

[LESS IS BEAUTIFUL]

69 STORIES OF HOW 'LESS' SUCCEEDS IN BUSINESS

C Y R I E L K O R T L E V E N

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.

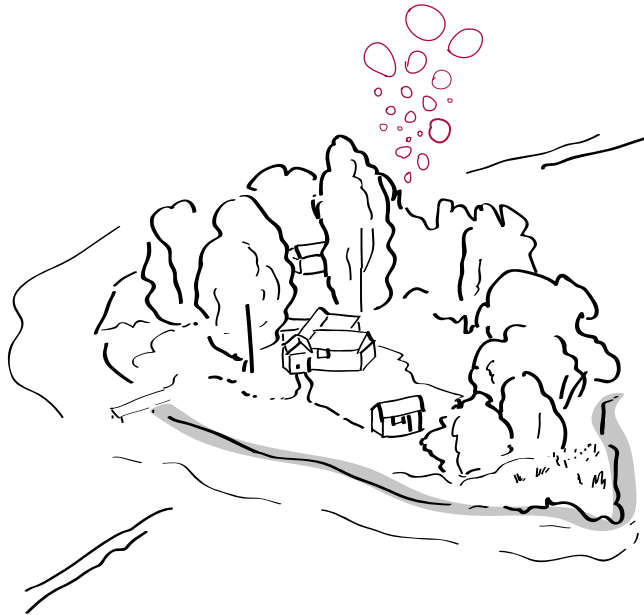
You will discover 69 tools and examples of how widely divergent industries approach the 'Less is Beautiful' theme. The collection of these diverse examples, summarised in 300 words and a beautiful, simple design, make this book unique. Chances are big that you will already know some of the examples, 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!

MORE INFO @ WWW.LESSISBEAUTIFUL.CO

(NO, THE LETTER 'M' ISN'T MISSING. LESS IS BEAUTIFUL)



ORIGIN 'LESS IS BEAUTIFUL'

'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.



STORY



TOOL



EXAMPLE



TWEET

1 WHY MORE IS TOO MUCH

Shells or starfish.....	19
Expiration date for rules.....	21
The Paradox of Choice.....	23
Compare the comparison sites.....	25
Let's plan a meeting.....	27
Wise lessons from zen monks.....	29
Rules rules and more ... Rules.....	31
Everybody speaks body language.....	33
The curse of knowledge.....	35
For me a tuna sandwich, please.....	37
More stuff... more space... more stress.....	39
The ultimate Swiss army knife.....	41
The smallest thing in the Universe.....	43

2 START TO STOP

Just walk.....	49
Create your own quit-list.....	51
Cutting out the middleman.....	53
Flying high by offering less.....	55
From switchtasking to monotasking.....	57
Do want matrix.....	59
The mindfulness bell.....	61
Vilfredo pareto was a smart guy.....	63
7 Fans x 24 hours = reach 350 million people.....	65
7 Levels of change.....	67
Activity based working.....	69
Call 311.....	71
Downsize gym.....	73
Become a knight who says NO.....	75
Fewer ideas more execution.....	77
Stop training start learning.....	79
The one touch phone.....	81
The power of empty space.....	83
Fancy a hotdog with champagne?.....	85
Who needs a shop anyway?.....	87

3 SIMPLIFY

To read or to eat, that's the question?.....	93
A prototype is worth a thousand meetings.....	95
Do the aunt bertha test.....	97
Follow the elephant paths.....	99
Success: creating sticky messages.....	101
Summarize your day in a tweet.....	103
Six-word stories.....	105
What's the commanders' intent?.....	107
A shoe as comfortable as a sock.....	109
A simplicity event in your company.....	111
Do a pecha kucha.....	113
Coach work simplification.....	115
Global brand simplicity index.....	117
Go for a crowdsourced speaker.....	119
iSIMPLE.....	121
Let's mini.....	123
Simplicity can improve your health.....	125
Use the tapas method.....	127
The number one insimplicity.....	129
Inspiration from third-world countries.....	131
Replace your bank with something simple.....	133

