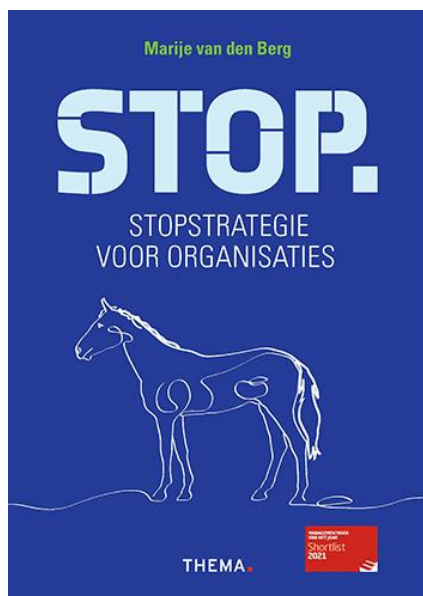# SANTASADO

STOP. *sample translation*
Marije van den Berg

A Stop Strategy for Organizations

STRATEGY | TEAMS

STOP. provides five clear steps with which you can stop successfully within your team or organization.

Stop beating dead horses, arrange a festive burial

Habit-driven meetings, suffocating bureaucracy, maniacal monitoring, endless reorganizations, hazy and endless projects, no organization seems to be able to escape them, the activities that don't contribute to the goals but do take up a lot of energy and money. It doesn't work, they make us burnout or become cynical. And still we keep them going.

We are beating a dead horse, against all instincts. Wouldn't it be great if our organizations would be better in stopping things? That sometimes less is really more?

A five-step stopping strategy

In her book *STOP.*, Stop Strategist Marije van den Berg provides:

- The five clear steps with which successful stopping can be achieved.
- The twelve mechanisms why stopping is so hard to do.
- Plenty real-life examples of good and bad stopping.
- The clever R.I.P. Model
- The big difference between removing or unlearning a practice.
- And why you have to keep an eye out for the little elephants.

Published in September 2020 | Paperback | 184 pages | ca. 45,000 words

- Shortlisted for Management Book of the Year
- Dutch edition published by Thema Publishers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marije van den Berg is a Stop Strategist. She has worked in countless organizations as researcher and advisor and has witnessed much unnecessary misery. She can teach you the craft of stopping. Marije is a champion in making stopping fun, simple and appealing and she will help you overcome your convictions that stopping is in fact a way of losing.

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'We're all afraid to acknowledge the freedom we really have.'
– Frieda Klein

FOREWORD

CityLab is a platform in the Dutch city of Leiden for local initiatives, and some years ago we had a cool project, CityBath. We had discovered that the water in the city canals (Leiden has *grachten* like Amsterdam) was clean enough for swimming. And we wanted to make a swimming pool in the canal. A large group of volunteers initiated the project, a well-renowned architect made the plans, students would build the pool and the neighborhood was involved. We got media attention and support from the local government. And still we were not able to complete the project, the core group pushed and pulled but we lost energy and momentum in the project and in the group. One night, we officially stopped the project. No matter how good the idea was, we wouldn't continue the project. It was a wonderful meeting where we showed gratitude to those who tried to get the project off the ground and we all went home satisfied and content.

When you stop beating dead horses, you are able to give them a festive burial. I came up with this variation on the expression that night. It was great to be able to stop.

I can't tell you where I got my curiosity for 'stopping' from, but I can tell you that I have a little tattoo of a typographic 'stop' sign, you see it at the end of magazine articles. I got it some 25 years ago when we ended a relationship. And I remember thinking, I've got to remember this, stopping can hurt, but it is good at the same time. I have quit some jobs, I have stopped smoking – once, and stopped drinking. I have made stopping decisions in local politics, I kind of like stopping.

I am truly fascinated by how we continue doing things in organizations that we actually would like to stop doing. Or that we create something new – policies, or a methodology – and that the old rules never leave the organization, which sometimes hinders the great new initiatives. All that energy and all that money is wasted!

This book is published at a special and appropriate time, but I would have rather been relevant to a less serious worldwide situation. There has been time for reflection and we

were forced to test assumptions like 'working from home is impossible'. We had to and could stop with a lot of things, and that will not change anytime soon.

But COVID will not be the main theme of this book, a crisis is never the source of stopping successfully. What does? That is what I researched for eighteen months with this book as the result. It is about having to stop and wanting to stop, about why stopping is so hard in teams and organizations. About really stopping and how to do that, the stop strategy. Let's arrange a festive burial for dead horses.

