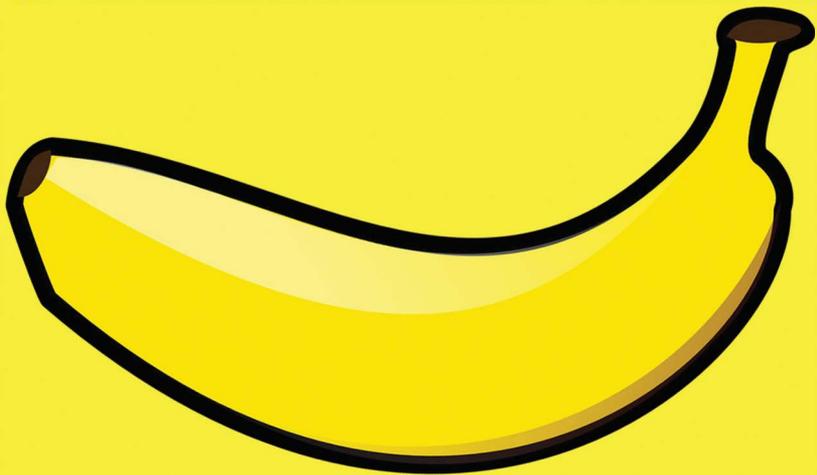


# NO MORE BANANAS

WITH  
45  
REMEDIES!

HOW TO KEEP YOUR COOL  
IN THE COLLECTIVE MADNESS



JEROEN KRAAIJENBRINK



# **No More Bananas**

How to Keep Your Cool in the Collective Madness



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Jeroen Kraaijenbrink



**Effectual Strategy Press**



## **Bananas**

*adjective* [ after verb ]

/bə' næn.əz/ informal

very silly

very excited because of pleasure, anger, or another emotion

extremely angry or excited

(Cambridge Dictionary)

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## Preface

This is a self-help book. Literally. I have written it to help myself get rid of my bananas and withstand the collective madness around me. So, I am sorry, its first goal was not to help you or to save the world. My purpose was more mundane and self-serving than that: eliminate the bananas in my own head so that I could think, say, feel and act as a sensible individual rather than as some sort of hyper-alert copy of what others think, say, feel and do. I needed that and still need it. Every day.

But, despite this initial self-serving starting point, this book is also a self-help book in the usual sense of the word. Of course, I wrote it for you. And of course, it is meant to help you to get rid of your bananas as well. Why else would I spend all those hours conceiving this book, writing it, rewriting it and polishing it, and why else publish it in the first place? If it were just for me, I could have saved myself the effort. So, this book is as much for you as it is for me.

In this book, I share all the lessons that I have learned on my own journey out of Bananaland because I think they can help you as well. We are all human beings with a great talent for going bananas. Therefore, many of the lessons I learned are not just personal lessons. They are universal lessons that should be as useful for you as they were for me. So here you have it: a nine-step approach with no less than forty-five remedies for going bananas.

To manage your expectations, this book is not a success story. It doesn't tell you about all the heroes who have mastered the nine steps

and got rid of all their bananas. And it most certainly doesn't tell you how great and successful I have been—because I haven't.

Success stories are interesting and inspiring. But they are not necessarily helpful. They are usually about hero-type people at a far distance from us ordinary people. I find it hard to relate to such stories, and it is far from evident that their unique experiences are helpful.

We learn more from ordinary people who have struggled and are still struggling. Of course, they should have their occasional successes, but it is their struggle from which we learn most. Because that struggle is telling us what they actually did to get rid of their bananas. Therefore, this book reflects the lessons I have learned, as well as lessons we can learn from others.

The book is intended as a guide for action. If all you do is read it, you won't be very successful in getting rid of your bananas. Because reading is not enough. To appreciate fully the power of the nine steps and forty-five remedies in this book, and get out of Bananaland, you will need to challenge yourself to do something. Bananas don't just disappear. They need active removal. This means there is work to do.

But you will be rewarded. If there is one thing I can say looking back at the past few years, it is that every part of my struggle was worth it. And even more worthwhile than I could have foreseen when I started my journey out of Bananaland. Now that I am rid of a large share of my bananas, I feel more relaxed and can think more freely and clearly than before. If you want that as well, I invite you to start your own banana detoxing journey. Not sooner, not later, but now.

If I can do it, you can do it. None of the nine steps and forty-five remedies in this book requires supernatural skills or special abilities, talent, knowledge, or experience. None of them. They are all things that anyone can do. They are practical things that don't require any higher order mindset, advanced meditation training or an enlightened mind. The only real difficulty is actually doing them and persisting. That is going to be your only real challenge. But if you can manage to do that, you can get rid of many of your bananas too. So join me!

## **Acknowledgments**

Writing this book was easy. At least in one sense. Sometimes you hear an author say that their book “wrote itself,” or that writing felt like “the story was already there,” inside them, waiting to be told. For me, writing this book was a similar experience. Before I started, I knew more or less what I wanted to say, but while on my way I discovered that the book kind of wrote itself. Apparently, I had been sitting on my thoughts about bananas for a while already, and just needed to release them.

But writing this book was also difficult. Particularly, it was confrontational. As I said, this truly is a self-help book. While doing the research, making my observations and writing, I continuously confronted myself with my own bananas and tried actively to get rid of them. This wasn’t always fun. And still, while going through the drafts and final version of the text, the book keeps working like a mirror, showing me where I can still improve.

Luckily enough, I wasn’t on my own. Even though the actual writing was a solitary job, and even though all remaining errors, omissions and mistakes are mine, this book would not have been possible without the help of many others.

First, there are all the people who have knowingly and unknowingly provided me with their observations, facts, studies, blogs, newspaper articles, books and scientific articles about banana problems. They were a great source of inspiration for Part 1 of the book and have ensured I could make a substantial deep dive into the banana problem. Thank you for that.

Along the same lines, I would also like to thank the people who have—again, mostly unknowingly—pointed me at the numerous possible solutions that are out there or demonstrated them through their own behaviors. They include people I know personally, like my relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and students. And they also include people I don’t know personally: researchers, journalists, bloggers, entrepreneurs, monks, politicians, and even pop stars. You have been the source of ideas and inspiration for Part 2 of the book. Thank you.