4 LETTING GO

Two monks and a lady.....	139
Allow slack time.....	141
Shared space.....	143
Follow a social media diet.....	145
Go for a wonder walk.....	147
Get rid of your stuff.....	149
Introduce mr. Iddi.....	151
Answer yes and instead of yes but.....	153
Authenticity and inspiring trust.....	155
Decentralized neighbourhood care.....	157
Every year a new leader.....	159
It's a nearling, baby.....	161
Organized chaos or a chaotic organization.....	163
A room for reflection.....	165
Do I need to do this right now?.....	167
Time for the sharing-economy.....	169
Take a book, leave a book.....	171
The leader in the middle.....	173
The new normal.....	175

SUMMARY

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.

EXPIRATION DATE FOR RULES



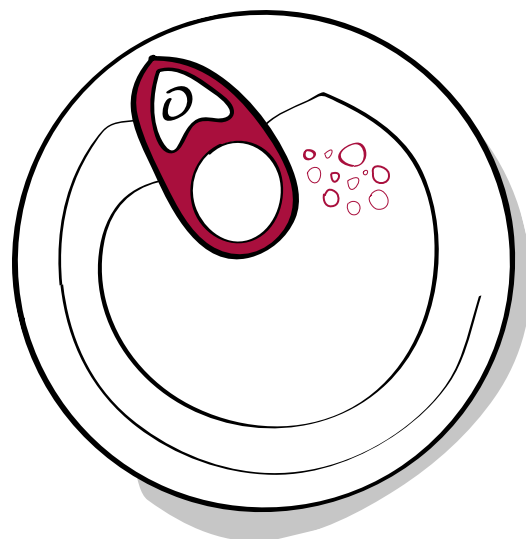
Expiration dates for food are very normal and widely accepted, but shouldn't it be interesting to introduce expiration dates for rules? Most rules are generated when change is happening or when something goes wrong. In those instances, we're very good - certainly in a business context - in creating a 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.

HOW MANY RULES IN YOUR ORGANISATION HAVE ALREADY REACHED THEIR EXPIRATION DATE?



LET'S PLAN A MEETING

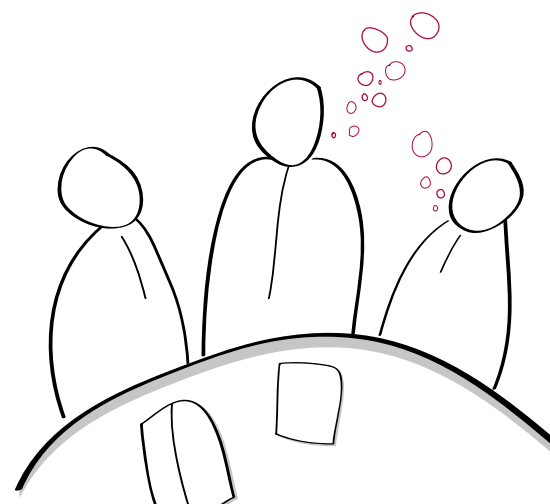


Have you ever been in a meeting where you couldn't bring any added value to the topics? Or that lasted too long? Or where the discussions didn't lead to an actual decision or understanding? Most likely the answer is yes. The *US Bureau of Labor Statistics* estimated that companies spent more than \$ 37 billion every year to unnecessary meetings. And that's just the financial cost of the salaries, not mentioning the negative effects on motivation, stress, burn outs, ...

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.**



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 adventurer or light traveller, this one of kind Swiss army-style multi-tasking tool has everything from a flashlight to a fish-scaling tool.

