

The background of the entire cover is a close-up photograph of a honeycomb, showing the characteristic hexagonal cells in shades of yellow and orange. The text is overlaid on this background.

HOW TO LEAD SELF-MANAGING TEAMS?

- A Business Novel -

Changing leadership
from shepherding
to beekeeping

RINI VAN SOLINGEN

(Author of The Power of Scrum and Formula X)

Rini van Solingen

*How to lead
self-managing
teams?*

Changing leadership from
shepherding to beekeeping

– A Business Novel –

Published by Rini van Solingen

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Foreword by Jos de Blok

When Rini asked me to write this foreword, I briefly had my doubts. This book is namely mostly about self-management, which to me is just a means to an end. Self-management must always serve a higher purpose: communally solving an existing problem as well as possible; and the realization of an extraordinary connection with your surroundings. In many cases, self-management leads to good solutions that have been reached quickly and locally. But it remains a tool. Self-management is not a goal in and of itself.

Self-management is also not exactly new; it existed in the 1980's. During that time, I was a nurse. The work was varied in nature and there were constant appeals to utilize one's creativity in the workplace. So many different problems and so many different solutions. Every day was an adventure with children, young mothers, and the elderly. The work was embedded in daily life; you were a part of the community, which motivated you to work quite effectively.

All that changed in the 1990's. Politicians thought that economies of scale would lead to more efficient healthcare for patients. Residential care organizations merged and evolved into massive organization that had ambitions of 'succeeding.' I could not tolerate this management style of thinking in health care; the notion that there are people

who think, the managers, and that there are other people to execute, the employees. That thought process of thinking from top to bottom...I find it dramatic. At that point, the perspective has changed from thinking about the client to the needs of the organization. That's why I quit in 1993.

But in the end, the idea remained on my mind.

Therefore, ten years ago my wife and I started Buurtzorg Foundation. Our organization provides personal care and nursing care to the homes of clients who are seriously ill, returning home from a hospital stay, or who want to continue living independently. Buurtzorg is customized based upon each client's possibilities and circumstances. Every client receives a personal counselor who helps to examine the client's anticipated care needs; now and in the future. We solve problems locally. We do this in a way that works best for everyone and which also does justice to all parties involved: the local policeman, doctor or neighbor, and the sister that lives around the corner.

Buurtzorg works with small teams of district nurses and caretakers. These are self-managing teams that cater to the specific wishes and needs of each individual client. In this way, our employees own the solution. These are their clients, their neighborhood, their office, and their team. Therefore we have no managers nor a public relations department at Buurtzorg. The employees' skills and expertise and the personal relationship with the client are at the center. Clients are satisfied and require a lower duration of care on average.

We started Buurtzorg with a small team of four employees. We now have more than 900 teams, more than

10,000 employees, and reached an annual revenue of over \$430 Million Dollars.

The lessons in this book work. I have been able to experience this myself. And these strategies work not just in healthcare, but in all industries. Allowing the people who do the work to organize it themselves is possible anywhere. Moreover, it renders various types of management roles and coordinator roles unnecessary. You can use it anywhere: in education, in police work, in the banking world. Let the people who execute the work self-organize. They can do it better than you would think. Rely on their knowledge, insight, and skill. Only in this way can you let people perform at their best and develop their skills.

‘The less you organize, the better it is!’ is my main message. Trust and responsibility instead of command and control. This book provides an accessible and clear understanding of the reasons why self-managing teams are the basis for work in the 21st century. It is ideal for folks who want to learn more about self-organization and harness it to help them reach their goals.

In short: a must read!

Jos de Blok - Director, Buurtzorg Foundation

Buurtzorg is a prominent case in Frederic Laloux’s *Reinventing Organizations* (Nelson Parker, 2014).

Jos de Blok is the 2014 winner of the Albert Medal; a prestigious award handed out yearly to one individual, organization or group that leads progress and creates positive change in tackling some of the world's intractable problems.

The medal is handed out since 1864. Former winners are for example: Louis Pasteur, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Marie Curie, Guglielmo Marconi, Orville Wright, Franklin D Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Yehudi Menuhin, Stephen Hawking, and Tim Berners-Lee.

The Novel

1. *Emergency Call*

Out of the corner of his eye, Mark sees his phone lighting up. It was still on silent mode of course! Just before he answers the call, he notices fifteen previous missed calls.

There is a huge crisis at work. None of the cash registers is working. Customers can't pay! They are losing loads of money every minute! Mark realizes he has no choice: he has to go back to the office. Immediately! The earliest boat leaves in twenty minutes. He can still catch that one if he hurries. He quickly changes clothes and grabs his stuff together.

He has 30 seconds left to write a quick note to aunt Ronda, explaining why he has to run and why now. He jumps in his car and races to the ferry.