In addition to this crowd of idea- and inspiration-givers, there is a small group of people who have volunteered to work actively on the book by reviewing drafts and sharing their feedback and comments. I’d

like to thank them in person. Franke Jongsma, thank you for your detailed and critical remarks and suggestions and challenging me to keep the book personal and to the point. Ingrid Maas-Aalbers, thank you for bringing in more nuances and empathy through sharing your personal reflections on the book. Björn Kijl, thank you for your confirmatory remarks and additional sources and suggestions. And David Williams, thank you for the final editing of the book and for offering great value and support in answering my questions. Together, you have made this a better book.

Finally, I have to thank one person in particular: my wife, Caroline. She has read and reviewed the book in detail and pointed me at those sections where things were unclear or too much in your face. But more importantly, she has been the greatest source of inspiration for this book. Many of the remedies described can be traced back to her. And she needed them for a good reason. Not for getting rid of her bananas but helping me get rid of my own. Therefore, Caroline, thank you so much for joining and guiding me on my own journey out of Bananaland. I hope you will stay on my side until the very end.

## Other Books to Read

As part of the research for this book, I also relied on what other authors have written about similar topics. As it turns out, there has been substantial and increasing attention to bananas and related subjects over recent years. While the total list of relevant books is too long to include here, I want to mention specifically ten ‘brothers in arms’ who also wrote books that help against bananas:

- Johan Nordberg (2016), *Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future*
- Steven Pinker (2018), *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*
- Fred Luskin (2002), *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*
- Timothy Ferriss (2007), *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich*

- David Allen (2015), *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*
- Tony Crabbe (2015), *Busy: How to Thrive in a World of Too Much*
- Cal Newport (2016), *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*
- Mark Manson (2016), *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck*
- Wil Derkse (2003), *The Rule of Benedict for Beginners: Spirituality for Daily Life*
- Svend Brinkmann (2017), *Stand Firm: Resisting the Self-Improvement Craze*

The first two form a reality check and plea for sensible and optimistic thinking. The next six contain a variety of contemporary approaches against bananas. And the last two invoke centuries-old approaches against bananas and translate them to the world of today.

Given that all the books address related topics, there is obviously overlap between these books and between them and this book. Some of the observations and points they make, for example, I also make in this book. But we all approach the banana problem from a different angle and in a different style, making them all worth reading separately. Therefore, if you are serious about ridding yourself of bananas, I can wholeheartedly recommend reading these books too. But now you are here, let's start with this one.



Part 1

**Problems**



# 1

## **We Are Going Bananas**

We are living in a crazy world. Not because the world is so crazy, but because we are. With ‘we’, I mean us, adult human beings, together, as a group—myself included. Somewhere over the years, we have started to collectively lose our senses as a human species. This makes us do, think, say and feel strange things that don’t make any sense.

Either in a documentary or for real, you must have seen schools of fish, flocks of birds or herds of wildebeest making extreme, unexpected and stressful movements when danger is signaled. Whenever an enemy approaches, the whole school, flock or herd moves from one direction to another in an attempt to escape the danger. This is pretty much how we, as grown-up people, often behave collectively.

The most accurate description that I can give for this behavior is that we have gone bananas. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, going ‘bananas’ means “very silly” or “to become extremely angry or excited” or “very excited because of pleasure, anger, or another emotion.” And that is what our collective behavior often looks like: very angry, very excited and very silly.

Taken individually, we are quite reasonable people. Apart from the occasional exception—the lunatic, the sociopath, the frustrated—we are generally fairly sensible. We usually think about things and try to make the best of our lives. And we even care about others while doing so.

Collectively, however, we behave like a panicking herd of animals that have spotted a source of danger. As part of this herd, we stop thinking and acting by ourselves. Instead, we mimic each other and show exponentially strange behaviors that make little to no sense.

A clear example of this is Twitter—where the metaphor of a flock of birds is hardly a metaphor anymore. Through Twitter, messages spread globally in a matter of seconds, causing an explosive chain of reactions, the one often even more extreme than the other.

Take the #MeToo movement that went viral in October 2017. Of course, at the heart of it is a very serious and unacceptable problem—the widespread prevalence of sexual assault by men in power. However, the chain of events that this movement has set in motion and that has been fired up by the media is absurd. Suddenly, large groups of people felt indignant and upset. They sensed an untamable need to express this loudly, and publicly condemn the possibly guilty with outraged messages full of hate. And if someone had the guts to make a critical remark, they were immediately crucified too. Even the very fact that I call #MeToo an example of going bananas here, may upset some people who will go bananas about it while reading this very paragraph.

It is not only social media where collective madness takes over our ability to think reasonably. Admittedly, Twitter, and also Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram or any social media app that is popular at the moment you read this book, play a big role in aggrandizing the collective lunacy.

There are countless other occasions though. A good example is the apparently irresistible force to follow consumer trends and buy stuff that others buy. Even though we may think we are living in a free society, where everyone can decide what to wear, eat, and do, we largely just follow the trends and do as everyone else does.

Take the superfood trend. With the exception of a few of us, a decade ago no one had ever heard of chia seeds, wheatgrass, quinoa, or goji berries—let alone considered for one second to eat them. And kale was still a boring vegetable that your grandpa and grandma ate. Today

though, we **MUST** eat these foods or else we are **DESTROYING OUR BODIES!!!** (note the caps and exclamation marks).

In some cases, the superfood craze can even take extreme forms that are unhealthy or downright dangerous. An example is the (hyped) Silicon Valley craze to drink ‘raw’ unfiltered water because it still contains all the natural ingredients that have been removed from normal drinking water. These natural ingredients include minerals and ions. They also include bacteria and parasites. It is exactly by drinking such raw water that millions of people across the globe have died and are still dying.

“But these are just two examples!” you may argue. “And altogether it is not that bad!” or “At least *I* am not as sensitive to the collective lunacy as other people,” you may think. But don’t be too sure. I’ll bet that, if you look honestly in the mirror and analyze your own behavior, you’ll discover quite a few bananas there. At least I did when looking in my mirror, and found many. Too many. Far too many.

