
FROM SWITCHTASKING TO MONOTASKING

A lot of research has been done on the topic of multitasking and the conclusions all point in the same direction. Multitasking is merely the opportunity to screw up more than one thing at the time [Steve Uzzell]. Studies show that only a very small percentage (2%) of people can multitask effectively. Trying to focus on more than one thing causes a 40% drop in productivity (that’s 2.1 hours a day that’s ‘lost’ due to interruptions or distractions). The odd thing is that most people know focusing on one thing is more effective, yet the feeling remains that you’re accomplishing more. And technology (smartphones, laptops) encourages this fruitless multitasking. To be correct, most activities referred to as multitasking should be called switchtasking, as we switch very quickly from task to task.

Dave Crenshaw, author of ‘The Myth of Multitasking’, also differentiates between background tasking (listening to music while jogging) and switchtasking (switching attention between several tasks). During the mental juggling between different tasks, two things happen - one is the decision to switch (a lot of times it’s not voluntarily, but the phone rings or a colleague asks something) and the second is to activate the ‘rules’ for whatever you’re about to do. The switching costs depend of course on how complex or simple the tasks are - sometimes it can even require over 100% or more if you’re doing very complicated tasks. And the switching cost is even higher when we give people (family, friends, colleagues) segmented attention, because then we’re not only losing time but even damaging relationships.

The next time you find yourself multitasking when you are trying to be productive, make a quick assessment of the various things you are trying to accomplish. Eliminate distractions and try to focus on one task at a time.

ARE YOU SWITCHTASKING RIGHT NOW WHEN READING THIS BOOK?
DO WANT MATRIX

Depending upon whether or not you want it and whether or not you’re already doing it, fill in the matrix. Every modification will demand a great deal of courage, so you really have to want it before commencing. The do-want matrix is a powerful instrument to realise real innovation. The matrix helps you in a very simple way to get an overview of how you use your resources (time, money and attention) and gives insight in what you have to do (and even more important) what you have to let go to realise the change.

The do-want-matrix is developed by Jim Van den Beuken.

### Do Want Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REDUCE</th>
<th>IMPROVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t waste time, talent, money and energy</td>
<td>Continue with things that you like and you’re good at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminish - Delegate</td>
<td>Keep - Reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop - Say goodbye</td>
<td>Enjoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doing, but don’t Want</strong></td>
<td><strong>Want &amp; Already doing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREVENT</th>
<th>INNOVATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not doing &amp; don’t Want</strong></td>
<td><strong>Want &amp; Not (yet) doing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevent</td>
<td>Organize - Invest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect - Manage risks</td>
<td>Develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate - Say no</td>
<td>Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure these things won’t happen</td>
<td>New initiatives you want to develop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ARE YOU ON OCCASION SPENDING TIME TO THINGS YOU DON’T WANT? EXPLORING THE DO-WANT-MATRIX TO GET A BETTER OVERVIEW.**
When it comes to meditation, a lot of literature and exercises can be found in order to improve your standard of living. In all fairness, I have to say that meditation isn’t my cup of tea because I’m quite restless and sitting down ‘doing nothing’ for 10 minutes is a big challenge for me.

But the mindfulness bell (there are several websites and apps) makes me conscious of my own patterns and behaviour. Sometimes, I just want to check a website to resolve a particular question and suddenly two hours later I still find myself perusing the world wide web without a clear purpose.

The mindfulness bell rings every 20 minutes - you can choose your own timeframe - and makes me conscious of what I’m doing. In the majority of the cases, I stop my current activity and switch back to my original task.

Do you use a mindfulness bell to stay focused? #concentration
VILFREDO PARETO WAS A SMART GUY

When everything feels urgent and important, no distinction can be made and we start at the top of our to do list. A lot of people are very efficient in ticking off boxes, and become active and busy. However, this doesn’t mean that those people are productive or effective.

Vilfredo Pareto was an Italian economist who lived in the 19th century and discovered that 80% of the land was owned by 20% of the people. And it appeared this observation even became a predictable certainty. **The 80/20 principle asserts that a minority of causes, input or effort usually lead to a majority of the results, outputs and rewards.** Sometimes the numbers can change to 90/10 or 70/10, but the most important thing to remember is that not everything matters equally. So focus on the things that have the most impact.

In his book *The One Thing*, Garry Keller even talks about Extreme Pareto. He invites you to find the single most important thing and focus only on that segment in the implementation.

FOLLOW THE (EXTREME) PARETO RULE IN SELECTING YOUR ACTIVITIES.
#FOCUS #NOTEVERYTHINGMATTERSEQUALLY
Flip the Funnel is a book by Joseph Jaffe, a leading expert and thought leader on new media. It means that instead of putting a lot of effort in acquiring new customers by spending budget in mass media (which costs roughly five-to-ten times more than it does to retain an existing one), invest in the ‘right’ end of the funnel. Support your existing customers to spread the word as a multiplier for your business. The economic impact of an active, engaged and loyal customer is tremendous. The Harry Potter theme park is a great example of flipping the funnel.

Since the Harry Potter fans are known for their loyalty to the brand, the campaign used the impact of word of mouth to promote the new theme park. Their media experts chose seven popular bloggers and invited them for a secret midnight webcast, where they announced the new theme park. Quickly after the webcast, these seven fans blogged about the news. And then everything went incredibly fast. Within 24 hours, the news went viral reaching more than 350 million people. The use of social networking as a promotional tool for this campaign, was an unconventional and inexpensive way to spread the buzz.

What actions have you done to engage your existing customers in the previous weeks?
Einstein pointed out that “the significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” To get different results - change - we must do things differently. The framework of Rolf Smith’s model is divided into seven distinct levels - from easy to impossible - across a spectrum of continual change (continuous innovation) over increasing levels of difficulty.

LEVEL 1: Effectiveness DOING the right things
LEVEL 2: Efficiency DOING things right
LEVEL 3: Improving DOING things better
LEVEL 4: Cutting Stop DOING things
LEVEL 5: Copying DOING things other people are doing
LEVEL 6: Different DOING things no one else is doing
LEVEL 7: Impossible DOING things that can’t be done

Each level is progressively more complex, more difficult to undertake than the preceding level. Consider the 7 Levels of Change within the context of moving into a new job or a new business activity to which you have not before been exposed. Especially level 4 proves quite interesting, because that step is more often than not skipped. It focusses on eliminating waste or processes that have no added value.

WHAT WAS THE LAST ACTIVITY THAT YOU HAVE STOPPED CONSCIOUSLY TO ALLOW FURTHER CHANGE?
Initially Activity Based Working (ABW) mainly involved switching to flexible workplaces and drastically reducing the number of desks and offices required. A portion of the budget saved in leasing and fit-out was invested in a higher spec working environment and IT. The partners from Veldhoen + Company explain that over time, the focus on individual offices disappeared, and first as a kind of side effect, staff were meeting with employees from other departments or units. As a result teamwork, cross-functional collaboration, employee satisfaction and consequently business performance improved. Today, organizations continue using ABW to achieve quantifiable operational targets, which are quite often linked to cultural change programs.

The essence of ABW is about providing choice for people when, where and with whom to work. Practically it’s based on the premise that no employee ‘owns’ or occupies an assigned workstation. Rather, the broader workspace provides employees with a variety of predetermined activity areas that allow them to conduct specific tasks including learning, focusing, collaborating and socializing. The transition to a “it’s not mine to own but for us to share” mindset is one that needs to be supported by a structured change management program in which leaders play an imperative role. And ABW is not a goal on its own. For ABW to be successful, it must be relevant to the workforce: who they are and what they do at work. ABW is not for everyone and is more appropriate for a workforce that is self-reliant and mobile or is planning to embrace mobility with the support of its leadership team. Veldhoen + Company often speaks about a change process of unlearning rather than learning new things.'
CALL 311

A great example of a government simplifying communication with its residents can be found in one of the biggest cities in the world: New York. Thousands of phone numbers (fourteen pages of listings in the city directory) have been replaced with one phone number, 311. The mission is to provide the public with quick, easy access to all New York City government services and information, while maintaining the highest possible level of customer service.

In ‘corporate’ call centres, employees are often assessed on how quickly they can end a call, while the 311-call centre employees are rated on the accuracy of their information + the successful resolution of the caller’s problem. Employees get a 4 week training to ask the right questions and hence determine the problem as soon as possible. The call centre will obviously not be able to solve all the questions first-hand, but callers are transferred more accurately to the right department.

To make sure that the government services are also available for non-English speakers, they can offer you assistance in over 170 languages. Every day 50,000 callers are connected within 30 seconds to an operator, who can answer questions on more than 3,600 topics.

The 311 project also served as a catalyst to simplify other city procedures, because several problems become apparent thanks to the extensive data resources that are gathered, parsed and transformed into usable intelligence at the call center.

DO YOU OFFER YOUR CUSTOMERS ONE POINT OF CONTACT FOR ALL THEIR QUESTIONS?
Downsize fitness, a gym, tailored its fitness centres to obese customers (with at least 20kgs of overweight) to make them feel at ease while exercising.