When driving off, he sees his grandfather's house disappearing in his rear-view mirror. Somehow it seems if grandpa watches from the bedroom window. But maybe that's just Mark's imagination.

Five days earlier

2. *To the Island*

It is half past seven at night when Mark Vandenburg walks through the sliding doors of his office building, on the way to his car. It's still a one-and-a-half-hour drive to the port, and the last boat leaves promptly at ten past nine; he only has ten minutes of leeway. A short vacation to his grandfather's island lies in the distance.

It's been a few years since he's last been there. Given that his grandfather never leaves the island anymore, they haven't seen each other in a while. Every now and then they call each other. They talk about the weather, the dike, and the water. And of course how busy it always is on the island, since it seems like more and more tourists are coming each year.

This week, Mark is going alone. Originally his girlfriend Susan had planned to come with but had to cancel at the last minute. She's an integration coach and works in a tight-knit team. One of her colleagues had to leave the country for a week quite suddenly – something to do with her family. Because of this, the rest of her colleagues couldn't pick up the slack alone and Susan had to jump in to help.

Her and Mark had had a heated conversation about it. Susan had proposed to leave one week later, but that wasn't an option for Mark. An arrangement is an

arrangement, he thought; so he decided to go alone after all.

It ended up still being a rather hectic day at the office. At the large supermarket chain where he works, he's responsible for maintaining the company's IT systems and ensuring that they are fully functional. Mark has the feeling that his job has become increasingly crucial the last few years. It seems as if nothing can happen in the company without help from his department. They're involved in everything: managing inventory at different store locations, processing orders, facilitating the check-out process, even helping with staffing. There's always an underlying system that supports the process. More and more things seem to revolve around Mark's division when it comes to new developments. Meanwhile, he also has to make sure that the existing systems stay up and running. It all keeps him quite busy.

Today was another one of those days. Halfway through the morning, he received a panicked phone call from the distribution center. The program that prepares orders for the stores kept getting stuck. This caused a huge delay in collecting the orders, and by the end of the day there was a long line of trucks idling and waiting because things were moving far too slowly in the distribution center.

On the one hand, days like today left him deeply frustrated. They reminded him how little the company knew about IT, and how unwilling his own people took action.

which emphasized how scarce deep knowledge of the company is, and how little his own people dare to take action. Paradoxically, days like today were also *satisfying*. There is an adrenaline rush when everything is working again, when the systems are back online, and when the danger has subsided. In a sense, the adrenaline rush is addictive. Every time when the problems are sky high and nobody really knows where to start or where the dysfunction resides, that's when Mark is at his best. These qualities have earned him a fortune. Year after year he receives laudatory performance reviews; he consistently gets raises and promotions. His own office is complete with a personal secretary, Joyce, and his own parking spot; it's all a part of the deal.

He doesn't have to walk far to get to his car, an Aston Martin convertible that he bought recently with some trepidation. Although it's not brand new, he still hesitated. Is that okay to do at a supermarket? What will the truck drivers have to say about it? Eventually he decided to do it; he indeed works hard enough for it, he thought. And when he tours across the island with the top down, it gives him an incalculable feeling of freedom.

He smoothly steers his car through the gates of the office lot exit. As he passes by, he gives a quick greeting to the guard and consequently zooms toward the highway. Luckily there's not really any traffic around this time, and by cruising at 85 miles per hour he makes it on the last ferry with time to spare.

At half past eight, Mark is standing on the deck of the ferry. He bought a large cup of coffee and goes to sit on one of the benches. It's a fantastic evening. The sun hangs low above the ocean, emitting a beautiful deep orange color as it sinks past the horizon. He immediately feels relaxed. The stress of the day melts away like snow in front of the sun.

And there's plenty of stress at the office. Just to have some vestige of control, he's at the office every day around seven o'clock. And the days that he's on time for dinner are few and far between. It's slowly starting to break him down. Every year he resolves to do things differently: to delegate more, to spread more responsibility to his team, so that he can take a step back from the daily grind and focus more on the big picture and the future. To serve as a better leader. But somehow, it never really happens.

At the moment, there's a plan of change in his company centered around self-managing teams. The company must become agile. The CEO has made himself responsible for implementing this change. Agility, responsiveness, and speed are the new paradigm. Achieving this combination is really what everything is about in some way or another. Everyone is placed in fixed teams with each other and the new teams are instructed to function by organizing themselves, making decisions autonomously, and acting quickly and decisively. That would provide the desired speed and agility.