Let's start with stopping.

Marije van den Berg, June 2020

STARTING WITH STOPPING

No organization can escape these symptoms, projects that don't result to anything, but do take up a lot of energy and money, and happiness in your work. Hopeless projects. Meetings that lead to nothing but remain on your calendar. Required administration tasks where no one reads what the reports you produce. And still we continue doing this, it seems like these useless activities are increasing. It doesn't work, we get burned-out, we get more and more cynical, we stop enjoying doing our work.

'Dead horses need a festive burial' is a proverb that resonates immediately with people that are pushing and pulling these kind of projects through their organizations. Everybody recognizes a dead horse project, meeting or goal. The idea that you could quit them instantly offers relief. You give it a try, imagine that you stop doing them, feels wonderful.

But strangely, we usually continue doing them. The time administration in Dutch health care has been canceled by the government, twice, still nurses continue doing it. Why don't we *just* quit with something that isn't working? It is not that simple. We just rather work on something new, different or better, but in the meantime we keep on beating a dead horse.

Stopping is a neglected topic in organizations and sometimes it is even a taboo. We stop secretly, too late or with a lot of noise. It isn't talked about, and when it is discussed, the discussion is seldom constructive. If you can't talk about it, how can you align on it? It would be wonderful if organizations were better at stopping, that less is actually more.

Another book?

Are there not more than enough books about quitting? Walk into a book store, open a magazine, and you'll encounter stopping, usually in a 'challenge' format. Quit drinking, sugar, worrying, meat, shopping, a cluttered home, social media, a steady job. You can pass, join Stoptober, go vegan, work independent, *minimalize*, *Mariekondo*-ing, and meditate, obviously we want to work on living our lives with less of something. Both our world and our heads are too busy, too fast and too crowded. Less gives space and rest, who doesn't want that?

But something funny is going on. Individually we are stopping with things and to quit something by yourself is difficult but doable. At least you can control the process yourself. But strategy gurus are also advocating the benefits of using 'no' in companies. Steve Jobs: 'I am actually as proud of the things that we haven't done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying no to a thousand things'. And another one, from Michael Porter: 'The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do', often quoted, seldom applied, the *knowing-doing-gap* in practice.

If we look at our organizations, we are hardly able to stop at all. There is organizational attention for 'different', 'new' and 'better', and methods, books and terminology for this focus are adopted by managers and team leaders and thus implemented in the teams or organizations. We are constantly changing approaches and sometimes even long-term visions. There is little that sticks to the wall and we chase another dot on the horizon.

Change roughly consists of three parts. The new aspect you add, the aspect you leave unchanged and *the aspect you stop*. But stopping is the least developed and least carefully executed part of change. A neglected theme.

We expect that if we just keep adding new things, the old will drop off the cart or priority list by themselves. And we fail to look back to see if that assumption is correct. This is something I have shown to my clients, 'It isn't hard to prioritize', I tell them in a relaxed way. 'Just chose three or five important things and the time that is available determines by itself what you won't do.' But this only works if you chose to finish this one task one day, and then time management kicks in and it only takes half an hour to 'clear my inbox'. But I wouldn't address that what we had to let go, what would get dropped on the floor

and lay in the corner of the office until it started to smell funny. We had to start working with our three to five priorities.

This is how it works in most organizations, we don't cut and stop, we expect that employees continue juggling and prioritizing all by themselves, often, or with their departments. We seldom stop together and with just a little bit of alignment and focus.

In the financial crisis, nearly forgotten by now, we were forced to choose. There will come a new time of crisis and cutting costs. But good stopping wasn't on the agenda during the financial crisis, a blunt axe was used or projects, policies and ambitions weren't stopped but downgraded to a simmer. While we were perfectly able to tell why they weren't necessary anymore, sometimes it was even good to punt and end to them. But we didn't bury the dead horses, and we certainly didn't make it a festive burial.

And then there was money available again, we stepped on the gas pedal again. Ambitions and activities were aflame again but we had new ideas and new promises. You can check all the plans, they were filled with ambition before, during and after the financial crisis. Everything was important, everything was being ordered, all at once, the sky was the limit and we become more busy than ever. Organizations were under pressure again, everything went unscripted and at a fast pace again. How could we stop this rumbling freight train? *Hold my beer*, this virus must have thought. We should do better in the next few decades.

We do stop some things sometimes. We quit email or we stop sitting down for a meeting. And we rigorously abolish something, like the staff meeting or a whole layer of managers. Yet still the pressure remains high, the calendar remains full, the inbox deep, the stacks remain high.