## **Some Effects of Going Bananas**

Going bananas is like taking drugs. Sometimes it reflects instant heavenly experiences that make us feel better, more excited, or happier than ever before. This is the kind of “Oh My God!” (OMG) excitement when we go bananas in the sense of going crazy about a new gadget, experience, movie, meal, book or song. It is also the kind of bananas that we find on Facebook whenever we share, like, and comment on something to show how superbly great our lives are. Or the kind of bananas when we buy cryptocurrency stocks and see them double in value in a couple of days. OMG!

This kind of going bananas and its effects seem positive. They reflect a ‘shot’ of instant gratification. Like with drugs though, the gratification is usually rather short-lived. After a few days, minutes, or even seconds, the ‘eternal’ happiness feeling is usually gone. After clicking or swiping to the next message on your Facebook timeline, or after the next cryptocurrency crash, the temporary high is quickly replaced by a feeling of disappointment, envy, anger or panic.

Going bananas also has a darker side—with only negatives. Through our collective madness and constant comparison to others, we often feel pressured to show particular behaviors. Some examples: we ‘have to’ stay abreast of everything happening on social media, we ‘have to’ respond promptly to email and WhatsApp messages, we ‘have to’ do as our friends and family do, we ‘have to’ eat certain foods, treat our kids in a particular way, like particular movies, and so on and so forth. Or so we make ourselves believe.

This creates pressure. It stresses us out. It makes us feel uncertain. We lose confidence. It makes us anxious. It increases our blood pressure. It leads to insomnia. It gives us heartburn. Palpitations. Headaches. In short: going bananas is not good for us.

Many of us recognize these effects and seek ways to deal with our bananas. Over the years, for example, an increasing number of people have visited monasteries, and been for a short or longer retreat to enjoy the silence and to calm down. Furthermore, people engage in information fasting, digital detoxes, and tidying up courses to reduce the physical and virtual clutter that is bothering them. And mindfulness, yoga and meditation training have never been so popular. So, we are aware and work on it. That’s great. But to avoid collectively losing our minds further, we need to step up our efforts.

## **What Is Going On?**

I have used the metaphors of a school of fish, flock of birds and herd of wildebeest to describe our collective madness. If we were really a school, flock or herd of animals, and if there was real danger threatening us, our collective behavior would not be mad. On the contrary, it would make a lot of sense. Staying close together, copying each other’s behaviors, and making unexpected collective movements are effective protection mechanisms facing an enemy we can’t beat on our own.

However, we are not a school, flock or herd of animals. Sure, we are connected. As the famous ‘six degrees of separation’ idea goes, we are all no more than six steps away from each other. So, our friends connect us to other friends, who connect us to still other friends, and so on. In this way, any two people in the world are assumed to be connected in a maximum of six steps.

But being connected doesn't automatically mean that we are like a school, flock or herd of animals. With the exception of our closest relationships, we are not dependent on each other to survive and we are not physically stuck with each other 24/7. We are only loosely connected some parts of the day and are largely unconnected other parts of the day. Even if we are online 24/7 and chatting with our friends all the time, we are still not as connected as these animals.

And the dangers that make us panic aren't real either. Only rarely, we are in real danger. Usually, we are safe, and our lives are rather dull compared to that of the average animal or bird. Our lives aren't at stake, we don't have to worry about food, we have a home to live in, and so on. The kind of fears that make us go bananas are other, more psychological and sociological fears. They include:

- *Fear of missing out.* The fear of missing interesting opportunities, information or experiences while doing something else.
- *Fear of being alone.* The fear of being disconnected from others and feeling uncomfortable when on your own.
- *Fear of being left alone.* The fear of being lonely and being left behind in a world in which all others seem to move forward.
- *Fear of being ordinary.* The fear of not being seen or being ignored because you are not special enough for others.
- *Fear of being extra-ordinary.* The fear of being called strange and thereby being abandoned, criticized or ridiculed by others.
- *Fear of failure.* The fear of setbacks, mistakes, grief or pain because you think you can't deal with such feelings.
- *Fear of nothingness.* The fear of being called lazy and of your demons coming up when doing nothing.

Compared to being eaten, I would argue these fears are relatively insignificant. When going bananas, they control our minds and seem to be the most important things on earth. However, if you think about it as a sensible person, there is not much to fear. So long as you are reasonably confident in yourself and do not care too much about what others are thinking, saying or doing, you'll be doing fine.

So, what is going on? The main thesis of this book is that, in this postmodern society, we have abandoned all but one of our pillars of certainty. And, as a result, we have lost our individuality and so go bananas.

Postmodernism is a Western philosophy that came up around the 1950s. It is characterized by an attitude of skepticism, subjectivism and relativism, a denial of all structures, ideologies and certainties of the past and a general suspicion of reason. Today, this is no longer just a philosophy engaging a handful of philosophers. Rather, it has invaded our lives and become part of our mainstream, everyday way of thinking.

We can think of postmodernism as a way of thinking that liberates us from the preconceptions and boundaries of the past. It does away with the straitjackets of science, reason and logic and it makes sure we don't take things for granted. It gives a lot of freedom in what and how to think, feel and act. This sounds good.

But it also makes us feel lost. If nothing is certain anymore, what can we rely on? In the past, we had various pillars that provided us with a level of certainty that made our lives comforting. We had kings, emperors and pharaohs to obey. We feared them, but they offered us protection and predictability. We had gods, churches and priests to have faith in. They gave us the comfort of forgiveness and the promise of heaven. We had witches, magicians and alchemists to believe. They made us feel more certain about what would happen to us in the future. Or we had science, universities and professors we could depend on. They made us feel masters of the universe and showed us the truth about our world.

All of that, many of us—at least in Western society—have abandoned today. We don't accept any know-it-all leaders, we don't believe in an omnipresent god, we are suspicious of anything that is non-scientific and, with the many cases of fraud we are confronted with, we don't even trust science any longer either. Our postmodern thinking has flushed all these certainties down the toilet.