As an idea, it makes sense to Mark. In principle, he's a huge proponent of delegating more, especially since having to be personally involved in solving operational problems is not a sustainable solution. But unfortunately, he doesn't

observe these self-managing teams functioning well in practice. On paper it all seems quite reorganized and lean, but in practice things are still moving slowly. And that makes sense: working in a different way is hard to learn. Often, there are still many situations where expectations are unclear to everyone. There's not a weekend that goes by without him being called several times. They still always ask Mark for permission and have difficulty making their own decisions and acting decisively.

He often wonders about it and has a myriad of questions. How does that work, leading self-managing teams? When am I doing it the right way? How do I stay in control? What should I and should I not be involved with? Do I have other tasks? And if so, which ones? Where do I lay the balance between granting autonomy and monitoring things? Why should I not intervene if something is likely to go wrong, and why should I let my teams make what I know to be mistakes? It's not efficient, and a waste of money. How can you expect the team to feel the same degree of responsibility as me? These are questions to which Mark has yet to find an answer.

That morning, Mark's departure from his house felt rather stiff. Susan was not happy that Mark is going alone, and she made sure he noticed her dissatisfaction. Mark tried to ignore her aloof attitude and body language. After a while, he broke the silence: "how about that, this time you're the one choosing to go to work; not me." Mark held back from

commenting on her excuse, namely that she had no choice. He shook his head and as he caught a glance at Susan's reddening face, he figured he should probably leave it at that. With one swift motion, she slammed the door behind her as she darted towards her office.

Deep in his heart, Mark wishes that Susan would stay home. He feels that their fifteen-year-old daughter Mandy is actually a bit too young to stay home alone. Unsurprisingly, Mandy isn't too enthusiastic about the idea. So in a way, it calms him to know that Susan isn't joining him. She always thinks Mark doesn't let her go out much, that he's coddling her and gives her far too few responsibilities. After all, she is "already" fifteen, according to Susan. It is a recurring topic that prompts disagreement.

Consequently, Mark goes alone. On his own, he can enjoy himself plenty. He likes hiking alone since he has all the time to let his mind run free. And mountain biking isn't exactly Susan's cup of tea. She would much rather read two novels a day, a not uncommon occurrence.

Mark quietly takes a big gulp of coffee while he enjoys the beautiful sunset. As the ferry lurches along, he feels his problems disappearing with the sun behind the horizon. It's as if he starts feeling the tranquility of the island as soon as the ferry sets off. It's amazing how the pace of life on an island seems to be twice as slow compared to the shore.

Mark had missed that feeling, and he had only just realized it moments ago. Ever since his parents came back

to the shore, he seldom finds himself on the island anymore. It's also been about fifteen years since they moved. Right before Mandy's birth, they had moved to come live in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, Mark has a more special relationship with his grandfather Marcus. He's named after him, actually: Marcus Emanuel Vandenburg, that's his official name. His parents always called him 'Marcus Jr.' but when he started High School, he had changed it to Mark, with a 'k.' His parents and grandfather tacitly went along with it.

Mark was born on the island and lived there his entire youth. He went to the shore to go to college. During the first year, he came back every week, with a bag full of dirty laundry. And of course, he was on the island all summer. But after his second year of study, he began returning less frequently, so much so that he didn't even go back for vacations during the last two years. He landed a solid job, and then bought a house. In this way, he left the island step by step. A quite typical story, allegedly.

Ultimately, it's now been three years since he's been back on the island. He doesn't come there enough. But it really is his island: it's in his blood (or so he strongly feels). Even when he's taking the ferry out there for the first time in years. Why does he go so little? How could he have forgotten this feeling?

From the dock, it's a fifteen-minute drive to his Aunt Ronda's house. She lives right next to grandpa and insisted

that he stay with her. Aunt Ronda had previously taken over his parents' house when they eventually left the island. She doesn't have any kids, and she's been a widow for more than ten years. She takes very good care of grandpa. Sometimes a little too well, according to grandpa. Every time he calls Mark, he complains about her meddling. Mark always laughs about it. Grandpa couldn't take care of himself without Aunt Ronda, and he knows that. And Aunt Ronda knows it too.

Mark entertained the idea of still grabbing a hotel instead. He knows how fond Aunt Ronda is of visitors and he really doesn't want to be patronized all day and forced to fill her need for companionship. At the same time, that didn't feel right either. After all, it is also his own family's home.

Aunt Ronda is waiting for him already. Mark sees her thin face and beady eyes piercing through the curtains as he parks his car. After a friendly greeting with a slightly excessively wet kiss, they drink a cup of tea together. She questions him constantly about Susan and Mandy. Mark is surprised at all of the things his Aunt knows to ask about. She really wants to know everything about his daughter, but even Mark doesn't know the answers to most of her questions. And he doesn't want to tell her about Mandy's problems at school. Then she wouldn't talk about anything else. Mark quickly drinks his tea and politely turns down a second cup; he's had a long day behind him, and he wants to go to bed.