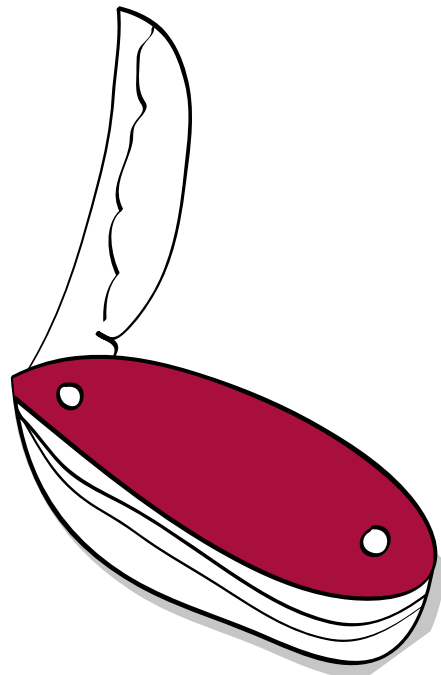


The 87 piece ultimate Swiss army knife contains a wide assortment of screwdrivers, openers, wrenches, magnifiers, compasses, blades, saws, rulers, tweezers and of course a toothpick, so you can pick your teeth clean after you've either gutted a moose in the woods or created a submarine singlehandedly.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



START TO STOP

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.

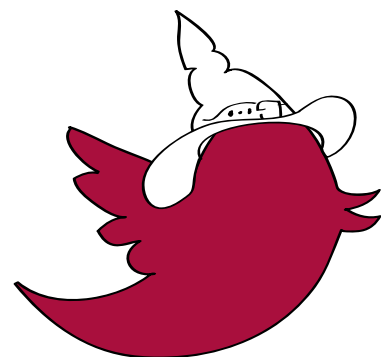
And you need a lot of perseverance to remain committed to the essence of what you wish to achieve. If you want to be the cheapest supplier, then cost-awareness should be reflected in everything you do. All your internal processes are aligned in the same direction to lower the costs and deliver the cheapest 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.

7 FANS X 24 HOURS = REACH 350 MILLION PEOPLE



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?



7 LEVELS OF CHANGE



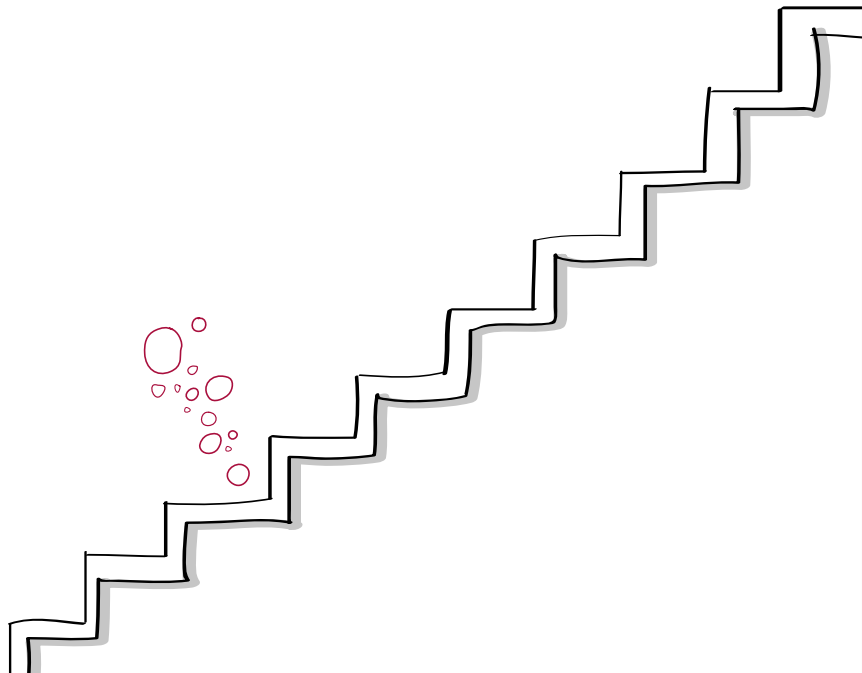
Einstein pointed out that “the significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

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?