The gym limits new members to those who are really suffering from weight problems. A ‘daring’ choice in itself, as most gyms offer services for everybody. Excluding a certain segment of society from their fitness centre is a risk, but also creates a great opportunity. For after all, the message for the more corpulent customers is suddenly clear: ‘You are welcome here, because this gym is tailor-made for you.’

By offering only services for obese clients, their programs have very simple and specific objectives – to lose weight. The trainers at the gym can focus on it and all products and services are aligned accordingly (eating habits, promotion campaigns, programs, materials).

Customers can set aside their feelings of anxiety or embarrassment of being watched by more healthy people. It reassures them to exercise with people who have similar problems.
When you say yes to something, it’s imperative that you understand what you’re saying no to. Now and again we all struggle with saying no, because you want to be helpful, you avoid being rude or are afraid of conflict or missed opportunities. But life is too short to do everything and you can’t please everyone. If you want to accomplish big things that are meaningful (can be anything – earning a lot of money, starting an orphanage in Africa or designing a beautiful artwork), you have to become a Knight who says No.

Steve Jobs was one of the Master Knights, who reduced the number of Apple products - when he returned to Apple - from 350 to 10 within a year. He formulated this to perfection: “People think focus means saying yes to the thing you’ve got to focus on. But that’s not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are.”

The simplest and most direct way is just saying ‘No I can’t or don’t want to’ in a respectful and clear way. But here are two alternatives if you don’t want to give a ‘clear no’. ‘I’m not the best person to be of assistance in this. Why don’t you try X’ or ‘Let me think about it first and I’ll get back to you within x amount of time (and of course give your honest reply within the time-limit).

A “no” uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a “yes” merely uttered to please, or even worse, to avoid trouble

Mahatma Gandhi

Train yourself to become a ‘Knight who says No’. Say ‘No’ at least three times a day - in a conscious way - to things you don’t want.
FEWER IDEAS
MORE EXECUTION

Good ideas are very valuable, and a person with repeated sparks of genius is priceless. But even the most creative ideas amount to nothing if they’re not organized, established and executed. That’s where Scott Belsky, author of Making Ideas Happen can empower you with the follow-through needed to bring your intangible ideas into reality. Here are some of the highlights from his book and some of the insights from the great 99U conference (organized by his team) focusing on the execution of innovation:

- Limit your ‘reactionary workflow’ and start pushing ideas forward (consider an idea as a project).
- Learn to work with a bias to action (what’s the next action step - make it concrete).
- Reconcile urgent with important to focus on what matters (prioritize).
- Overcome the stigma of self-marketing to maximize the impact of your ideas (effective ways of marketing yourself will lead to respect and followers).
- Maximize the creative chemistry of your team (find a balance between flexibility and expectations, idea generation and execution, as well as helpful disagreement and consensus).
- Break free of consensus and bureaucracy (listen to what people are saying and then bring your skills to bear to preserve the core mission).

The vision of Scott Belsky converges very well with the philosophy of Seth Godin, marketing guru, who is an ardent advocate of shipping. Shipping is the act of conquering the resistance of our lizard brain. This part of the brain is responsible for revenge, fear and anger in order to protect us from failure (a very good feature thousands of years ago, yet preventing us in this day and age from making ideas happen). **Stop trying to reach perfection and just do it - good enough is enough, you need to experience failure if you wish to succeed.** Ship, ship and ship again.

FOCUS A LITTLE LESS ON INSPIRATION AND GENERATING IDEAS, AND A LOT MORE ON EXECUTION AND DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY TO PUSH IDEAS TO FRUITION.
All too often, talent development is associated with traditional forms of training. If a manager discovers his/her staff are not acquainted with something, or need to develop a skill, they send them to a training. Sound familiar? But face to face training is amongst the most time-intensive and costly investment in people development.

During my interview with Avinash Chandarana, Group Learning and Development Director at MCI - a global communication and event management company with 1400 employees in 23 countries - he explained his vision of establishing a learning culture within the company.

Learning is a journey - a process of discovery. ‘Training’ is just one component of that journey. We realised that traditional forms of training (formal education such as attending face to face workshops or participating in live online learning) only account for 10% of developing the knowledge and skills we possess. We are hence working on leveraging the 90% of ‘informal’ learning channels to develop our talent. This can be divided into two main categories: on the job (experiential) activity represents 70% of how we develop our minds and learning through others, such as coaching and mentoring, accounts for 20%.

By educating our leadership and workforce on how to identify solutions beyond traditional forms of ‘training,’ we are aiming to broaden the scope and effectiveness of developing talent at MCI. And when diagnosing a skills or knowledge gap in a staff member’s competency, discovering that sitting in a classroom for 2 entire days is not the right solution, but two coaching sessions or reading a short chapter in a business book may prove to be the most effective means of reaching the same goal.
The telecommunications industry is very dynamic, driven by technology and changes in the competitive and regulatory environment. As a result, you will encounter a lot of complexity, but some great examples as well.

John’s phone is claimed to be the world’s most basic cell phone, allowing the user only to make and receive calls (no camera, no internet, no texting). The Dutch designers have also added a paper pad and a pen - built into the back of the device, which appears to be a huge success among children, elderly and technophobes. You can even go further and choose the one touch phone from Jitterbug (with only three buttons: operator, home and 911).

Telia is a Swedish telecom operator and as a promotion campaign, they have created a few internet free zones (a purple bulb with a frequency jammer that blocked the internet). People with a laptop can also download an app ‘the internet disconnector’ to shut down the internet for a while. (Just shutting down your laptop and mobile phone might also be an option).

How can you simplify certain processes or products to attract a new target audience?
THE POWER OF EMPTY SPACE

The design elements of a message are at least as important as the actual content. Highlighting, colours, layout and type size can be used to draw attention.

‘Think small’ was the advertising campaign for the Volkswagen Beetle, which was ranked as the best campaign of the twentieth century. The ad features a white background, with only a small image of the Beetle to emphasise its simplicity (accompanied by a small text at the bottom of the page).

Apple is also an ardent advocate of using white space in their packages, ads and other forms of communication. In retail, people speak of the ‘4 second rule’ to catch attention from a potential customer, so your message has to be clear.

Another nice example of ‘empty space’ is the song 4’33” from John Cage - a composition from 1952 for any instrument. The performer is supposed NOT to play the instrument for 4 minutes and 33 seconds - it’s an ode to silence.

CREATE A MEETING REPORT WITH ONLY ONE ACTION THAT SUMMARISES THE MEETING.
The restaurant industry has taken the ‘less is more’ principle literally with quite a lot of single and dual dish restaurants opening lately. The fish and chips restaurants are already quite known, but you can also find some more bizarre dual dish restaurants: Burger & Lobster keeps it simple with just three options: a burger served bloody, a whole lobster and a lobster roll. Bubbledogs is an unorthodox marriage of hotdogs and champagne. The menu is slightly longer, comprising 10 dishes, but still restrained by most standards. Madd - a restaurant in Soho - only serves mango based dishes, and in Paris you have been able to enjoy their one dish ‘Steak frites’ for over 50 years now.

Assuming a restaurant does excel at the dishes it serves, a simple menu should make diner a lot easier. Simple menus with fewer choices make dining straightforward. Simpler menus entail benefits for the restaurants as well, providing them with the opportunity of producing less waste.

Datinq is a company specialized in supporting food professionals in a smart market approach. They work in 14 different countries and use unique tools to increase market transparency by using indicators like traffic, location density and presence of your target group. General director Marco van den Ouden and marketing manager Martijn de Bruin confirm the current ‘Less is Beautiful’ trends.

By analogy of the shorter menus in restaurants, the same is happening in petrol & convenience markets, where fewer options exact a faster decision process from the clients. Another trend is that the portions are getting smaller (eg, coke cans of 15 cl) and the customer is willing to pay more for products that contain fewer calories.

**FANCY A HOTDOG WITH CHAMPAGNE?**

**HAVE YOU ALREADY CONSIDERED CHARGING MORE FOR PRODUCTS OR SERVICES WITH FEWER OPTIONS?**
WHO NEEDS A SHOP ANYWAY?

The beauty industry (cosmetic/clothing) has some interesting examples of applying ‘Less is Beautiful’. The main reason for this is exclusivity, an important differentiator in the highly competitive market.

@Cosme is a cosmetic website with more than 6 million members that only puts its top three products on display in their bricks and mortar stores. Every hour an employee sweeps through the store and changes the position of the products according to their online sales (and on surrounding screens, potential clients can monitor online chat discussions on these 3 products).

In the 19th century the brothers Clemens and August sold high quality fabrics directly to the wealthy farmers in the north of the Netherlands. Walking from farm to farm they offered an exceptional quality. 160 years later, they still bypass traditional retailing by selling their collection at contemporary art centers and museums. The collection is sold exclusively ‘on tour’ around the world. Each season, Clemens and August ‘tours’ 10 cities for 3 days only. In addition, the collection can be purchased online at their webshop.
Complexity - the opposite of simplicity - is costing money, undermining government and business, as well as putting our health and even lives at risk. Irene Etzkorn and Alan Siegel, authors of Simple, express it with great clarity: ‘There’s nothing simple about simplicity.’ It’s the sum of transparency (laying bare the underlying truth whatever it reveals) + clarity (expressing meaning in a clear and simple manner) + usability (making something fit for its purpose).