And it is not that we don't *want* to stop. There are 'cancel weeks' in health care where we need to disarrange procedures. And who will start with stopping? I will also describe forms of not really stopping and stopping badly. I will answer the question, why is stopping so difficult in organizations? You are not crazy for failing, there are many arguments why stopping is near impossible.

The core of this book are the five steps we can take for sustainable and controlled stopping, the stopping strategy. Each stopping step offers insight and knowledge to make stopping in your team or organization a feasible goal. These five steps are:

1. Slowing down
2. Looking behind you
3. Departure
4. Unlearning
5. Completion

But first, can you hear them, see them in the corner of your eyes, do you recognize the stop signs?

1. STOP SIGNS

What makes you notice that it is time to stop

Suppose you are sitting together with all the employees from your organization. Someone says, 'close your eyes', and you all do it, nobody sees anyone else. 'Now raise your hand if you are currently working on a project that you secretly think will fail. This will not reach the goal we set, we really should stop it.' How many people would have raised their hands and would you have raised your hand? Would you still raise your hand if everybody had their eyes open?

We are bad at recognizing stop signs. We react too late while they are all around us. The signs are coming from colleagues or extern contacts, customers, residents, cooperation partners, scientists, competitors, members, share holders or the press. And from yourself. We ignore them, we continue while we feel unconsciously uneasy. *Bending the map* is how psychologists call this behavioral pattern. We adapt our mental navigation to match the prevailing circumstances. The 'we have it totally under control' statements from politicians are in this category. This is something we could blame politicians for, but we would rather hear from them that we can sleep peacefully than that we should panic.

The term stopping is usually not in an entrepreneur's dictionary. They prevail, see opportunities, don't give up. Femke Hogema is a financial expert for entrepreneurs and recently wrote the book *Entrepreneurship in Times of Crisis*. 'Avoiding bankruptcy by stopping your venture is possible but it rarely happens. Companies mostly slowly sink

into the swamp until it is too late to avoid bankruptcy. And believe me, you want to avoid bankruptcy.'

Saying out loud that you want to quit something is a taboo. We like comfort, safety and stability, even if that is the stability of a Titanic that is still floating. And if there is something that disrupts stability, it is stopping. But this means that we easily miss the signs we get to stop. Our colleagues do it, and we do it too. 'We grumble in the hallways but in the meeting we dare not speak up, or we agree with a proposal but don't act counterproductive and make up excuses why things don't work out.' In her book *Deep Democracy*, Jitske Kramer explains the effect of missing the important signs. The things we don't say, or not everybody says, the thing we don't know yet but do 'feel', underbelly, discomfort, taboo. Ignoring these signs lead to active sabotage in a team or organization, is Kramer's thesis. Sabotage grows from a joke to cynicism, to silent resistance, open resistance, to conflict and leaving.

We have to learn how to recognize and act on the stop signs early on to become better at stopping and avoid worse outcomes. The first step is to acknowledge that you want to stop. How we used to do things or why we did them doesn't work anymore, you need to want to stop.

And then you need to break the usual course of business and step out of it. To decide to quit something requires some energy and possibly a lot of courage. Because if you stop doing the regular things, your work will become tiring, uncomfortable or complicated. You break with the status quo, the comfort of it and eventually you need to label the current situation as a 'problem' and convince the rest that it is time to start stopping.

People that stop are outsiders

To say 'stop' means that you wish to end the current situation. You are either unwilling or unable to continue with the current navigation, you have the desire to voice the opinion that is probably shared by others. And if you want to stop a collective situation, things will be hard. If you don't like the movie, you can easily just silently leave the cinema. But picture this, now you are in the dark movie theatre with your entire team and the movie is some hip management method that you know doesn't work. You know that things will

not work out, you want your team to stop, so halfway through the movie you turn on the lights, make a stand and shout, 'Do you all think this was an incredible crappy movie too?'

You are probably not the only one with this opinion, but do you have the courage to be the first to stand up and voice your opinion? Are you the first sheep to jump over the fence? If you want to stop, prepare yourself initially to take on the role of loner or trouble maker. Exactly how difficult you are labeled, depends on the way you interact with each other, the kind of organization you have and your position in the organization. A department manager with a firm position on the hierarchical ladder will have more room to navigate and if you have the power to make decisions, you can more easily suggest that you would stop with something. If you work in a Lean start-up, you will probably have the slogan 'Fail fast!' printed on a T-shirt and are trying, failing and stopping business as usual in your team. But if you work in healthcare, 'helping and rescuing' are part of your DNA and here, stopping works differently. That the Dutch doctors that have united themselves against over-diagnosing and over-treating patients, have called themselves the 'Fearless Physicians'.