CALL 311



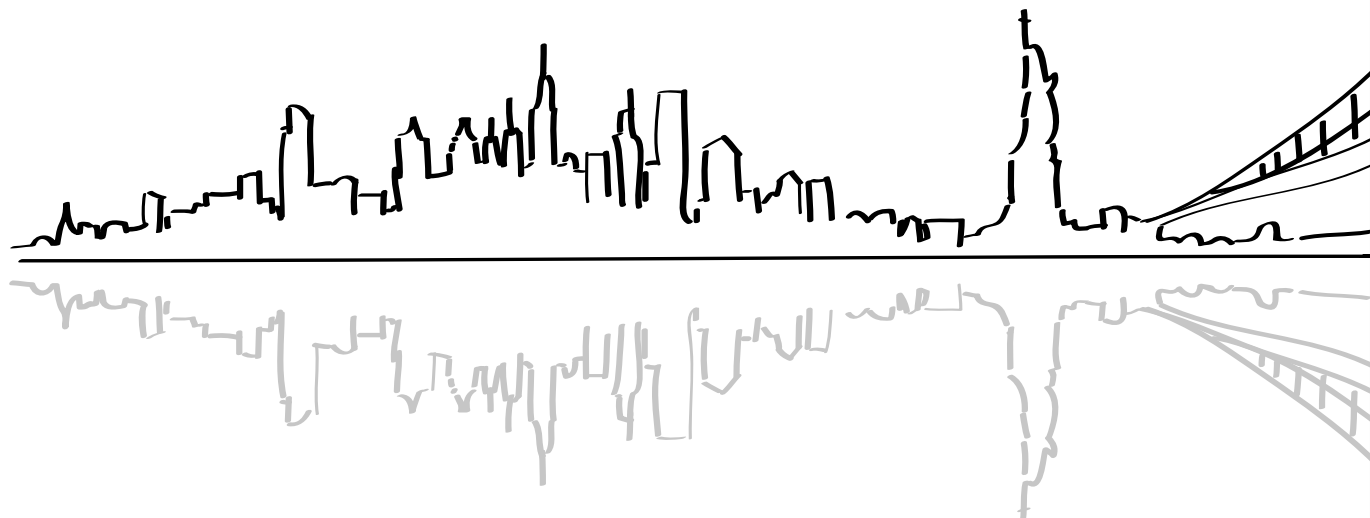
A great example of a government simplifying communication with its residents can be found in one of the biggest cities in the world: New York. Thousands of phone numbers (fourteen pages of listings in the city directory) have been replaced with one phone number, 311. The mission is to provide the public 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?



DO THE AUNT BERTHA TEST



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 WOULD YOUR MESSAGE BE IF YOU HAD TO EXPLAIN IT TO AUNT BERTHA?"



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.

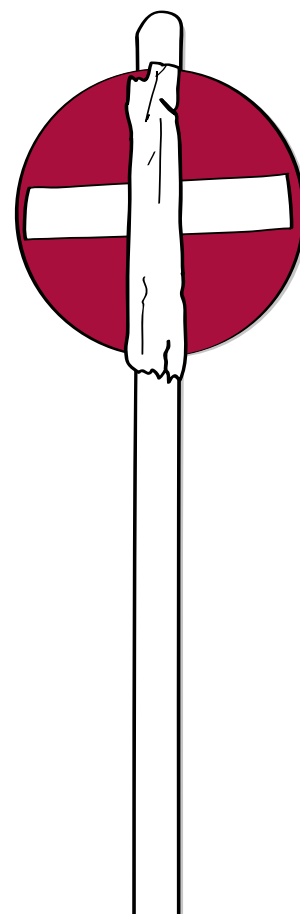
Let's introduce a new word: the nearling. A nearling is a positive word for something new that was done with the right intentions, which has not - yet - led to the right result. The reasons for nearlings not to succeed can be diverse: the circumstances have changed; a better option has been chosen; an 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



ABOUT THE CREATOR

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

www.cyrielkortleven.com - cyriel@cyrielkortleven.com - [@CyrielKortleven](https://twitter.com/CyrielKortleven)

Lay-out & illustrations by Kathleen Steegmans

www.mistimages.be - kathleen@mistimages.be - [@MIST_images](https://twitter.com/MIST_images)

Edited by Sam De Kegel

www.lettergek.be - sam.dekegel@lettergek.be - [@DeKegelSam](https://twitter.com/DeKegelSam)

More info at www.lessisbeautiful.co (no, the letter 'm' isn't missing. Less is Beautiful)



© photography: 1. Stroes.info 2. Luc Peeters 3. Bert Janssen 4. Stroes.info 5. Flanders DC