The biggest challenge lies within conquering the ‘Curse of Knowledge’. This means that you can find yourself trapped in your own knowledge and experience. You are an expert in your field - certainly compared to people who don’t work in your line of work - and you have the knowledge (and resources) to do something extra that might add value. The problem is we are tempted to keep on adding and hence improve something, but in reality we’re merely adding layers of complexity. It is most likely ‘normal’ for you as an expert to know how something works, but a layman can consider this to be overwhelming and confusing. The Curse of Knowledge is even more predominant in areas where much expertise is needed (like engineering or IT or R&D departments).

Joshua Reynolds, an influential painter from the 18th century, stated it as follows: ‘Simplicity is an exact medium between too little and too much.’ It’s a constant balance to narrow the scope of what you offer as you try to serve the needs of the consumer. This also means you have to kill your darlings - referring to term of filmmakers where the scriptwriter has to do the painful task of deleting many a scene that doesn’t enrich the story. You have to delete or reduce elements in your creation and focus once more on your key feature that has to stand out. What’s the main reason why clients buy your products? What’s the whole purpose of having this process? What's the one thing that makes you special? And the rest is less important (or maybe even clutter).

And once you’ve found the essence of a concept, stick to it and communicate it clearly. Using the right language - be aware of jargon - for the right target group is very important to spread your message. You can use the S.U.C.C.E.S.s formule from Dan and Chip Heath (authors of the book Made to Stick) to create a lasting message. Or visualization might also be a good way to easily transfer the message. The same simplicity paradox works for communication: ‘The less you tell people, the more they understand.’

And let us conclude with the wise words of John Maeda, author of The Laws of Simplicity: “Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful.”
TO READ OR TO EAT, THAT’S THE QUESTION?

Zen Master Seung Sahn would say: “When you eat, just eat. When you read the newspaper, just read the newspaper. Don’t do anything other than what you are doing.”

One day a student saw him reading the newspaper, while he was eating. The student asked if this did not contradict his teachings.

Seung Sahn said: “When you eat and read the newspaper, just eat and read the newspaper.”
A PROTOTYPE IS WORTH A THOUSAND MEETINGS

Removing data that isn’t adding value proves to be an efficient way to present a simple message, but sometimes you have to include additional information. If such is the case, data visualization might be a good solution to make things simpler. A dynamic image can help the viewer to interpret the message, fill in the gaps and draw conclusions of an abstract concept. If you look at the human anatomy, our visual system is extremely well-built for visual analysis. By using visualization, data is cast into a format that can be grasped and understood much more quickly than the raw data alone. Effective data visualizations go beyond aesthetics; they also allow organizations to draw quick and correct conclusions from massive amounts of information.

A real breakthrough in data visualization occurred when Hans Rosling, professor international health, gave a famous lecture at the TED conference in 2006. There he combined enormous quantities of public data with a sports broadcaster’s style to reveal the story of the world’s past, present and future development. Visual.ly is also a very nice example. It’s an one-stop shop for the creation of data visualizations and infographics, bringing together marketing gurus, data nerds and design junkies based on common interests. By tapping into Visual.ly’s vibrant community of more than 35,000 designers, matching can happen between infographic commissioners - brands, companies, agencies - and designers.

In the field of product or service development, visualization is a great tool to clarify things, but even better are prototypes. During a workshop at IDEO, I heard the following: ‘If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a prototype is worth a thousand meetings’.

Can you visualize part of your message in your next meeting?
If you check the definition of jargon on Wikipedia, you’ll get a good example of dictionary-jargon: ‘Jargon is the technical terminology or characteristic idiom of a special activity occupational or social group. A simple definition would be ‘the language used by people who work in a particular area or who have a common interest.’

There’s nothing wrong with using jargon when communicating with your colleagues who grasp the ‘language’. Yet it can make things very complicated for people who don’t work in your own field of expertise. It’s caused by the Curse of Knowledge, because you assume your listeners possess the same knowledge level as you do (or at least understand the basics of your work domain). But that’s an illusion.

To avoid jargon, apply the Aunt Bertha test: imagine telling your story to your 78 year-old aunt Bertha. What words will you use? How will you phrase your sentence? What metaphor can you use to make it as simple as possible?

If you survive the Aunt Bertha test, then your message is probably jargon-free.
What are the elephant paths in your organisation? What are the shortcuts everybody takes?

FOLLOW THE ELEPHANT PATHS

An elephant path defines a path that is formed in space by people making their own paths and shortcuts; it is an unofficial route. One great example can be shown when presenting the difference between the ‘bureaucratic’ city plan developed by city-planners and architects on the one hand and the ‘anarchist’ way of moving through a city used by residents on the other hand. The residents will find the easiest way to go from A to B and will break ‘the rules’ of walking on the designated paths. In some cases local government will adapt its city development strategy later on, in accordance with these elephant paths that are formed.

Some cities are really smart. They wait for ‘simplicity’. Instead of paving the paths already before opening a new park, they wait 2 or 3 months. Then they use the elephant paths - which will become clear very soon - as their base layout to develop the paved routes.
SUCCESs: CREATING STICKY MESSAGES

The Heath-brothers Dan & Chip wrote a book Made to Stick, which comprises their research on why some stories (even urban legends) stick and others do not. They established 6 principles that will increase the ‘stickiness’ of a message:

- Simple
- Unexpected
- Concrete
- Credible
- Emotional
- Stories

A great example to illustrate the power of SUCCESs is the message that president JF Kennedy announced to the world on May 25th, 1961: “It is our goal to land a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth by the end of the decade.”

If JF Kennedy had been a CEO of a big company, the message would probably be something like this: “Our mission is to become the international leader in the space industry through maximum team-centered innovation and strategically targeted aerospace initiatives.”

Use the SUCCESs principles to make your own message (email, question, report or mission statement) stick.
SUMMARIZE YOUR DAY IN A TWEET

Most people have a love or hate relationship with twitter, the 140 characteristics social networking service. Like all technology, the results depend on the quality of the content that you put into the technology. The first tweet occurred on March 21, 2006 when founding father Jack Dorsey tweeted ‘just setting up my twttr’. Twitter was meant as a sort of ‘group send’ SMS application to inform your friends what you were doing at that moment. Today, over 340 million tweets are sent every day.

A practical use for Twitter exists as an emergency communication system for breaking news (eg, death of Michael Jackson and the arrest of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers by the police). Twitter even had a huge social impact in countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Iran where the medium was used to organise protest (‘Twitter revolutions’).

Twitter is a great tool that forces you to reduce your message to the essence. You can use it to describe the essence of either a problem or your business plan. If you can summarize your message in a tweet that others understand, it will most likely be a simple, clear message that sticks.
According to literary legend, Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a short story in only six words. Taking a cue from the infamous novelist, SMITH Magazine (smith-mag.net) decided in 2006 to give the format a personal twist. Hemingway’s six-word story read: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn”

SMITH editors asked their readers to relate their true life story in six words, calling the new take on the format Six-Word Memoirs®. They received thousands of responses, which now can be found in a bestselling book series and on SixWordMemoirs.com. Here are a few great examples of six word stories that summarize one’s entire life.

+ Fifteen years since last professional haircut [Dave Eggers]
+ Ran east, ran west, ran late [Susie Smith]
+ 3000 miles away from the truth [Michael Slenske]
+ Started small, grew, peaked, shrunk, vanished [George Saunders]
+ It’s like forever, only much shorter [Pete DeVito]
+ Eight thousand orgasms. Only one baby. [Neal Pollack]
+ I was a Michael Jackson impersonator [Keith Knight]
+ Born in California. Then nothing happened [Mark Harris]
WHAT’S THE COMMANDERS’ INTENT?

Before an army goes into battle, a tremendous amount of planning takes place - very detailed and thorough. But battle is fraught with unpredictable things. In the 1980’s, the army adapted its planning concept called Commander’s Intent (CI). The CI is a simple, clear statement headlining every order, specifying the plan’s goal. The CI never provides too many details, but it does enable every single soldier to know what the goal is. That allows individuals to improvise as needed and adapt to their situation. When they know the intent, they can generate their own solutions.

Marco Hulleman, Major in the Royal Netherlands Army, gave me several examples from within the Army. When, for instance, simulation came into play, for training and in preparation for the mission, many ‘hard core’ commanders had to relinquish the idea that you could only train properly in real life/combat. Teaching soldiers how to shoot in a virtual world (shooting theatre), will develop their shooting skills, saving a lot of ammunition and money. Another example is the simplified administration of the vehicles’ fuel consumption. After refueling, drivers had to manually fill out the paper work, but now all they have to do is swipe their ID cards (from driver and vehicle). And to conclude, a nice example concerns the uniforms. For all the official events within the Royal Netherlands Forces everybody had to wear a hat. Disadvantage: the hat was quite expensive and worn at very few occasions. By changing the clothing regulations, the hat no longer constitutes as part of the uniform (except for the generals).