Typical stop types

An interim manager or temporary advisor are asked to bring an external view. If you are a strategist with innovative plans and experiments, you are probably a loner within the organization. Others would hate to have a position against the rest of the team, and in the end, everyone wants to belong to 'their' club.

Sometimes you are a stopper yourself, sometimes you notice someone else being the stopper. There are types that you can look out for, because stoppers emit stop signals. So keep an eye out for:

- The Canary in a Coalmine, the first to emit stopping signals;
- The Whistleblower, their subtle signals were not noticed;
- I'm not Crazy Harry, who doesn't do what is asked, based on convincing naivety or outsider-logics;
- The Brave One, who works against the currents with well-founded convictions;
- Unbelieving Thomas, the one that always thinks differently;

- The Cooperative Struggler, who says yes, but does no (also the *pocket veto*, say yes but have the no in your back pocket);
- The Postscript, who will reverse their initial decision, because he has a bad feeling about things;
- The Court Jester, who will use a joke to say what can't be said to those in charge, *speaking truth to power*;
- The Intern, who is unaware how things are done and will say what needs to be said;
- The First Sheep Over the Fence, leading the herd;
- The Gutsy Guy (male/female), who breaks the status quo with bravado by just saying it like it is;
- The Striker, who will throw down the axe when all other means haven't given the desired results;
- The Cold-Hearted Remediator, who stops what need to be stopped, without any empathy;
- The Curator, who will settle a bankruptcy with the utmost care and discretion;
- The Skunk at the Picnic, who comes in to ruin the party;
- The Child from the Emperor's Clothes, who is able to unmask.

Pull your head from out of the sand

Tim de Boer has researched the number of cable car projects that were proposed in the Netherlands but never built: one hundred. Bas Houten works on an exposition called 'Never Built in Tilburg', which shows that the small city in the south of the Netherlands almost had an airport and a giant pyramid from which you could ski downhill. Luckily, not all plans are executed. There was a plan to demolish the inner city of Leiden and their cute canals with weaver's houses to make way for a highway, but the city could not fund these plans (phew!).

You can foresee many reasons to stop, you know the signs. This is a list from Seth Godin's *The Dip* from 2011: running out of time, running out of money, getting scared, losing you interest, losing enthusiasm, settling for mediocre, focusing on the short term in stead of

the long term. Godin says that if these are the reasons to stop, don't start, it will be a waste of energy.

Below the line

A municipality had the rule that local initiatives could be subsidized for a maximum of three years, after that period they should be able to be self-reliant and self-funding. From their perspective, this rule was clear and practical, with a clear end point. But you can draw on a napkin whether initiatives are able to be self-reliant after three years. If that seems unlikely, you should not start with the subsidy in the first place, it would be a divestment.

'But it is such a great idea, could we not try to see if... They are so enthusiastic!' If the help is temporary, it will be easier to say yes. But the people who really want something are the exact people who will have a too optimistic view of the situation. You have to help them to pull their heads out of the sand and not subsidize them into a dead-end three-year period. That is an ungrateful task, you will be the *Skunk at the Picnic*, and who wants to do that? 'How many people need to order a cup of coffee daily in order for a coffee shop in the park to be profitable? By proposing this question I am the one who kills a brilliant plan,' is the unpleasant conclusion one mayor came to. Ungrateful, but necessary. You can do the math with cold-hearted euro's and help people to pull their heads from out of the sand.

Or at least pull the plug before you go bankrupt. 'If something is not profitable on paper, it will never become profitable in real-life.' Femke Hogema is the ultimate expert on pulling heads out of the sand. 'You should, at any given time, know how your organization is doing financially and if things are getting tight, you should let the facts rule your decision-making. Start adding and subtracting, funny that you have to tell this to entrepreneurs, most of them rely on their gut feelings, managing the company by staring at the ceiling for hours every night. A shortage of one hundred euros every month is easily supplemented, but if you head towards a shortage of 50K within three months, you should call for help.'

I asked the question 'what made you realize that you should stop something?' in my social media network. The CEO of a charity organization said, 'When we put on a fundraising

week, we planned for a week that would cost us several ten thousand euros, without a direct benefit.' He stopped the fundraising week, rightfully so, and hopefully before the organization had invested in it.