In our quest for certainty, grip and support, the only seemingly dependable pillar we have left is The Other—other people. This is our friends and families, but also celebrities or any other people we want to relate ourselves to. We look to them to get the desired feeling of certainty about what we should be doing. We copy their behavior, we take their opinions seriously, we try to please them, and we try to be as

them. And since we are all doing this and aping each other, it is no wonder we go bananas. Together, we create and perpetuate our own vicious socio-psychological stress-cycle.

The interesting effect is that bit-by-bit we are losing our individuality. Often, you hear claims that we are living in an individualistic society. We don't care about others, we are ego-centric, and we engage only in self-serving behavior. That may very well be the case, since *individualism*—the idea that freedom and autonomy are key qualities in a society—rules.

However, at the same time, we are more socially bound than ever before. Through the various fears described above, we hardly dare think for ourselves, be different, or be our true selves. Rather, we conform to what we expect is expected from us. This means that real *individuality*—the things that make us unique as a person and different from others—is getting rarer and rarer. And so we go bananas.

## **But What About Real Problems?**

Of course, we have real problems and real fears. We may be assured of food on our plate and have a decent home to live in. But we all have our own share of problems to deal with. Maybe you have an unruly child who drives you to despair or a demented parent you provide care to. Maybe you are in a dreadful fight with your ex or with your neighbors. Maybe you have suffered a trauma from something terrible that happened to you. Maybe you have a super stressful job that keeps you awake at night. Or maybe you have any other problem that is as real as it can be.

Problems like these make us easily lose our minds. They make us anxious, uncertain, sad, frustrated or angry. And they keep our mind continuously occupied. We keep on worrying and thinking about our problems night and day, and so they have a significant influence on everything we do. They make it so that we can't function as well and think as clearly as we would like.

Worrying, feeling lost and losing our minds because of these real problems, though, is perfectly sane. We aren't robots or cold, rational thinkers. So we can't avoid it. We even need it. To process the things happening to us, we need to worry and think about them, and we need

them to disturb our lives. If we ignore them and pretend everything is fine, they will come back to us twice as forcefully later on.

And, of course, we look at others when we have real problems. We ask them for help and support, we look at how they deal with it, or we talk to them so we can share and tell our story. We want to know what they think, feel, say and do or we want them to listen. After all, together we are stronger than alone.

These behaviors are sane. Not silly. This means they are *not* what this book is about. Going bananas is not about our real problems and how we deal with them. Going bananas is about our imaginary or pseudo-problems. About the things which we make larger than they are. About our silliness in how we respond to things. About how we derive what we think, feel, say and do from others, and thereby create bandwagon effects and reinforcing cycles that make our minds derail. About being so occupied with our pseudo-problems that we can't effectively deal with our real problems. About not taking responsibility for the things we do. About not behaving as sensible adults.

## Is There Hope?

Yes. There is hope. Because most of our problems and fears are not life-threatening and are largely imaginary, we can do something about them.

At root, the remedy is extremely simple: be yourself. You are you, so basically, being yourself is the most natural thing you can do. I don't mean the kind of 'be yourself' that would imply that you don't care about anyone or anything else. And I most certainly don't mean the kind of be yourself that is used as an excuse for 'intuitive' uncontrolled outbursts of so-called authenticity. You know, the sort of people who shout, sing, laugh out loud, or give you unsolicited advice about how to raise your kids because they authentically feel they should do that.

Be yourself refers to the quieter self that is inside you. The self you find through introspection and reflection—or by doing nothing. And no, I don't mean the self that results from over-analyzing yourself and digging deeper and deeper to find your 'true' self. Instead, it is the confident self that you experience when being happy or satisfied with something small. It is the self that cares about things and about others and knows what is right and what is wrong.

I'm sure you know what I mean. Maybe it has been a while since you experienced this self. Or maybe you made yourself believe it isn't there because you can't remember when you experienced it. This is understandable. In the social lunacy of today, your self gets easily suppressed and moved to the background. But it is there, and you know it.

While many of us, me included, find it extremely difficult to be this self and regain their individuality, there are people around us who are doing it all the time. Here is a list:

- Movie or book characters including Mr. Miyagi from *The Karate Kid*, Pippi Longstocking and Moana (*Vaiana*). They are all strong-willed individualistic characters daring to be different.
- Rockstar entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson, Steve Jobs and Elon Musk. They are famous for their unique ideas and approach and their headstrong disregard of conventional wisdom and public opinion.
- Political and religious leaders like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, who stood up for their belief in a better world and persisted despite all the threats and suffering.

But wait... "These are not real people," you may argue, or "they are real, but surreal exceptions and not like ordinary people." You are right. So, even though we can learn from them, they are so far out of reach that taking them as a role model might be too much of a stretch. But there are more ordinary people who manage to stay true to themselves as well:

- The mysterious monks who live a structured, dedicated and segregated life in a monastery. They successfully manage to keep the craziness outside and live a peaceful, silent life together.
- The mad scientists who ignore what others are telling them and continue their quest for the truth. They stoically manage to follow their own ideas and let others laugh at them.
- The hard-nosed politicians who follow their own convictions and convince others too. They manage to withstand the pressure of populism and fight for their own ideology.

“But...,” I almost hear you object again, “...these hardly qualify as ‘people like us.’” You are right. They have chosen a rather particular career and made extraordinary sacrifices to follow their heart. Despite their perhaps inspirational way of life, they are exceptions too and hard to relate to. So, here’s another list:

- Your outspoken aunt wearing her purple dress, carrying her own herbal tea and having a smiling face all the time. She manages to deviate from what ‘everyone’ finds ‘normal.’
- Your imperturbable colleague sitting next to you in the flex room, who would continue working even if a bomb went off next to her. She can switch off her ears or so it seems.
- Your offline grandma who still writes letters on her old typewriter and whom you can only reach by wired phone, snail mail or by visiting her. She manages to escape the social media craze completely.
- Your nerdy neighbor who wears the ‘wrong’ jeans, laughs about the ‘wrong’ jokes and likes the ‘wrong’ music. He manages to stay totally ignorant about what is supposedly wrong.
- Your explosively energetic four-year-old who talks to her imaginary friend and sees cars where you see random scribbles. She manages to let her fantasy speak for itself.