DO YOU KNOW THE ‘COMMANDER’S INTENT’ OF YOUR MANAGER OR CEO WITHIN THE COMPANY?
A SHOE AS COMFORTABLE AS A SOCK

I had the opportunity to see Ben Shaffer - studio director at the Innovation Kitchen at Nike - at the 99U conference in New York who talked about their latest innovation. The Nike 'the Flyknit' technology is light, virtually seamless and precision engineered in one layer. Because the upper is made in one layer, it has less pieces to assemble and the amount of material wasted manufacturing each pair weighs only as much as a piece of paper.

The new knitting technology, which knits the entire upper part of the shoe in a single layer that's then attached to the sole, promises to cut labor costs and production time while opportunities for personalisation arise. The Flyknit is a great example how a product innovation might even influence a whole industry.

And it's also a good example that improving performance isn't an easy task - it's hard work. Nike embarked on a four-year mission of micro-engineering static properties into pliable materials. It required teams of programmers, engineers and designers to create the proprietary technology needed to create the knit upper.

WHAT PROCESS OR PRODUCT COULD SIMPLIFY IN SUCH WAY THAT IT GIVES YOU A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OVER YOUR COMPETITORS?
A SIMPLICITY EVENT IN YOUR COMPANY

Philips is one of the first companies that springs to mind when thinking about simplicity. Its baseline ‘Sense and Simplicity’ emphasizes the company’s sincere intent of integrating simplicity in everything they do. Everyone who comes into contact with Philips, whether they be employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers or other stakeholders, should see this brand’s promise (image). The ‘sense and simplicity’ feeling also features in all new and existing products.

- Philips organizes Simplicity events all over the world to present their latest innovations towards a more simple, sustainable world.
- They have installed a Simplicity Advisory Board to provide advice for new innovations.
- In meetings, there is a powerpoint slide limit of 10 slides.
- Financial reports have been rewritten to make sure it’s also easy to understand for those without a financial background.

Nico Orie, global HR Shared Service Director, adds a few examples from HR. In the past, Philips had more than 100 country intranet sites with HR information. Furthermore, users often needed several passwords to access different HR Systems. The implementation of the one-access point HR Portal has not only made it easy for users, but significantly improved the quality of content as well. Most of Philips’ employee files were paper based, making it time-intensive to retrieve information, not to mention the storage space this required. By digitizing all employee files, Philips has simplified the entire procedure with enhanced access control and file usage. And Philips implemented one access point for all questions related to HR topics. Per country the company created one phone number and one email address to address any questions related to HR topics, significantly reducing the time it takes employees to receive an answer.

HOW ABOUT ORGANIZING A SIMPLICITY EVENT IN YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION?
More often than not meetings and events can be quite boring, if the only ingredient appears to be a long row of business presentations. But great alternatives do exist, even for large group meetings.

A Pecha Kucha (originally from Japan) is a presentation methodology in which 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each (six minutes and 40 seconds in total). Afterwards the audience starts clapping and the presentation is over. The very strict format forces the speaker to relate the essence of the story - no side-tracks, no extra information, just one clear message. It’s a great way for event-organisers to have several speakers within a limited amount sharing the essence of their messages.

There are several other methods to create interaction - even with large numbers of participants. In a world cafe participants are seated in small subgroups at round tables with a writable tablecloth. During three rounds (after every round, they switch tables and subgroups), they discuss a certain issue following the cafe etiquette. Open space, mega-brainstorming sessions, future search, … are other methods to interact with large audiences.

Organize a pecha kucha on the next business event, if you’re bored with long speeches.
COACH WORK SIMPLIFICATION

Colruyt Group is a Belgian family owned retail corporation - its core business focusses on discount supermarket stores, with over 200 locations in Belgium (the Colruyt Group has more than 25,000 employees). The company exists for over 80 years now and efficiency was an important condition to guarantee the lowest costs and the lowest prices. This efficiency gradually evolved into simplicity. Colruyt Group is a company where they walk the talk.

Within the Colruyt Group, everybody is responsible for work simplification, yet 50 people are employed as ‘coach work simplification’ - their role is to challenge, inspire, support other employees to simplify their work. Hilde Cerstelotte (Head of Department Coaching Work Simplification) explains that her team receives a special training to discover processes and activities that can be improved and learn how to create awareness within the company (and within the remainder of the supply chain) to simplify things. The checkout process is still revolutionary - no assembly lines to stack your purchases, but standing employees take the purchases from your shopping cart, scan them and put them orderly in another shopping cart, which holds the customer’s shopping bag. And several feet beyond this checkout point, you can pay for your purchases in a fast and efficient manner. Customers also receive a very clear purchase receipt (with even a comparison with the higher prices of competitors).

To simplify logistics, some products are now packaged in a square format instead of round ones, as these are easier to stack and transport. And shopping carts don’t need a coin anymore. Everything that’s done within the Colruyt Group is focused on creating an easier customer experience.

Organise a session with 5 employees with different functions and only discuss how work can be simplified.
The need for simplicity and the corresponding economic value is greater than ever. A company that totally understands this need is Siegel + Gale. With the tagline, “Simple Is Smart,” Siegel+Gale has conducted its business with an ethos of simplicity since 1969. Since then, the company continues to guide corporations, government agencies and non-profit organizations to simplify brand imaging, communication strategies, organizational processes and online usability. For example, in the 1970s, Siegel+Gale began translating complex legal, government and business documents into Plain English.

Since a few years, Siegel+Gale performs an annual Global Brand Simplicity Index where they evaluate the state, significance and impact of simplicity and provide recommendations on how brands can improve their customer relationships and create value. In the findings, you’ll discover that the fast food and retail industries understand that they have to make things simple for their clients. And it shows that there’s an enormous potential (translated in profits) for insurance, banking, technology, automotive industries to communicate in a more simple language.

Where would your company be positioned in the Global Brand Simplicity Index?
GO FOR A CROWDSOURCED SPEAKER

In the event industry, much has changed in recent years, because clients and participants demand and expect ever more. Doing less might also be a great idea in this industry. No more goodie bags filled with folders and other stuff, given that most participants immediately throw these things in the trash. Invest in delivering extra value to your sponsors in a creative way.

Relinquish the classical event flow of planning a keynote followed by some workshops and a reception at the end. Dare to use alternative presentation formats and the available technologies. Stop organising an event between 9am-5pm, because everybody will be stuck in traffic.

Julius Solaris, founder and editor of eventmanagerblog.com, also agrees that the event industry is receptive to these ‘Less is Beautiful’ initiatives. Give more freedom and commitment to the audience instead of organizing and controlling everything. A nice example to sponsor your event is crowdfunding; the organizers announce the theme and program in advance and potential participants can already register (and pay), if they wish to attend. If a minimum of participants is reached, the event will be organised. Or what about organising an event and putting the shortlist of speakers on your website. Let the audience decide who they want to see on stage (crowdsourced speakers). It’s all about letting go and let other people (eg the participants) do the work.

What activities could be crowdsourced in your organisation?
“Here’s to the crazy ones. The rebels. The troublemakers. The ones who see things differently. While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

This great campaign was of course launched by Apple and it reflects the company’s ‘think different’ approach. Several great books have been written on this company and its charismatic leader Steve Jobs, so I limit myself to using a few of his quotes to underline Apple’s simplicity focus.

“People think focus means saying yes to the thing you’ve got to focus on. But that’s not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully.” - no exceptions.

“The quality of work resulting from a project is inversely proportional to the number of people involved in the project.” - go for small dedicated teams with the decision maker involved.

“Design is not just what it looks like, design is how it works.” - make it happen instead of talking about it.

“If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking.” - Steve Jobs often used the Simplicity Stick, if one of his teams failed to reduce the idea to its essence.

“I’m convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance” - simplicity is very hard work.
The MINI is of course also a brand that can’t be missed in this book. The MINI is a British automotive marque owned by BMW which specialises in small cars. The original two-door MINI was developed in 1959 and is considered as an icon of the 1960s and its layout influenced a generation of car-makers. But next to the small size and beautifully designed car, MINI does more to integrate the ‘Less is Beautiful’ principle in their daily business.

On their website, there is a visual application with easy scroll bars (price, speed, luggage room, ...) to find and create your ideal MINI model. A few years ago, MINI has also launched a new model ‘MINI One Minimalist’ to show their care for sustainable cars with a low CO2 emission rate.

Another great example in the automotive industry is Tesla Motors. This disruptive innovator is growing fast thanks to a great design (for instance, an elegant touchscreen console the size of an iPad, no mechanical locks but electronically-controlled door handles, ...) and a lot of other innovations to drive faster and longer with less emission.

Can you MINI something in your organisation?
SIMPLICITY CAN IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

One very complex domain is the healthcare industry where too much complexity can lead to disastrous consequences. For those reasons, several ‘Less is Beautiful’ actions are being taken to realize more with less complexity.

**Planetree** is a non-profit organization that provides education and information in a collaborative community of healthcare organizations. It hence facilitates efforts to create patient-centered care in healing environments. Thousands of focus groups - from bedside to boardroom - with patients, long-term care residents, families and professional caregivers across the globe have borne out their needs and desires for a more person-alized, humanized and demystified health care experience. For instance, patient-driven visit hours and shared decision making instead of standardised solutions. In short, they wish to create a healing environment.