Too many projects

And how about an organization that is turning in a good profit or where profit is not the main goal? These are organizations where new initiatives are being born daily and projects are growing like weeds. But you cannot make the quick napkin calculation because you can't use the financial outcome to make stopping them logical.

This is called an *Initiatives overload* by Rose Hollister and Michael Watkins (Harvard Business Review, 2018) and they summarized a list of questions with which you can determine if you have too many initiatives. So *wake up and smell the coffee*, how often do you say yes to these questions?:

- Do managers discuss the need to decrease the number of projects and initiatives?
- Do you invest a significant amount of time in starting projects and initiatives?
- Does the organization lack the people that have an overview over all new and current initiatives?
- Do you launch different initiatives at the same time?
- Are initiatives often launched without coordination between departments, silo's or functions?
- Are initiatives being launched at any given time, regardless of the normal cycle of the organization?
- Is stopping or slowing down initiatives something that goes against the corporate culture of your organization?
- Are outdated projects being 'renewed' without looking if they are still effective or necessary?
- Are new initiatives being launched while there is a shortage of people and other means?
- Do you ask employees to dive into new issues before they have been able to complete or stop other projects?
- Are projects being launched without a clear end date and exit strategy?

Stopping starts with paying attention

While researching this book, if have spoken with a lot of people that have implemented reorganizations. Large reorganizations, where a large number of employees were laid off and what heralded a significant change of course for the organization. One CEO told me that he now regards reorganizations as a sign of ignorance. 'We missed the signals, from both the market and our employees.' I asked, 'What have you done to recognize the stop signals sooner now?', but there was no answer.

I discussed sabotage earlier, a sure sign of the need to stop. Just like dark humor and cynical remarks. And watch out for the results of employee satisfaction surveys, especially the questions about the work-private life balance. Worries about money in the organization is another sure sign of the need to stop. Asking if holiday payments can be postponed for a month, needing to loan money in order to pay the salaries, the strategic paying of invoices, stop answering the telephone…

What else do you need to look out for? When I asked this, I received a load of examples of stop signs, which I categorized in Silence, Clutter and Pinpricks.

- **Silence** is when you expect a response, but it doesn't come.
- **Clutter** is when you notice that things are becoming messy. You don't get the stop signs from someone directly, but you can feel them in the air, the subtext, the organization or the system. And it is draining all the energy.
- **Pinpricks** are the actions when someone feels the need to playfully punctuate a stop sign.

Silence, when you expect a response that doesn't come

Highlight in yellow It is best to stop when it is not relevant for anyone. How do you notice? When you stop receiving reactions on the contents, like in the example from Mirjam, advisor at the Dutch Government. 'The assignment came from a group of fourteen CEO's and I set up a project, but after a year I asked them for their opinions, and all I got as a response, was 'Do we need to invest a lot of time?' Then you know that you can stop.' Or take the stop sign from another advisor. 'When your requests for input and feedback

are getting increasingly hysterical, with a lot of writing in red and text highlighted in yellow. When organizations cancel important meetings at the last moment.'

Moving on indifferently I once researched a welfare organization and one of the social workers showed me a form they had to fill in to get approval to spend a little more time with a client. She filled in this form twice to three times a week, and I asked her, 'How often has approval been denied for these extra few hours?' 'Not once,' was her answer. So moving on indifferently is a stop sign for unnecessary control systems.

Vague looks 'When you are just about the only one that is enthusiastic and you get vague, glassy looks from everyone else,' was the response from a communication advisor. Suzanne is a product manager at Google and she adds, 'When you or nobody else in the organization is able to tell the new CEO what the use is. If you hide behind complex gibberish at that presentation and there is no clear-cut story, you are in front of a stop sign.'

Resignation 'Being told that I need to put things in perspective,' is a stop sign for team leader Lia. No, no, no, this is how we do things around here and that is not about to change. While that would be an improvement, actually.

No order There are fixed moments in project management methods where you test if the business case is still valid. The business arguments for a project and the expected results. When the business case collapses you would – ideally – stop the project, but sometimes a projects doesn't have a clear client or commissioner. How do you find out then? Carola de Vree taught me the simple question, 'Who ordered this?' When there is no good answer, you have a stop sign.

Clutter, when things get kind of messy

Workarounds Suzanne from Google has the stop sign 'When you invest more time in the workarounds than in the work itself. Merging two servers together, what a great idea! But one server has data that your support team isn't authorized to access and then you are working for months to structure the data to be secure. Isn't it time then to stop and split the two servers again?'