Even though some of them look like outright anti-heroines, they are the real heroes in your banana detox. They are as ordinary as people can be. And yet, they do something that seems increasingly extra-ordinary: they withstand the collective craze, keep a cool head, and stay close to themselves. The good thing is that we can learn a great deal from them. Because what they do is nothing magical and doesn’t require supernatural skills. This means that all of us can do it. So yes, there is hope.

## How to Regain Your Senses

The road to regaining your senses is a bumpy and winding one. We are extremely attracted by The Other and go to great lengths to imitate and

please other people and thereby lose our senses. However, as the beacons of light above show, there are people who can withstand the madness. They keep a cool head and stay grounded and true to themselves. And if they can do it, you can do it too.

But how? How to keep your cool in the lunacy? How to behave and be more like them? For these role models, it seems to come naturally. They seem to have an intuitive built-in feature that makes them less sensitive to others than us, ordinary people. While they will have the occasional slip and also join the lunacy, their default mode is being grounded.

This may be true for some of them. But certainly not for all of them. Getting and staying grounded doesn't come naturally to many people, including these role models. Take the monk, the scientist, the politician. Don't you think they are tempted to join the collective madness every day? And don't you think they spend a great deal of effort withstanding it? Of course they do. And take your nerdy neighbor and your outspoken aunt. Don't you think the same applies to them? Of course it does. They are human too, which means they also have their doubts and temptations. But, nevertheless, they choose to stay grounded.

The way to regain your senses is exactly that: regain your senses. I already referred to the school of fish, flock of birds and herd of wildebeest a couple of times. As these metaphors suggest, the behavior we show when joining the madness is animal behavior. It reflects a primary, animal-like response when in danger. We respond out of fear and let our ancient animal brains take control of us.

But we are not just animals. As human beings, we have a unique ability that makes us different from other species: we can reason. We have the ability to think about what we do, reflect on it, and decide to behave differently. We can affect our primary instincts and choose to ignore them. We might not be able to control them fully, but we can influence and neglect them. And this is exactly how we can keep a cool head and stay grounded in the collective madness. When we succeed in staying sensible and think about things before we let our fears and primary responses control us, we no longer have to join the collective treadmill. We can step out and become ourselves again.



# Part 2

# **Solutions**



# 4

## Leaving Bananaland

As Part 1 showed, we are going pretty bananas and there are strong forces that push us to do so. But this doesn't mean at all that we have to sit down and accept it or that we can't do anything about it. On the contrary, as I found out while doing the research for this book, there are no less than 45 remedies for bananas. The following chapters lay out these 45 remedies in nine steps.

The solution to bananas that unfolds in these steps is that you get grounded again. This helps you to get back on your feet and keep your individuality. Rather than letting yourself be driven by collective lunacy, following the nine steps will help you get more control of your thoughts and behavior. And regaining your senses in this way will help you get more control of your life. It did for me, and so it can for you.

But before you rush to the steps, it is important to realize that making any meaningful changes to your life is hard work. The steps are not steps that you can simply execute once. They require your continuous attention and a lot of practice. Your banana habits have become part of your everyday way of thinking and doing. This means that replacing them with other habits may take a while.

This is not meant to discourage you. Most certainly not. It is meant to give you a realistic picture of what you can expect. This should help to motivate you to continue when things take longer and aren't going as well as you hoped. This is perfectly normal. Too many self-help books and self-help gurus suggest that making changes is easy. You just have to follow their X-step plan to an epiphany or join their expensive two-day seminar and you'll live happily ever after. But life doesn't work like that. To help you make some real change, this chapter therefore discusses the overall attitude and approach that you need in order to follow the nine steps successfully.

## How Great People Get Great

Why do some musicians get famous? Why do some athletes win the Olympics? Why do some entrepreneurs create hugely successful companies? Why do some scientists win Nobel prizes? Why do some authors write bestsellers?

Because they are talented, right? Sure, without their talent they wouldn't have gotten there. After all, you need to have a bit of luck with your genes. But the real answer is that they work damn hard. Whether you ask them or look at any of the many studies done on successful people, the conclusion is always the same: being successful in anything requires a lot of sweat, pain, effort, patience, and failure. It requires hard work and perseverance. Just look at the following quotes by some successful people in different disciplines.

*Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.—Pele*

*All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish, and insensitive to the real values of life. The very striving and hard work that we so constantly try to avoid is the major building block in the person we are today.—Pope Paul VI*

*Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work.—Stephen King*

*The three great essentials to achieve anything worthwhile are: Hard work, Stick-to-itiveness, and Common sense.*—Thomas A. Edison

*Writing music is not so much inspiration as hard work.*—George Gershwin

To be able to put a lot of hard work into something, you need to really want it. That is also what research on ‘grit’ shows: only people with passion and perseverance reach the top. Of course, in trying to overcome your bananas, your goal is not to reach the top. There is no top. There is only you who wants to feel better, be more effective or be a nicer person. But that requires the same passion and perseverance to make it happen.

I can’t see how you could be ‘passionate’ about not being bananas. Imagine someone saying “Oh, I am so passionate about not going bananas. I love it!” The very fact that you are passionate about it is a clear sign you are not ready yet to let your bananas go. But what passion stands for here is that the only way to succeed is if you really want it. And this applies certainly to not going bananas anymore. Given that our banana habits are so deep in our veins, you need to really want to get rid of them to actually start getting rid of them. So, in that sense, both passion and perseverance are needed.

Only hard work is not enough. You can work very hard but not achieve any results. You can practice and practice and practice without getting any better at something. This happens when you practice in the wrong way. If you repeat the same thing over again, you are unlikely to make any progress. This means it is not only the number of hours or sweat you put in, but also the way you do this. You need to practice smart, not just hard.

Scientists have a name for it. They call it ‘deliberate practice’. If you apply deliberate practice, you try to improve one thing at a time in a systematic and focused manner. When you are trying to achieve something, you observe what is your main weakness and try to improve on that. Once you have succeeded in that, you focus on your next main weakness and work hard to improve that one too. And so on and so forth. So, you deliberately pick something you are not doing in the right way yet and practice until you have improved it, before you move on to the next thing.