At Cleveland Clinic, they want to deliver a great patient experience and almost 40,000 employees got a ‘caregiver’-training to make sure that everybody (going from parking lot attendants to neurosurgeons) participates in improving the patient experience. The hospital also tracks and displays individual performance ratings and satisfaction scores of all those interactions.

At Kaiser Permanente they developed a simple protocol that requires nurses upon changing shifts to exchange information with each other at the patient’s bedside (with the patient encouraged to participate).

NU91 is a Dutch association that has developed a brief workshop for medical staff to ‘brainstorm’ how wasted time can be transformed into patient time.

**WHAT ARE SOME CONCRETE ACTIONS IN YOUR COMPANY TO IMPROVE THE CUSTOMER’S EXPERIENCE?**
Data is worthless. Give me insights. A good market researcher will find many interesting things to report. A great one will focus on fewer items, but bridge the gap to actionable insights. InSites Consulting is a new generation market research agency [125 employees, 5 offices worldwide] where they understand this message very well. I had a chat with Kristof De Wulf (CEO) and Tom de Ruyck (head of research communities) and they explained they use ‘weather forecast’ symbols to measure the happiness-level within Insites. Every week, all employees receive a simple, one question survey which requires them to select one symbol reflecting their happiness level for that week, which gives insight in the individual and organisational happiness of the company and hence allows the proper actions to be taken.

Another method - the name was sprouted during our meeting - is the Tapas method. Tapas are a wide variety of appetizers in Spanish cuisine but we use it as a metaphor for small pieces of information that are communicated over a longer period of time. This means insights from a survey are not only delivered to the management board in a presentation, but also to the rest of the organisation through small, easy to swallow bits and pieces. Every day, people will receive an insight in the form of a tweet, an image, a cartoon, ... to make sure the results are communicated in a consequent and easily accessible way.

USE THE TAPAS METHOD

APPLY THE TAPAS METHOD - DELIVERING SMALL BITS OF INFORMATION OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME - TO MAKE SURE YOUR MESSAGE IS COMMUNICATED IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE WAY.
Google is obviously one of the players that can’t be overlooked in this chapter on simplicity. Over the past few years it has been the number one in the Siegel + Gale Global Brand Simplicity Index. For years this organisation’s gateway has been the clean, white home page, typically featuring no more than 30 lean words; a cheery, six-character, primary-colored logo; and a capacious search box. This simple screen conceals the enormous, complex technology that uses algorithms to find its way to more than 4 billion webpages. But simplicity’s important role in this company, which has over 30,000 employees working around the world, stretches far beyond the homepage.

Within the company, all information - even if it’s very confidential - is shared with all employees (“open is better than closed”). By doing this, a great amount of time is saved that would otherwise be wasted protecting information from colleagues. Google even encourages their people to steal with pride. If you can use some information from a colleague for your own projects, you’re very welcome to use it. The colleague will take pride in the fact that others are making use of his/her knowledge. To make sure this culture of openness and trust can remain, Google spends a lot of time and effort recruiting and selecting the right people within the company (“hiring is in the heart of what we do”).

Google is also world-famous for their 20% time principle. All employees have the right to spend 20% of their working hours on whatever they like - provided it improves Google in some way (“doesn’t have to be in your field of expertise”). Projects like Gmail and Google News took shape thanks to the 20% time principle.

Choose a project not completely in your field of expertise and suggest spending 20% of your time on that project.
INSPIRATION FROM THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES

Modern societies (and certainly larger organizations) have a tendency to make things unnecessarily complex. It can be very interesting to learn how ‘the third-world countries’ use ‘Appropriate Technologies’ – a concept to provide simple and easily replicable technologies to communities in need.

The Hippo water roller is a device for carrying water more easily and efficiently than traditional methods. People in underprivileged communities can transport approximately five times the amount of water in less time with far less effort than the traditional method of carrying 20 liters on one’s head. The first purpose leans towards water gathering; yet several other uses have since been discovered. It also acts as a watertight container to keep valuables and clothes dry when going downstream in white water rapids; or as a container with life-saving supplies to be dropped from helicopters, in which case some rollers have been distributed to villages pre-filled with grain or other food supplies.

A Liter of Light is a movement with the aim to provide an ecologically and economically sustainable source of light to underprivileged households, which do not have access to electricity. The invention is relatively simple. It involves filling up a plastic bottle with purified water and bleach and installing onto the roof of a house. The water inside the bottle refracts the sunlight during daytime and creates the same intensity as a 55 watt light bulb. In less than a year since inception, over 200,000 bottle bulbs were installed in communities around the world. Liter of Light’s objective is to light up 1 million homes by the end of 2015.

WHAT WOULD BE A GOOD ‘APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY’ FOR YOUR OWN COMPANY?
REPLACE YOUR BANK WITH SOMETHING SIMPLE

Simple was born out of CEO Josh Reich’s frustration with the complexity of banking and his desire to start a business that would actually help people spend smarter and save more, free of the industry’s typical pitfalls. Reich notes that since most banks earn money from fees and charges resulting from their customers’ mistakes, they intentionally keep the customer confused. Bearing this in mind, he created a radically simplified customer experience that focuses on a strong product and great service. Simple is best described as a replacement for your existing retail checking account, though the company works with its partner bank, Bancorp, which holds and insures all funds.

At Simple, customers see just one account balance, though they can subdivide this into an infinite number of buckets of buckets called Goals, effectively hiding money away for bills, regular, and long-term expenses before spending it. This capability is paired with data-rich transaction analysis of their spending; support in a personal and humanized communication style, and no monthly, annual, minimum balance, or overdraft fees. Today, the company has more than 50,000 customers and more than a quarter of a million people have requested an invite to Simple.

“In addition to our seating arrangement, it might be worth noting that at Simple, we see design and engineering as one synchronous team, rather than two individual orgs. There is no definition between design and engineering, instead we view engineering as design. For example, at Simple, our Creative Director is also a front-end web and app developer, photographer, and our design lead. This alignment and cross-over of core job responsibilities simplifies our creative process, while simultaneously accelerating the time it takes to create and deploy new features, site elements, and design assets.”
LETTING GO
The third principle to integrate ‘Less is Beautiful’ in your (professional) life is letting go of control. This one is the hardest to grasp. It’s a state of mind. Most people have trouble letting go, due to fear (bad things might happen), unworthiness (doubts whether you deserve support or help) or lack of trust (can you completely count on others).

A first step towards overcoming this controlling habit is to assess your own controlling nature and become aware of what this control costs (time, energy, money, stress). And consider the advantages of letting go: freedom, support, creativity, connection and peace of mind.

The next step is to decide whether you’re willing to let go of control. In some cases and situations, the answer may very well be ‘no’ and that’s fine. In other situations (and of course you can start experimenting with it) you decide to surrender - even not knowing how to do it or what it would look like, but authentic willingness is always the first step in positive change.

A third step is to focus on your circle of influence instead of your circle of concern (concept from Stephen Covey). The vast majority of people invest too much time and energy in things they cannot control, such as the weather, what the next weekend will bring or the war in the Middle East. Preoccupying yourself with such issues is a huge waste of time and energy. An example: If all you do is spending your evenings at home, shaking your head as you watch crime reports on the local news, wondering what the world is coming to, you’re way out in your circle of concern. If you were working within your circle of influence, you’d be busy attending community action meetings, or volunteering to coach youth sports, providing leadership and guidance to build a better future for your community. It might look like a contradiction, yet being vulnerable and asking for help increases your own circle of influence.

And at last, surrender. It doesn’t mean giving up or stop caring, yet you must have faith and allow things to be taken care of by others and by the ‘Universe’. This last element might sound spiritual or soft, but I guess everyone has experienced situations when ‘the world’ gave you exactly what you needed at certain times. Maybe you didn’t always like the moment in itself, but in hindsight it was one of the best things that could have happened to you (for instance, getting fired could be the start of your own business). And probably you didn’t plan to meet your best friend or partner when you did. It just happened and your mind was open to allow the experience.

Is letting go always a success? No, absolutely not. Like all things in life, you have to try things; some will work, some will fail. That’s the essence of change and learning. The basic lessons from improvisation theatre can be a very good way to improve your ‘letting go’ skills: be positive, dare to fail, follow your intuition, be in the moment, make others look good.
TWO MONKS AND A LADY

Two monks, going to a neighbouring monastery, walked side by side in silence. They arrived at a river they had to cross. That season, water levels were higher than usual. On the bank, a young woman was hesitating and asked the younger of the two monks for help. He exclaimed: ‘Don’t you see that I am a monk, that I took a vow of chastity?’

‘I require nothing from you that could impede your vow, but simply to help me to cross the river’, replied the young woman with a little smile.

‘I...not...I can...do nothing for you’, said the embarrassed young monk.

‘It doesn’t matter’, said the elderly monk. ‘Climb on my back and we will cross together.’

Having reached the other bank, the old monk put down the young woman who, in return, thanked him with a broad smile. She went away and both monks continued their route in silence. Close to the monastery, the young monk could not stand it anymore and said, ‘You shouldn’t have carried that person on your back. It’s against our rules.’

‘This young woman needed help and I put her down on the other bank. You didn’t carry her at all, but she is still on your back’, replied the older monk.
ALLOW SLACK TIME

Most people know the story of how Google allows 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 originate from the 20% ‘innovation’ time.