Mess Is your department a dusty mess? Rolled up flip-over sheets all over the place from that brainstorm session ages ago, you started an inspirational library but nobody picks up the books anymore because they are all outdated now, the same goes for brochures and magazines, and the intranet is filled with ancient information where you can not find what you are searching for. A sign of neglect and a stop sign.

Pillars and posts If customers, clients or residents don't know anymore how you organization works, this is a stop sign. They fail to understand why they need to be at this business unit for one issue and at another for something else. Too many layers, too many silos, too many managers, and – presumably – too many projects.

Filling holes with holes Especially in governmental organizations and education, loyalty is an important value and saying no is not one of the core skills, to put it mildly. Or saying no usually means that you killed your chances for promotion. Employees get or take additional tasks until they are overloaded and burned-out. Which means that the next employee that isn't yet overloaded and burned-out will receive additional tasks. One practical example: at a school an internal mentor will retire and leaves three months before the summer vacations. The head of the school will add these tasks to her work load because there isn't yet an official vacancy, giving her two jobs at once and creating an overload. Here, someone needs to say stop, filling holes with holes is a stop sign.

Spark of joy You understand that Marie Kondo can not be left out in this summary. She started the KonMari-method for cleaning up and she now has a Netflix series in which she helps out families. Her method revolves around the question, does this spark joy? No joy? Throw it away. But let's be realistic, work also consists of tasks that simply need to be done. Chores you get paid for to do, that are simply part of the deal. Like administration or accountancy, things that usually don't spark joy. But it would not hurt to see if your protocols, meetings, functions or management team still spark joy. It is wise to avoid wasting energy, if your team is drained you need to do something about it. But the great dependencies within organizations ask for a better alignment than just sparking joy, which is an individual parameter. The stop strategy in this book offers tools for this.

Side issues A real estate company wanted to change seriously and launched many initiatives within a year. Management saw that the pace was much too high and could not be sustained and they shared this with the company. They waited the second year for the

projects and initiatives to lessen, but that didn't happen. In fact, there were even more and most of them were internal, large meetings, leadership development programs, scheduling meetings, IT-launches, HR-trainings. And there was enough money for all this, but the problem was that no one within the company had time to sell real estate anymore. There was a massive intervention and everything that did not directly contribute to selling real estate, was stopped, and devoting time to the scheduling became obsolete overnight.

Vision addicted and monitor mania If companies don't want to face the facts, they sometimes start developing visions. Usually because leadership doesn't want to say that there are some tough decisions to make. And creating a vision can be a nice sidetrack, get all introspective and make up a wonderful description of a dot on the horizon in the far future without any clear conclusions for the work of today.

Or employees or politicians call for a vision because they know that the hard decisions are coming up and they want to ignore them. Time after time they will ask, 'but what is the vision?' without someone being able to stipulate the social or organizational issue that we fail to get a good picture of. A similar withdrawing movement is the insatiable desire for research, without having a clear view of the question. Or maniacal monitoring without benchmarks or interventions, without knowing what the actions are at certain values.

Pinpricks, someone playfully punctuates a stop sign

The bar of chocolate Peter is a project manager with an interest group and he stops writing 'reports that nobody reads, especially when I raise the alarm in a report and nobody responds.' His tip to see if people actually read your report is this, 'Put in the text the line 'If you read this, you can come to my office to receive a bar of chocolate.' If nobody comes for a bar of chocolate, you can stop writing the reports. My father was a math teacher and in a mandatory report for the school direction he once wrote 'We should abolish math for all fourth-year classes.' He receive no reaction whatsoever, which taught him that he and his colleagues could invest less time in writing these reports.'

My father-in-law's little elephant The funniest stop sign I know is a little elephant. My father-in-law Paul worked at a municipality which was very hierarchical in the 1980's. It was customary to put your initials on an endless series of documents, which in the digital

age we now do with a bucketload of cc's. He regularly received a document for him to put his initials on, and if he thought that he personally was of value for this document, he would put his initials on it. But if he thought that the document only crossed his desk out of force of habit and was something he shouldn't really take a look at, he would take his ink pad and stamp. Then he would not put his initials on the pages, but the stamp of a little elephant.

Purple crocodile stamp The elephant stamp is similar to the actions of the general practitioner Marcel Blanker who would stamp a purple crocodile on unnecessary cross-references that the insurance company would send him. It became a hype in the Netherlands and dozens of practitioners and health care professionals follow his example. I tried to find out where all those purple crocodiles are now, but I haven't succeeded so I fear their fate. And the worst would be if they are still alive today.