Deliberate practice implies that you constantly reflect on your progress. When practicing, you keep a close eye on whether you improve in what you are trying to achieve. And if you are not making progress, you adjust how you practice. This means that you try to learn from what you do. Thus, in a nutshell, deliberate practice works like this:

1. You identify the thing or aspect that you want to improve.
2. You practice, practice and practice to improve it.
3. You monitor whether you are improving.
4. If you are not, you adjust your way of practicing until you have found a way that works for you.
5. Once you are satisfied with the improvement made, you start again at 1 for the next thing or aspect that you want to improve.

This works for musicians, athletes, entrepreneurs, scientists, authors and anyone else who wants to improve their skills significantly. And it also works for getting rid of your bananas. Therefore, I recommend using these principles of deliberate practice when going through the remaining chapters. Of course, you can read them first at a glance. But if you want to make improvements, the best thing is to focus on one step or even one remedy at a time and work on that. And once you are happy with your achievements, you move on to the next.

Furthermore, in the same way as becoming great in music, sports, etcetera, you will have to maintain the other steps and remedies as well. Once developed, every skill needs to be maintained so as not to lose it. Maintenance is easier than development, but it needs to be done. There is thus no finish line or end point to aim for. Keep this in mind.

## **Another Take on How to Do It**

We often look at the great achievers to learn how to become better at something. They are the stars, the heroes, the people that inspire us to achieve something great as well. That makes sense. After all, they show that great achievements are possible and how to do it. However, there is also a different, and perhaps unexpected, place to look for inspiration: the monastery.

“The monastery?” you may ask. “How on earth can we learn how to get rid of our bananas from monks and nuns who have completely disconnected from the world?” But that is exactly why we can learn from them. They manage to live in this world and at the same time not let themselves go bananas. And as you’ll see, the way they live and their basic attitude—with the important exception of their religious core—is at its heart not that different from our heroes.

When looking at the monastery, I took my inspiration from monastic life in the spirit of Saint Benedict, or Benedict of Nursia, a Christian Saint who lived around the year 500 AD. His ‘Rule of Saint Benedict’ is one of the most influential religious rules in the Western Christian world. This rule contains a lot of surprisingly practical advice on how to live a monastic life. Unlike some other religious documents, it is extremely down-to-earth and free of mystique and symbolism.

Of course, you don’t have to become a monk or nun to rid your bananas. Also, you don’t need religion for that. But there is a surprising number of things we can learn from Benedict’s Rule and from the way monks and nuns live. That is also one of the key points of Benedict’s philosophy: you are supposed to apply it and integrate it in everyday life, also if you are not a monk. If you are interested, Wil Derkse’s *The Rule of Benedict for Beginners: Spirituality for Daily Life* helps you do this.

Throughout the steps outlined in the next chapters, you will find ideas that can be traced back to, or are also found in, monastic life. At this point, though, I would like to zoom in on the general attitude and approach that can be found in Benedict’s Rule. This rule is meant to explain how to achieve something really hard, in this case becoming a fully dedicated monk. And from this, we can learn a great deal about how to achieve something else that can be really hard too: liberating ourselves from our bananas.

It starts with your basic attitude. Benedict tells us always to stay a novice. You have to feel like a novice and behave like a novice, even if you are already advanced at something. This is interesting and humbling advice. It makes you realize that there is always something to learn and that you are never there yet. It also makes you realize that there is always someone to learn from, even if you are the highest boss or greatest person on earth. This attitude helps you focus on the things you are not

good at yet and to improve them—an element that we also find back in the deliberate practice idea.

Another main principle outlined in the rule is perseverance—or *stabilitas* as it is called there. It means not walking away from something you have committed yourself too. So, despite the hard times that you will face, you need to go on and not stop and escape into something else. This we also find in our heroes' advice. But what I particularly like about the idea of *stabilitas* is that it takes away any grandeur. It is a grounded way of saying that once you commit to something, you stick to it. You are going to need this attitude to get the stickiest bananas out of your head.

A third important principle is Benedict's version of continuous improvement: *conversatio morum*. It is a bit hard to translate, but it means something like 'conversion of life'. It refers to making changes. According to Benedict, we are not only supposed to stick to something, but also engage in continuous, step-by-step change to improve. For Benedict, life is a continuous journey in which you keep on improving yourself all the time. The word *conversatio* implies a commitment to live faithfully and keep one's mind open. Broadly translated, it means we should stay optimistic and open to any ideas or help that we find along the way. So, you are not just sticking to your own improvement plan but, on your journey, you welcome and appreciate any help or opportunity that you may encounter. Having such an open attitude is going to help you a great deal in getting rid of your bananas.

This brings me to the fourth and probably initially most deterring aspect of Benedict's rule: obedience (*obedientia*). Benedict tells us to be obedient to our superiors and each other. That sounds old-fashioned and against today's strong focus on freedom, equality and self-determination. It would be if it meant that we follow someone else's orders blindly. But that is not at all what *obedientia* means.

The term *obedientia* comes from the Latin word *audire*, which means listening. What it stands for, is that you listen attentively and look carefully around you and embrace any advice or suggestions that you can get—and that you act accordingly. It means you are always trying to learn from what others do or tell you and that you implement their advice. So, you 'obey' signals you are getting and not just think by yourself that you are right.

Interestingly, *obedientia* means almost the opposite of blind obedience. It implies taking responsibility for your own life. You are supposed to make the best of it, and seriously consider any input you get and act if this is the right thing to do. So, you don't hide behind others, or behind being busy, or behind having some sort of special inability, or behind being entitled to deserve exceptional treatment.

I suppose you are getting a sense now of what Benedict is trying to tell us in his Rule. The four principles discussed above belong together and add up to an image of us persevering to continuously improve our lives with a humble attitude while carefully paying attention to any help and opportunities that come our way.