More and more companies are considering a ‘free time’ program, of which different variations exist as well. At Yahoo they organized Hack Days - a specific 24 hours time-frame where employees collaborate (or work together in a friendly competition) on new projects. And at Atlassian they organize a ShipIt-day 4 times a year.

It’s important that you allow real ‘time-off’ for employees to think about new ideas and work on extra projects. And that is simply not possible if the (time-)pressure for efficiency is enormous. If you have to do overtime to keep up with your ‘usual’ work, ‘extra’ time will not be greeted happily. 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 is no longer room for flexibility and innovation and business becomes busyness.

Do you still remember the puzzle with numbers from your childhood?
You had to place the numbers in the right order to complete it. The essence of the puzzle boils down to the presence of one empty space to allow you to move the buttons/pieces and hence reach your goal.
If you go for 100% efficiency (and imagine a puzzle without empty space), there’s no room to respond to unexpected opportunities.

How much ‘slack’ time have you built in this week?
#unexpectedopportunities
When dealing with complex situations, the number of rules and guidelines increase in an exponential way. The shared space principle (applied in traffic) is a great example of going in the opposite direction: diminish the number of rules to have better results.

Shared space is an urban design approach which seeks to minimise boundaries between vehicle traffic and pedestrians, often by removing features such as curbs, road surface markings, traffic signs, and regulations. Schemes are often motivated by a desire to reduce the dominance of vehicles, their speed, as well as road casualty rates.

Makkinga is a town in the north of the Netherlands were the shared space principle is applied. There are no road markings and no prohibition or direction signs visible in the streets. There is a traffic sign at the border of the town which reads “free of traffic signs”. Parking meters and parking restrictions are also absent.
FOLLOW A SOCIAL MEDIA DIET

- You check your mail on your smartphone when you’re leaving the office.
- You think the new table-setting etiquette stipulates a fork and napkin to the left of the plate, whereas knife, spoon and smartphone go on the right.
- You are using #hashtags in your #mail.
- You find it weird when people haven’t heard of Instagram, Pinterest, FourSquares or WhatsApp.
- You check your news feed on Facebook, Twitter and other social media more than 5 times a day.
- You feel stressed, if your ex-schoolmate Suzy doesn’t respond within one hour to your friend request.
- You feel a slight feeling of panic when your battery of your smartphone shows less than 10%.

Have you ticked all the boxes? Then you may belong to the ‘social media addict’ category. And it might be good to follow a strict social media diet for a few weeks. Don’t go cold turkey to avoid a big shock, but slowly diminish the number of times you check your mail or social media. The world keeps turning if you don’t update your profile on Facebook or Twitter for a day. And maybe you can even start enjoying the moment.
GO FOR A WONDER WALK

A wonder walk is a great alternative to traditional meetings (with a chairman, reports, tables, ...). A few principles:

• 1 person is responsible for the walking route (+ try to integrate a cafe/little restaurant on the way to have lunch/coffee/tea).
• Before you start, collect the topics from the participants on a flip chart: keyword topic + name contributor (max 30 minutes) and no discussion when collecting the topics.
• Have the wonder walk whatever the weather conditions are.
• There’s no process or leader and subgroups are formed organically - depending on the topics that interest you (and hopefully also the topics where you’re responsible for).
• During the walk, you can stop a few times and a subgroup can summarise their topic in 1 minute - every topic should have 1 concrete decision (what’s the next action that should be taken to realise this). New subgroups are formed in an organic way (if you can’t contribute to a certain discussion, you can join another subgroup).
• After the walk, take the original flip chart with the topics and write down a few key words concerning the concrete decision or action step + a person who’s responsible to follow up on this. Take a picture of the flipchart and your report is ready.
• People who couldn’t attend are responsible for asking other colleagues what’s discussed and decided.

Other alternatives for a meeting: have a short skypecall/conferencecall (max 30’); create a wiki (or other common working document); have one-on-one meetings; have a short brainstorming session; use the 6 thinking hats method; ...
GET RID OF YOUR STUFF

There is an enormous amount of great initiatives, organisations, websites, books, ... out there to assist us in living happily with less stuff. Here are a few examples:

- The Story of Stuff project from Annie Leonard is a great source of inspiration to live with less stuff and to get information on how the production and consumption cycles behind the scenes work.
- Graham Hill is the founder of LifeEdited, a website that provides heaps of inspiration on how you can live large in small spaces.
- De Goedzak (translated it would mean ‘good bag’) is a prominent, transparent garbage bag for old stuff which can still be useful. The bag will be put on the sidewalk next to the normal garbage bags, but passers-by can go through the bag if they notice a thing they can use.
- The swap-o-magic is a unique vending-machine that allows users to swap items rather than buy them. Its intention is to offer an alternative in today’s disposable economy by encouraging communities to trade and reuse items.
- The 100 things challenge is a simple living movement started by Dave Bruno who wanted to break free from consumerism and lived for one year with 100 personal possessions.

What’s the stuff in your office that you don’t use anymore? Make somebody else happy with that material.
Organisations spend a lot of time finding the department or person to blame when something goes wrong. In essence, there’s nothing wrong with determining the cause of a problem - to make sure it doesn’t happen again and the learning process can ensue. But in many cases, a lot of energy is lost during this crusade to find the ‘culprit’ (with accusations, deception and a lot of other negative energy).

On many occasions the problem results from a coincidence of different actions and cannot be attributed to 1 guilty person. What would happen if we could transform all this negative energy in a positive exploration to ensure the problem will not arise again? It is possible. From the moment something goes wrong, Mr. IDDI is the guilty one. IDDI stands for ‘I Didn’t Do It’, which renders it unnecessary to invest energy in finding the wrongdoer. The focus can switch to positive solutions and ideas to prevent the situation from occurring again.
ANSWER YES AND INSTEAD OF YES BUT

Yes and ... is the first exercise you learn in improvisation theatre. It’s about accepting the situation and suspending your judgment to allow the story to continue. You have to answer a suggestion from your colleague with ‘Yes and ...’ instead of an idea killer (Yes but ... no money, no time, we’ve already tried it).

In business situations - just think about any meeting you’ve attended - people are very good in conjuring up those idea killers. If you want to establish a more creative culture, this exercise (just do it for 3 minutes on a topic that needs some new ideas) is perfect. Apply it in your next meeting to ensure people will not be limited to their fixed thinking patterns. This is just one exercise from improvisation theatre that can be used in organisations to quickly and creatively adapt to all their challenges.

At the Antwerp Management School, I’ve had the chance to speak with Koen Marichal, director of the Future Leadership Initiative. They are supporting middle managers to become leaders in these hectic, ever changing world. In one of their modules, ‘managing the complexity’, they apply basic improvisation skills to offer managers an experience to demonstrate nobody can control everything. Instead of trying to understand all the forces in your environment, let go of these ‘fake certainties’ and react to the situations at hand, influenced by a few guiding principles. It provides great mental rest and room to reflect upon one’s own behaviour. And change your leadership style if necessary.

Experiment with the three minute ‘yes and ...’ exercise in your next meeting.
AUTHENTICITY AND INSPIRING TRUST

Durabrik is a Belgian building company [200 employees and + 80 million in revenue] that connects leadership with vulnerability and authenticity. CEO Joost Callens is the driving force behind the company and their sustainable philosophy. An important turning point in their outlook was a pilgrimage to Compostella with the management team and several employees. During their journey there was room for reflection and dialogue about the values of the organization. Due to suitable rest and the idea of relinquishing a fixed meeting-structure, this resulted in deep insights for the organisation’s future. After the success of this pilgrimage, the remainder of the employees are now presented with the opportunity of having a similar experience with their department.

The vulnerability - and at the same time power - is also created through other initiatives: meetings start with a short check-in process which allows attendees to express their feelings going into the meeting, there is weekly ‘toilet-inspiration’ with a fresh thought and a fitting image, and there are dialogue-meetings on the interaction between employees and their managers. Durabrik wishes to stimulate people to be themselves and to give them room to develop. That means letting go of control.

HAVE YOU ALREADY BEEN ON A PILGRIMAGE TO COMPOSTELLA WITH YOUR TEAM TO FIND INSPIRATION/GET INSPIRED?
Organizations have a tendency to try to control everything. This certainly applies to healthcare, where lives are at stake and the control mechanisms are prevalent. Yet the people who actually do the work (the real experts) are often no longer involved in developing the strategy (done by managers who’ve never done any fieldwork themselves).

Buurtzorg (“neighbourhood care”) is an innovative approach in the Netherlands to deliver home care. It originated in 2006 from staff’s dissatisfaction with traditional home care organisations. Bureaucratic duties, working in isolation from other care providers, and, above all, neglect of their professional competencies, were amongst the complaints.

The organisational model of Buurtzorg is to have care delivered by small self-managing teams consisting of a maximum of twelve professional caretakers. In addition Buurtzorg wishes to keep organisational costs as low as possible, partially by using ICT to organise and register care programs. At this moment, more than 500 self-managing teams (6,000 caretakers) are already operational and the company has already won the nomination for ‘the best company to work for’ twice in the previous years.