Explosion of independents A special stop sign is the explosion of people that start working independently and especially the people that quit their jobs and then return to do them as independent contractors under different conditions. This is a stop sign you will see all around you and it is a sign of the exploitation of your employees. If they return under lesser conditions, it is a sign that the business model is no longer sustainable and we are exploiting the flexible work force. If they return under better conditions, it is a stop sign for the way we organize and reward work and is the business model more than sustainable. It is just something the permanent employees don't benefit from and we are exploiting them. This is something you can see in health care and education and these are no longer pinpricks, you would rather call it a firm uppercut.

Natural moments

There are natural moments when you can start stopping. When someone leaves, celebrate the success of their work and the fact that it is no longer necessary. You would rather not wait for someone to leave but raise the question earlier, if you leave, what will stop and can we complete that now?

Delegation is another natural moment for a stop question, the moment that a department comes to the conclusion that this is not our responsibility or our task. 'A secretary should

do this, but if we're honest, we don't see any added value in it anyway.' Are we going to delegate the task or would it be better if we would stop it altogether?

Did you recognize the stop signs, do you see little elephants, are you filling holes with holes or are you vision addicted? You would think, clear signs, red light, we should stop. But the reality teaches us that we usually continue or stop badly and that is what the next chapter is about.

RECOMMENDATIONS

'A clear, cheerful and well-written book that will help a lot of people to make choices. The author has succeeded in keeping the book compact and to the point.'
Patrick Davidson, organizational advisor and co-author of the international bestseller *Musk Mania*

'I wish I had thought of a book like *STOP.* about a heavily neglected practice in most organizations, stopping the activities that don't work anymore. There wasn't yet a management book on the responsible and definitive stopping with these activities in organizations. *STOP.* fills this void, and how! After reading this great book I felt the urge to stop a few pointless things myself.'
Martin van Staveren, advisor, lecturer and author of books on risk management

'*STOP.* is a wonderful book filled with confronting and recognizable examples that understate the plea to stop with dragging and grueling activities. The book is written with flow and a firm dose understated humor.'
Nico de Jong, senior advisor with the Dutch ministry of Public Health, Wealth and Sports

'*STOP.* is the kind of book that makes you wonder why it wasn't written earlier. I could easily remember several situations with companies that made me wish they had pulled the plug much sooner. Much has been written about starting and executing policies, changes, procedures and projects, but not one book existed about successful stopping them. An ever-changing world requires you to be agile. And it requires an organization, division or team to be able to quit with the things that have become irrelevant.'
Sjors van Leeuwen, advisor and bestselling author of *CRM in Practice*, *The Customer in the Driver's Seat* and *Health Care Marketing in Practice*

'A valuable and accessible book about how hard and how essential it is to be able to stop the things that people in organizations are working on. It is a vital contribution to the change and learning theories of Chris Argyris, Ed Schein, Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer. In order to be able to change or add something, you always also need to subtract something else.'
Paul Misdorp, director at Change at New Thinking & Applying

'Stopping is perhaps the most, most, most difficult thing to do. For people and certainly for organizations. Marije shows wonderfully how little talent we have for stopping and how hesitant we are in our attempts. She works in organizations, mostly in government, where the predictable is an important factor. That you can control and manage. And how uncertain is stopping, where you know what you have but don't know what you will end up with. We are stuck in our habits and routines, we are attached to what we know and what we already can do and stopping those things creates a void where you hope that it fills with an improvement to what is already existing there. *STOP.* provides a strategy that makes you less anxious about this whole quitting. Marije highlights the beauty of stopping in a way that makes you seem crazy if you don't start stopping with a lot of unnecessary actions.'
Leike van Oss and Jaap van 't Hek, organizational advisors and coauthors of *Underway*, *Irreversible* and *Powerless*

'A nice, specific, to the point, recognizable, useful and humorful book!'
Meta Knol, director at Museum De Lakenhal

'I have been an advocate for a Chief Policy Stopping Officer, someone that hunts for opportunities to stop activities all year. Marije wrote a delicious and accessible guide book for that function, filled with practical tips to recognize the right time to stop things and really make it work. This is far from boring but a cool and enjoyable process, as this book will show. With lots of examples and some humor, Marije shows that stopping is a true science. In the end you will wonder why you haven't discovered the benefits of stopping sooner. It truly gives you the urge to start stopping. Haphazard stopping is a thing of the past and believe me, that will save you a lot of money.'
Carole de Vree, head of communication for the City of Rotterdam