## The Nine Steps to Bananalessness

To master anything, there is always a variety of steps or levels that you should go through. Although there are many routes to making progress, you need to go through certain stages which cannot be skipped and which you should approach in a particular order. We see this, for example, in education, where you start at elementary school and go through high school before you can go to college. The idea of this is that you first need to learn a set of basic skills before you can move on to more specific or advanced skills. Another example is the belt system in martial arts, where you first have to earn a variety of colored belts before you can earn your first level of black belt. So, there is a particular order in how to make progress.

The same applies to your road to bananalessness. There are things you first need to have in place before you can move on. This means that there is logic in the order in which the steps are presented in the next chapters. Of course, you can deviate from this order and also go back and forth. But my recommendation is to start with the first step and only proceed to the next step once you have mastered it to a reasonable degree. This will increase your chances of getting rid of your bananas and it will keep you motivated since you keep on making progress—one step at a time. So here are the nine steps.

**Step 1: Calm Down**

The first step on your journey to bananalessness is to calm down your mind. If you are going bananas, you are too full of thoughts and feelings to act sensibly. Therefore, before you can make any progress, you need to calm down. As you will see in Chapter 5, the way to do this is to shut off the noise and drastically reduce your information intake.

**Step 2: Let Go**

Your next step is to stop trying to control the many things that are beyond your control. Going bananas is also a result of keeping too many balls in the air. Once you drop a significant number of them, you will calm down further and free enough brain space to continue your journey out of Bananaland. Chapter 6 will help you achieve this.

**Step 3: Take Responsibility**

Once you have calmed down a bit and let go of some bananas, the next step is that you take responsibility for the fact that you are going bananas—and for your life in general. You can only make further progress if you accept that there is nothing and no one else to blame and that you are the only one responsible. This step is discussed in Chapter 7.

**Step 4: Dethrone Yourself**

The next step is a bit of a nasty one—at least for me. Getting rid of your bananas implies that you have to dethrone yourself. This means realizing that you are not as important as you think you are and that anything you worry about isn't so important either. Chapter 8 describes how to do this in a way that makes you feel better rather than worse.

**Step 5: Build Character**

Now that you have put yourself with both feet back on the ground and taken responsibility for your banana journey, you can start reclaiming your own individuality. That is what this fifth step—and Chapter 9—is about. It helps you to ignore your inner call to conform to what others think and do and live your life in your own way—even if that goes against accepted norms.

### **Step 6: Detox Yourself**

Going through steps 3 to 5 helps you develop the right attitude to beat your bananas. These three steps are emotionally the hardest ones since they imply reconstructing yourself. Once you are that far, it is now time to start detoxing yourself. This means that you start cleaning your mind from all the clutter about what you are supposed to believe, aspire, say and do. Chapter 10 should help you with this.

### **Step 7: Get Organized**

In the previous steps, you have mainly worked on your mind, on improving the way you think. That is clearly the most important part of getting rid of your bananas. However, you also need to work on the way you work, on how you plan and organize things. This helps you reduce the chances of falling back to your old banana behaviors. Chapter 11 focuses on this.

### **Step 8: Think Sensibly**

In the first seven steps, you have made yourself banana-ready. After the noise-canceling of Steps 1 and 2, you have worked on your character in Steps 3-5 and cleaned up your internal and external clutter in Steps 6 and 7. This should enable you to stand firm against the never-ending flow of bananas thrown at you. Now, in the last two steps, you are ready to take in information again. Chapter 12 describes how you can do this without going bananas, by developing and using sensible thinking.

### **Step 9: Pay Attention**

In the last step, you make yourself fully ready for this banana-rich world. Step 8 taught you how to think and act more sensibly so that you can separate the bananas from the other fruit. In this final step, you learn how to actively seek to take in new information and connect to others while staying calm at the same time. As you will see, Chapter 13 describes how to pay careful attention to the things that matter.

## **Stages You May Go Through**

The process of getting rid of your bananas resembles kicking the habit of drug addiction. Of course, there are differences, but this resemblance

makes sense. Going bananas is a bit of a drug addiction. Chapter 2 showed how invasive the addiction is, and Chapter 3 gave various biological, psychological and sociological reasons why we have such a strong inclination to go bananas. This makes ridding your bananas close to getting rid of a serious drug addiction—although usually without most of the physical effects.

The fact that getting rid of your bananas has striking resemblances to recovering from an addiction means that, in each step, you are also likely to go through a series of mental stages. Research shows that we go through a couple of stages in almost any relevant change in our lives. Well-known in this respect are the ‘coping’ stages of dealing with a loss, trauma, or externally imposed change such as being fired or discovering you have a chronic disease. Along these lines, you may find yourself going through the following mental stages while facing your bananas:

- ***The ‘Uh-Huh’ Stage.*** In this stage, you read about a particular banana or step and think: Okay, that makes sense, people are that crazy and they could indeed benefit from a step like this.
- ***The ‘Not Me’ Stage.*** While the banana or step you read about may be applicable to others, it doesn’t apply to you. After all, you are doing fine and are certainly not as bananas as others.
- ***The ‘Oh Shit’ Stage.*** After your initial denial, you realize that what you read *does* apply to you. You may be shocked because you are more bananas than you were ready to admit.
- ***The ‘I’m a Failure’ Stage.*** While still trying to find evidence that you are not bananas, you know you are. And you loathe yourself for it. You may get angry and call yourself a failure.
- ***The ‘Poor Me’ Stage.*** After you have put yourself down, your anger turns into self-pity. You don’t see how you can change, and you feel like a helpless child. Others should solve your problems.
- ***The ‘Farewell Banana’ Stage.*** With pain in your heart, you get ready to say goodbye to your banana habit. Having been your dependable companion, you feel sad about letting it go.

- ***The ‘Nothingness’ Stage.*** After having said goodbye to your banana, you wait and see. You don’t give any special attention to it anymore and just do whatever you do.
- ***The ‘Done, Next’ Stage.*** At a certain point in time, you realize that your banana habit is gone and replaced by a non-banana version. You are ready to move on to the next step.