What could be organised (or ‘disorganised’) in your company to give your employees back their responsibility and let them manage it themselves?
EVERY YEAR A NEW LEADER

Present in 124 countries and territories and with over 86,000 members, AIESEC is the world’s largest youth-run organisation. AIESEC facilitates youth leadership activities as well as international internships & volunteer experiences. There is one very interesting aspect to it: the entire global, national, and local leadership teams change every year. That means that every year, 24,000 students have the opportunity to experience a leadership position within one of the committees. It’s a great example of letting go of a key position within an organisation without losing their vision and mission.

I’ve had the opportunity to be a founding member of two great networks: new shoes today and 21 Lobsterstreet. Within new shoes today, we strived to achieve the advantages of a normal company based on a minimal structure. We only arranged the legal stuff and agreed on a minimal financial contribution model (10% of the individual revenues where used to keep the organisation running - a website, common database, our wonder walks and business cards). In addition there were some guiding principles:

+ No fixed leadership roles - if you can bring some added value to a certain project, take responsibility and create your own team.
+ No fixed costs like an office, back-office or sales-support - everybody is responsible for his/her own activities and revenues.
+ No extensive list of rules and procedures - use your common sense to go forward & address difficult topics based on mutual trust and respect.

Within the 21 Lobsterstreet network, the same principles are applied with even more freedom and ownership at an individual level. For an outsider it might appear we’re operating as 8 separate entrepreneurs, but behind the scenes, strong connections and an enormous level of trust is pushing everybody forward to fulfill his/her dreams. Nothing is stronger than trust in a partnership.

WOULDN’T IT BE GREAT TO OFFER YOUR EMPLOYEES A CHANCE TO TAKE LEADERSHIP OF A CERTAIN POSITION FOR ONE YEAR? #EXPERIENCEBOOST
IT’S A NEARLING, BABY

Mentally, we are accustomed to focusing on error and failure prevention, whilst actually we should also be able to let go of this focus and start learning from our mistakes. For true innovation, the ability to let go is equally important as thinking of the new. Sometimes it’s better to start doing something and discover you’re on the wrong path (you learned what’s not the right path) instead of doing nothing (because then you learned nothing). Yet the words ‘failure’ and ‘mistake’ have a negative connotation to it.

Let’s introduce a new word: the nearling. A nearling is a positive word for something new that was done with the right intentions, which has not – yet – led to the right result. The reasons for nearlings not to succeed can be diverse: the circumstances have changed; a better option has been chosen; an error was made; fate decided otherwise; there suddenly were other priorities, and so on. The nearling is situated between zero and one, between failure and success. You only recognise a nearling in retrospect.

You can be proud of nearlings, because:

• You started and took initiative
• You may have moved others
• Maybe it led you to something that was successful
• You need many nearlings for a few successes
• You learned from it

The nearling emphasises that initiatives are almost always valuable, even if they don’t lead to the right result. They may be the result of an experiment gone awry or of something unexpected, yet something has been learned from it.

YOU NEED A LOT OF #NEARLINGS TO LEARN AND GROW IN LIFE. FAIL FAST AND LEARN FAST
‘Trying to explain what Burning Man is to someone who has never been to the event is a bit like trying to explain what a particular colour looks like to someone who is blind.’

The Burning Man is an annual experiment in temporary community dedicated to radical self-expression and radical self-reliance. Every year 50,000 people gather for one week in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada for this ‘art-festival’ where everybody is dressed up, the music is playing non-stop and 200 workshops - going from discussing TED talks, star gazing, massage and walking nude for beginners - take place every day.

The temporary citizens live up to 10 basic principles (such as leave no trace, de-commodification, radical self-reliance, communal effort). The lack of laws and rules create an atmosphere where everybody uses their common sense and takes responsibility for their own actions. Completely different in our current societies where a large segment puts all its trust (and accompanying frustrations) in the government or other authorities. You could call the Burning man organized chaos or a chaotic organization.

And everything is done by volunteers (everybody is a volunteer). Black Rock City (temporarily denominated as such) has its own postal code for one week, has a radio station, a post office, a newspaper, ... and every year somebody comes up with another initiative to support the community.

COULD WE RUN OUR OWN ORGANIZATION BASED ON A MAXIMUM OF 10 BASIC PRINCIPLES?
A ROOM FOR REFLECTION

One of the reasons why we’re always busy can be found in our physical environment. At home or at the office, there are always triggers to be busy. But sometimes it’s beneficial to let our minds wander and let our unconscious mind do the ‘work’.

One way to escape from the daily busy-ness is finding a third place. The third place refers to social surroundings separate from home and the workplace. Third places are informal ‘anchors’ of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction. Some examples of this third place are: a coffee shop, a pub, a church, bookstore, social clubs, if there’s an emphasis on social interaction and the ability to ‘hang out’ without the necessity to purchase.

A more creative way to create reflection time is on the Ideas Island. It’s an initiative by professional speaker Fredrik Härén. People who are working on a creative project can send a proposal and might get the opportunity to stay 1 week for free at a private island (there’s a financial barrier to donate $1000 to charity to scare off those with the wrong mind-set). Its purpose lies in providing an environment that helps to bring some great ideas to life. And we all know that truly great ideas come when we are in solitude, when we are relaxed, when we are close to nature and when we feel in tune with the universe. So, what better place to think about ideas than alone on a private island!

GO FOR LESS DISTRACTION AND MORE INSPIRATION. SPEND A WEEK ON THE IDEAS ISLAND. OR FIND YOUR THIRD PLACE.
Do I need to do this right now?

This is a tool that will help you to become more aware of the things that you’re doing. You could print out these words in a large format and hang them in your office. At certain times during the day you can use this ‘sentence’ as a checklist. Ask yourself if the task at hand is the right job for you at that very moment by reading every word of the sentence:

Do I
Is this a task that YOU have to do or is there somebody to whom you could delegate this task?

Need
Is it absolutely necessary that this task NEEDS to be done?

To do
Does this task require that you DO something with it?

This
Is THIS task the most important thing that you should be doing now?

Right now
Is NOW the moment for you to be working on this task?

On many occasions we’re working on urgent tasks, although they are often not that important. Always start with the most important task. And in the majority of the cases you will find the task at hand (which spending time and energy on) isn’t the most important task at that very moment and you can switch tasks and priorities. Be aware.
TIME FOR THE SHARING-ECONOMY

Do you have your own drilling machine? Did you know that the average use of a drilling machine - during its entire life span - is around 15 minutes? Human beings have a tendency to own things, because they represent a symbol of status. Yet as a result people buy more and more stuff they don’t really need. And these additional things cost money and provide grounds for more stress. So it’s time for the sharing-economy.

This sharing is not exactly a fresh idea and has been around for ages. You don’t buy a house in all your travel destinations, so you rent a bed. You join a gym instead of buying treadmills. You borrow books from the library and rent movies and music. What’s new is that the sharing-economy is deepening and spreading. This collaborative consumption is a way to live light, waste less, protect the environment, create and associate with a community of like-minded people. This is taking place in both personal and business environments. It has become quite common to encounter systems where you can share your car (1.7 million car-sharing members in 27 countries) or bike (535 programs to share 517,000 bikes around the world). You can even go to a co-working space. But some initiatives might be considered quite new, like sharing driveways, dresses (eg Rent the Runway or Little Borrowed Dress) or jeans (mudjeans), sharing dogs (eg city dog share, Rover or Borrow my Doggie) or even sharing babies (eg Coparents, MyAlternativeFamily).

And this sharing-trend is going to expand further due to a ‘green mind set’ (sharing leaves a smaller ecological footprint), the recession (sharing saves money), an increased longing for community, as well as the new technologies that stimulate social networking.

WHAT PHYSICAL THINGS FROM YOUR COMPANY COULD EASILY BE SHARED WITH OTHER USERS?
Libraries and local culture centres are facing enormous challenges, because their budgets shrink rapidly in times when governments are pruning their cultural budgets. Fortunately, creativity arises when a crisis hits a society. Little Free Libraries is a community movement housed in small containers and started worldwide offering free books to members of the local community. They are also referred to as community book exchanges or pop-up libraries. It exceeds the mere book on a shelf that people can borrow, because every little library has an official steward and the libraries are listed on an official website. No less than 5,000 registered libraries already exist and 40 countries worldwide are involved. The community also donates libraries to rural areas that have no library of their own. **There are no rules or procedures if you want to borrow a book, except the phrase that’s attached to the little containers ‘Take a book, leave a book’**.

Due to a difficult political discussion on cultural subsidies, Mediamatic (in Amsterdam) distributed the whole collection of their physical library to their members who could pick up their favourite books for free. You just had to register (for free) on the Mediamatic site and promise that you will always honour a loan request from another community member. And in Rotterdam, a local community created their own ‘reading room’ where people gather to bring or lend books, read a newspaper or do some research - because the local library had to close.

Is your organisation already collaborating with the local community?
THE LEADER IN THE MIDDLE

Torfs Schoenen is a Belgian shoe-store chain where authenticity and personal development also play a very important role. The company has 560 employees and 70 stores and has already received the award for Best Employer 4 times.