'As children, we all learn that you don't quit, that you finish what you started. Marije counters with the statement that stopping is valuable. A must-read for anyone that want to learn how to be successful at stopping and how to arrange a festive burial for dead horses. I want the whole world to read this book!'
Bianca den Outer, partner at JB Lorenz research bureau

'I had to laugh out loud repeatedly with the funny and recognizable examples. Marije won me over with the closing statement that nobody knows how to do it, you included. An example of a very successful management book.'
Richard Engelfriet, columnist and author of *How To Catch A Rat* and *The Success Illusion*

'Colleagues can tell you the things that are annoying them without hesitation. But if you want to change them, they counter with general remarks like 'it would be fine if everybody did their job'. Let's just quit with them!'
Dennis van der Graaf, concern controller

'I am no longer surprised about how well people know what the things are that you can stop with immediately and how collective this knowledge is. What does surprise me is that they keep continue doing them, even if it is clearly complete nonsense. This book finally gave me answers on why that is and especially on how to break through the persisting with what doesn't work. When we are able to stop honorably and collectively, it saves us so much in energy, time and talent that would have been wasted otherwise. I am not good in reading these type of books, I would rather read a story. But the optimistic tone of voice, the many clarifying examples, the specific tools and clear language gave me a vivid image of the matter. In fact, I think this book truly is the beginning of successful stopping.'
Marihuela Belt, organizational advisor and actor at Maranza! improvisational theater

'This book is required reading for any civil servant. I will give it to everyone that starts a new function, job or project. We have to learn to become better at stopping!'
Senna Maatoug, policy economist at the Dutch Ministry of Finance

'We emphasize what we want to learn in changes. And we should, but that is only half of the story. The more you want to renew, the more you have to push away existing routines to create space for something different. If you don't, the new plans are unusable because they are at odds with habits, opinions, interests, et cetera. In short, beginning something new requires that you stop with something too. And stopping requires its own set of rules and actions, it is good to see that Marije focuses on this too.'
Hans Vermaak, organizational advisor and bestselling author of *Enjoying The Tough Issues, Everybody Changes, How About Us?* and coauthor of *Learning How to Change*

'I always feel like I spoil the party when I ask the tough questions that jeopardize the project. Marije teaches me that I should not feel guilty about this. You can always stop a project, in fact, she advises us to do so. And she tells us how.'
Maike Klip, The Understanding Civil Servant blog

'After reading this you are unable to stop just like that, on your own and in silence with something anymore.'
Janneke van Veldhuyzen, expert on complex health care

'A wonderful book, because you can learn how to stop. It is not easy but Marije takes you by the hand by first unraveling the phenomenon, paint the very recognizable pitfalls and show how you can succeed in stopping. And without putting your world upside down or putting people aside.'
Marleen Damen, alderwoman

'In our drive for more and better we forget the beauty of less. Stopping successfully is an ode to simplicity. If you are able to simplify the growing complexity of the world, you will be able to see the forest from the trees again. Stopping successfully will enlighten your path. Marije has delete all the unnecessary things from her book and the essence remains: stop it.'
Danielle Braun, corporate anthropologist, director of the Academy of Organizations Culture and author of the books *Patterns* and *That's Crazy* and coauthor of the bestselling books *The Corporate Tribe* and *Building Tribes*

'Marije has written a great book on an unpopular theme, which is exactly why it is so important. While reading I reminisce about all the times that I refused to stop something, because I felt I couldn't, how would they react? Now I realize I should have stopped then, because it would have saved so much time, energy and money. Continuing what you should have stopped simply costs too much. Thanks to this book I know that I will be able to see the possibility to stop something, that I will consider stopping and that I will even be doing it.'
Femke Hogema, owner Profit First Professionals, bestselling author and speaker

'Ten years ago I was part of a hopeless project when someone asked, 'Why don't we just quit?' I battled without justification to continue at the time, but now I wonder if the other person saw how hopeless the situation really was. And how he could have had convinced us of that fact.'
Ionica Smeets, mathematician, science journalist, columnist, television host and professor of Science Communication

'It is tempting to blame bureaucracy for this collective inability, I like to do so and no one will argue. But it doesn't get us anywhere is a justified observation after decennia of pointing fingers of blame in that direction.'
Jos van der Lans, cultural psychologist and journalist