By eleven o'clock he walks into his old room. With his smartphone, he shoots a quick text message to the home front: *"Hey honey. Still angry? Mandy OK? Was able to get the last boat. Aunt Ronda is still Aunt Ronda, hahaha. I'll call you tomorrow, if that's alright :-) xxx."*

Mark then turns off the light. Although he would have preferred to lie next to Susan, he can now sleep with the window wide open. One of the delights of being away from home. Susan always gets cold, so the windows always have to stay shut.

A cool breeze circulates through his bedroom. He smells the island. That unique combination of grass and ocean mist that you only find in one place: home! For a moment, he realizes how quiet it is outside. Even with the window open. However, he fails to listen much longer as he sinks into a deep slumber after a few minutes.

About The Author

Rini van Solingen is a part-time professor at the Delft University of Technology. At TU Delft, he teaches and conducts research on global software teams.

Additionally, Rini is the CTO of Prowareness We-On (www.prowareness.nl). There, he helps organizations to increase their speed and agility. Leadership of large scale Agile transformations and implementing Agile with tens or hundreds of teams is his specialty.

In 2010, Rini wrote the bestseller “The Power of Scrum” (along with Jeff Sutherland and Eelco Rustenburg), in which he explains Scrum in narrative form. In 2014 he wrote “Scrum for Managers” (together with Rob van Lanen), to assist managers to direct teams in an Agile framework. With Vikram Kapoor he wrote “The Responsive Enterprise”, a book about the most important practices in flexible and agile enterprises. In 2020 he published “Formula X – How to reach extreme acceleration in your organization?” with Jurriaan Kamer. All four books have also been published in German and Dutch.

Rini can be contacted via r.vansolingen@prowareness.nl or rini@rinivansolingen.nl. Don't hesitate to approach him with a question or discussion. He enjoys hearing from you and (mostly) responds faster than you might expect.

Praise about the book

Amir Arooni (CIO, Discover): 'I recommend this book to all change makers, and to those who want to make an impact in a rapidly changing world!'

Svenja de Vos (CTO, Leaseweb): 'An easy to read book that induces self-reflection and the energy to change!'

Teun van der Vorm (CIO): 'An inspiring book in which the practical lessons from Mark's grandfather taught me how to work with self-managing teams. Directly applicable!'

Johan van Hall (Vice President, ABNAMRO Group): 'Thanks to this book, I've learned a lot about shepherds and beekeepers, and thereby got the insight that the biggest challenge is to change yourself, first.'

Lisette Oosterbroek (Vice President Innovation Excellence KPN): 'The Bee Shepherd describes a journey. Not only a journey for the main character, but also for you as the reader. Inspiring, fascinating, and liberating!'

Nico Orié (Global Director, Coca Cola): 'A management book, but with a twist. This book gives original insights into leadership of self-managing teams.'

John Heideman (ING): ‘This book helps you to understand how you can execute Agile self-organization more successfully by changing your old style of management.’

Frans van der Horst (CEO, ABNAMRO Retail): ‘Managers with shut-up-get-out-I-have-always-done-it-this-way syndrome are the greatest obstacle to attaining self-managing teams and better outcomes for customers. This is laid out very sharply in this book!’

Peter Groen (Head of IT Strategy, Security, and Control, NIBC Bank): ‘From the rush of ad hoc troubleshooting to the enjoyment of true collaboration and the results it produces. This book provides valuable insights for anyone who wants to sustainably improve by laying the foundation for Agile.’

Ronald Dähne (Technology Director of Cloud Solutions, Exact): ‘This parable of bees and the shepherd helps you to simply and clearly make the right choices when working with self-managing teams.’

Tino Scholman (Vice President of Cloud, Oracle EMEA): ‘This is a wonderful book. It explains aptly that ‘Lean’ is easily within reach. The job of a beekeeper is not to interfere with the work of the bees, but to ensure that they can execute their work.’

More and more organizations introduce self-managing teams. Managers need to initiate and guide that transformation, although it's often unclear what their roles will be afterwards. And if a manager does not change with it, they could become an obstacle instead of a motivating factor.

This book tells you the story of Mark, an executive in a large organization that has introduced self-management. During a short holiday, Mark visited his grandfather who told him how he had switched careers from being a shepherd to a beekeeper and what he had learned along the way. These lessons applied to Mark's situation surprisingly well. The chat helped Mark make a list of the things he needed to change and implement. The key lesson is to 'un-manage' and unlearn old habits. This book explains how.

Rini van Solingen is CTO of Prowareness and professor in Global Software Engineering at the Delft University of Technology in The Netherlands. He is also author of *The Power of Scrum* and *Scrum for Managers*.

"A management book, but with a twist. It gives original insights into leadership of self-managing teams."

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