CEO Wouter Torfs wants his employees to be happy and have opportunities to grow, because happy employees mean happy customers (and the accompanying good business results lead to happy shareholders). Wouter Torfs symbolizes a leader not at the top of the pyramid, but as one of the players in the middle of the action. It’s essential to understand what’s happening on the ‘floor’ and be a living example every single day. The company combines a long-term vision with pragmatic applications in daily practice.

One of the principles of the selection procedure at Torfs Schoenen is ‘Hire for attitude and train for skills’. Using this principle, the company can select the people with the right attitude and give them the trust and freedom to realize long-term targets. Employees also have the opportunity to develop their personal skills (two days a year) from a broad range of workshops with innovative topics like mindfulness and foot reflexology. Not to mention, every employee gets a day off on his/her birthday.

Do you lead from the middle or are you standing at the top of the pyramid?
THE NEW NORMAL

Peter Hinssen, thought leader on the impact of technology on our society, explains in his book The New Normal how companies may address a society without digital limits. Organizations are faced ever more with customers and consumers who no longer tolerate limitations in terms of pricing, timing, patience, depth, privacy and convenience. A number of new rules will apply to the New Normal. Internet and connectivity will be just as ubiquitous as electricity. Consumers will demand instantaneous fulfillment of their informative needs. Every interaction with a customer must be viewed as a ‘make or break’ moment in the relationship.

IT departments will have to adopt a new way of working. They will have to react in a more flexible manner to the demands of the company’s business side. IT-departments were used to build big systems, now they will have to create small, flexible structures that can be adapted quickly. They no longer have to build pyramids, they must put up tents instead. Peter gives some very recognizable examples of how the IT department is confronted with questions: why does a corporate website cost thousands of dollars while a young nephew can build a website for his school in a weekend or why can an employee book an online flight in 2 minutes, while it takes employees almost an hour to input their expenditure statements in SAP?

IT has to let go of trying to control everything and focus on coordinating and enhancing things that other people control. They have to adapt to an application-centric model instead of trying to control the infrastructure in this era of cloud computing. New skills and tools are needed to support and interconnect the diverse applications and resources that employees use in order to communicate with the outer world. Welcome to the new normal.

WHAT ARE THE TECHNOLOGIES IN YOUR BUSINESS THAT HAVE BECOME THE NEW NORMAL?
THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE AREN’T THINGS
LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL.
LIVE A BEAUTIFUL LIFE.

FREDRIK HÄRÉN
Author and speaker on business creativity.

I asked Fredrik Härén to write the closing word for this book. A closing word should be short, and perhaps especially a book like this. Fredrik really lived up to that.
Imagine a man coming in. He’s friendly. Joyful. Expressive. Very present to what you want to discuss with him and happy to be of service. His enthusiasm is contagious, his playfulness apparent, his creativity endless. At the same time he is practical and to the point. He knows his stuff. There’s also something you can’t quite put your finger on. A kind of innocence that puts you at ease. An openness that is integer and authentic. Take a deep breath, relax and allow that smile to emerge on your face … You’ve just met Cyriel Kortleven.

You can invite Cyriel to deliver an inspiring keynote at your conference or event around Business Creativity or Less is Beautiful. Every presentation is tailor-made with the latest, creative examples.

Cyriel Kortleven - International speaker, Master of Interaction, 21Lobsterstreet, Knight of NOW, inspirator, author, human being, brainstormsessions, large groups, creativity, improvisation, interaction, timespiration, present

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More info at www.lessisbeautiful.co (no, the letter ‘m’ isn’t missing. Less is Beautiful)
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SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

The purpose of this book is to inspire you with many examples of applying ‘Less is Beautiful’ within your own professional life. As a consequence, I have visited an enormous amount of websites and blogs; watched dozens of YouTube movies; been in touch with many people; read many articles, discovered several great slideshares and buried myself in a few books to create this book. To honor the authors and sources of all this inspiration, I’ve made a list of the most important sources - in random order. At the book-website www.lessisbeautiful.co you will find the same list where you can easily click through to the right website.

BOOKS

7 habits of effective people, Stephen Covey (2004)
7 levels of change, by Rolf Smith (2007)
Flip the Funnel, by Joseph Jaffe (2010)
Insanely simple, by Ken Segall (2013)
Ja en Nee, Realiseren wat de moeite waard is met de Wildoe methode, by Jim van den Beuken (2013)
Olifantenpaadjes, by Jan-Dirk van der Burg (2011)
Presentation Zen, by Garr Reynolds (2011)
Making ideas happen, by Scott Belsky (2010)
Made to Stick, by Dan and Chip Heath (2007)
Simple, by Alan Siegel and Irene Etskorn (2013)
Six Word Memoir® from SMITH Magazine (2008)
Slack, by Tom DeMarco (2002)
Timespiration, by Cyriel Kortleven (2012)
The Laws of simplicity, John Maeda (2006)
The One Thing, by Gary Keller and Jay Papasan (2013)
The new normal, by Peter Hinssen (2010)
The Myth of Multitasking, by Dave Crenshaw (2008)
The paradox of choice, by Barry Schwartz (2004)
Yes and … Your Business, Gijs van Bilsen, Joost Kadijk and Cyriel Kortleven (2013)
PEOPLE

- Alan Siegel - President and CEO and Irene Eitzkorn - Chief Clarity Strategist at Siegelvision (www.siegelvisioncorp.com) @AlanSiegel @Irene_Eitzkorn
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- Ben Shafer - Studio Director of the Innovation Kitchen and Matthew Kneller - Communications Manager at NIKE (www.nike.com)
- Dan & Chip Heath - Speakers and Authors of 3 bestellers at Heathbrothers (www.heathbrothers.com)
- Fredrik Härén - Author and Speaker on Business Creativity (www.fredrikharen.com) @fredrikharen
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- Thierry Geerts - Country Director at Google Belgium (www.google.com) @TGeerts
- Tom de Ruyck - head of research communities at InSites Consulting (www.insites-consulting.com) @Tomderuyck
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- Wouter Torfs - CEO at Torfs Schoenen (www.torfs.be) @WouterTorfs
WEBSITES & BLOGS

www.21lobsterstreet.com (go for a wonderwalk)
www.7ideas.net (general inspiration)
www.100things.com (get rid of your stuff)
www.aiesec.org (every year a new leader)
www.alterflight.org (inspiration from third world countries)
www.antwerpmangementsschool.be (yes and ... lesson from improv)
www.apple.com (Simple)
www.beechle.com (the power of empty space)
www.bluearlax.com (general inspiration)
www.bubbledogs.co.uk (the single dish menu)
www.burgerandlobster.com (the single dish menu)
www.burningman.com (organized chaos or chaotic organization)
www.buurzorgnederland.com (decentralized neighbourhood care)
www.clemens-en-august.com (who needs a shop anyway?)
www.clevelandclinic.org (simplicity can improve your health)
www.comparethecomparisonsites.com (comparison sites)
www.cosme-de.com (who needs a shop anyway?)
www.degoedzak.nl (get rid of your stuff)
www.dove.com (go for a make-under instead of a make-over)
www.downsizefitness.com (downsize gym)
www.dumblaws.com (rules, rules and more ... rules)
www.fastcompany.com (general inspiration)
www.fredrikharen.com/ideas-island (room for reflection)
www.greatcall.com/jitterbug (the one touch phone)
www.hipporoller.com (inspiration from third-world countries)
www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-robbins/let-go-of-control (Introduction let go)
www.johnsonphones.com (the one touch phone)
www.kp.org (simplicity can improve your health)
www.lifeedited.com (get rid of your stuff)

www.littlefreelibrary.org (take a book, leave a book)
www.mediamatic.net (take a book, leave a book)
www.mindfulnessdc.org/bell/index.html (Mindfulness Bell)
www.nearling.com (It’s a nearling)
www.newshoestoday.com (go for a wonderwalk)
www.nu91.nl (simplicity can improve your health)
www.nyc.gov/311 (Call 311)
www.pechakucha.org (Do a pecha kucha)
www.planetree.org (simplicity can improve your health)
www.ryanair.com (flying high by offering less)
www.robbell.com (story of the starfish)
www.siegelgale.com (the Global Brand Simplicity Index)
www.sixwordmemoirs.com (six-word memoirs)
www.snavewool.nl (comparison sites)
www.southwest.com (flying high by offering less)
www.springwise.com (general inspiration)
www.stopvergaderen.nu (meetings)
www.swap-o-matic.com (get rid of your stuff)
www.telai.se/international (the one touch phone)
www.Thestoryofstuff.com (get rid of your stuff)
www.thefutureleadershipinitiative.com (lessons from improv)
www.universalsolarlando.com/harrypotter (Flip the Funnel)
www.veldhoencompany.com (Activity Based Working)
www.visual.ly (a prototype is worth a thousand meetings)
www.vitaya.be/de-make-under (go for a make-under instead of a make-over)
www.wearemadd.com (the single dish menu)
www.wengerna.com (The Ultimate Swiss Army Knife)
www.wikipedia.com (general inspiration)
www.zenhabits.net (general inspiration)

New app: Next Step (from Jim van den Beuken)
RELAX. NOTHING IS UNDER CONTROL

Adi Da Samraj