## **Your Personal Banana Demons**

Even though all nine steps are important in ridding yourself of bananas, it is likely that there are one, two or maybe three that are especially important to you. Everyone has their own specific pitfalls and weaknesses. Mine are Step 4 (Dethroning Yourself), Step 5 (Building Character), and probably Step 2 as well (Let Go). I tend to make myself and the things I do far too important and find it hard to stand strong against the social norms around me. And I am also not good at letting things go, even though I know that would be better for me.

You will have your own personal banana demons, the steps that are most difficult for you. This means they require extra attention. You probably won’t be able ever to master them fully, but that is okay. You don’t need to be a banana champ. In line with the attitude and way of working described above though, these steps will always require your attention. You need to be aware of them and keep working on them in order not to regress back into Bananaland.

## **How to Get the Most Out of this Book**

As should be clear by now, the best way of using the rest of this book is not just to read it and put it back on your bookshelf or in your folder of read e-books. Of course, you could do this, but the chances of any lasting effect are then close to zero. As this chapter has argued, making change is hard work, which can be as confrontational and difficult as recovering from drug addiction. If you just read the book and put it away, you are probably not getting beyond the ‘Uh-huh’ and ‘Not Me’ stages. You think it is interesting, but now let’s go back to work.

To get the most out of this book, the best thing is to go through it step by step, or even remedy by remedy, within a chapter. So, you read a chapter or section, let it sink in and think about how you could adjust and implement the suggested remedies in your life. *And then you do so.* You are prepared to go through the stages above, and, while doing this, you persevere with an open mind and take any help and opportunity coming your way.

While reading the book, you have to continuously make the translation of what you read to yourself and to your own life. The steps and remedies are general, but this book is colored by my personal experiences and perspective. These may not be the same as yours. You have your own experiences and perspective. This means that, rather than taking things literally, you should see the steps, remedies and examples as seeds of inspiration that help you guide your own journey out of Bananaland. So, let's get started.

## No More Bananas!

Everything that needed to be said has been said. So, let me merely draw a quick conclusion. First of all, you now know *what* to do to say goodbye to your bananas. Divided into nine steps, Chapters 5 through 13 offer you no less than 45 possible remedies to do this. When applying them in practice, the Table of Contents may come in handy. Whenever you find yourself swamped in bananas, have a look at it and see which step and which remedy would be most helpful for you at that moment.

Second, you also know *how* to do it. As emphasized in Chapter 4, the road out of Bananaland is a bumpy, winding, and never-ending road. As emphasized there and repeatedly afterward, it requires a novice attitude and a lot of perseverance to start, continue, and restart your journey continuously. And while doing that, you may be going through various phases including denial, hopelessness and euphoria. Hold on and take one step at a time.

Third, you also know *why* to do it. You probably knew before you started reading this book, because you will have had your own reasons to obtain it. In addition, Chapter 2 illustrated how deeply the bananas have invaded what we think, feel, do and say. Furthermore, Chapter 3 gave you a peek into the science of bananas, thereby showing you how natural and self-evident it is that we go bananas.

The bottom-line of all of this is staying grounded and keeping a cool head in the collective madness that surrounds you. The idea is that you want to discover, enhance and celebrate your individuality and your

human capacity to think sensibly instead of mindlessly following the herd. Overall, the nine steps and 45 remedies comprise one big journey towards becoming that more conscious and sensible person.

This is hard work. Getting rid of your bananas is challenging, and you will always keep on creating and gathering new bananas. I do. And I am nowhere near an endpoint. Despite all my efforts, I go bananas about something at least once every day and usually more often. And I find myself going back to all the steps all the time. But still, I am making progress. The number and size of bananas occupying my head have significantly dropped. And I hope the same will happen to you.

Because the payoff is great. Even though you will never reach an endpoint, every banana you can get rid of helps in making progress. And it is worth it for at least three super-important reasons:

1. **It makes you feel better.** With fewer bananas, you feel more relaxed, more confident, and more in control of your life.
2. **It makes you more effective.** With fewer bananas, you get more done and you do it better with less effort.
3. **It makes you a nicer person.** With fewer bananas, you are nicer and kinder to others, giving them the attention they deserve.

This means that saying goodbye to your bananas is not only good for you. It also is good for the people around you, the school, flock or herd of people you relate to and interact with. Not only will you be a nicer person to them, you will also inspire them to get rid of their bananas too. After all, we are all social animals that look at each other and copy each other's behavior. So, by applying the contents of this book, I hope you can set an example for them and thereby help reduce not only your own bananas, but also theirs. Enjoy.

## **About the Author**

Jeroen Kraaijenbrink is a writer, advisor and lecturer on leadership and strategy. He lectures at the University of Amsterdam Business School and the TSM Business School in Enschede. He advises leaders in corporate and non-profit organizations and is also an active contributor on forbes.com.

No More Bananas is Jeroen's third book. After writing two earlier books on strategy based on his professional expertise, No More Bananas reflects his personal journey to stand strong against the collective lunacy of today. Jeroen lives in the Netherlands, with his wife Caroline and their cat.

For more information about this book, Jeroen, or his other work, visit [www.jeroenkraaijenbrink.com](http://www.jeroenkraaijenbrink.com) or [www.nomorebananas.com](http://www.nomorebananas.com).





## **Feel better, get done more and become a nicer person**

In this age of social media, fake news, individualism and information overload, the certainties we relied on in the past are gone. In our quest for assurance and support, the only seemingly dependable pillar left is other people. So we look to them. But they are unsettled too. And by looking to them, we create and perpetuate our own vicious stress-cycle. As a result, we lose our sensible selves. And we go bananas.

But there is good news. If we look around us, there are people who withstand the collective lunacy and stay grounded. They do something that most of us have a hard time doing: they stay themselves. And the best news is that what they can do, you can do too. It doesn't require any special talents or supernatural powers. It only requires doing.

In this amiable, open and accessible book, Jeroen Kraaijenbrink takes you on his personal journey out of Bananaland. Drawing from cognitive psychology, martial arts, Saint Benedict, personal experience, and a wide range of other sources, the book offers a nine-step approach with some remarkably practical advice for keeping a cool head in the collective lunacy.

**Free yourself from the collective  
lunacy and reclaim  
your calm and sensible self**