Help! My project is on fire!

An insanely large number of projects fail. Some limp across the finish line, and others are total dumpster fires.

A project on fire is like a game of snakes and ladders: some days you'll make huge progress, and on others you'll lose ground.

This cheatsheet explains what to do if you find yourself on a project that is in crisis. Beginning with: should you bother?
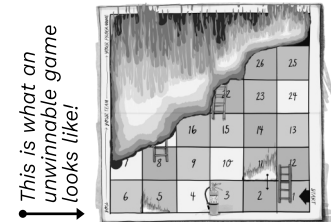
SHOULD YOU STAY?

Stay if you can say yes to all of these:

- ✔ The environment isn't toxic
- ✔ There are people I trust
- ✔ I'm not bitter or angry
- ✔ I have support
- ✔ I can help!

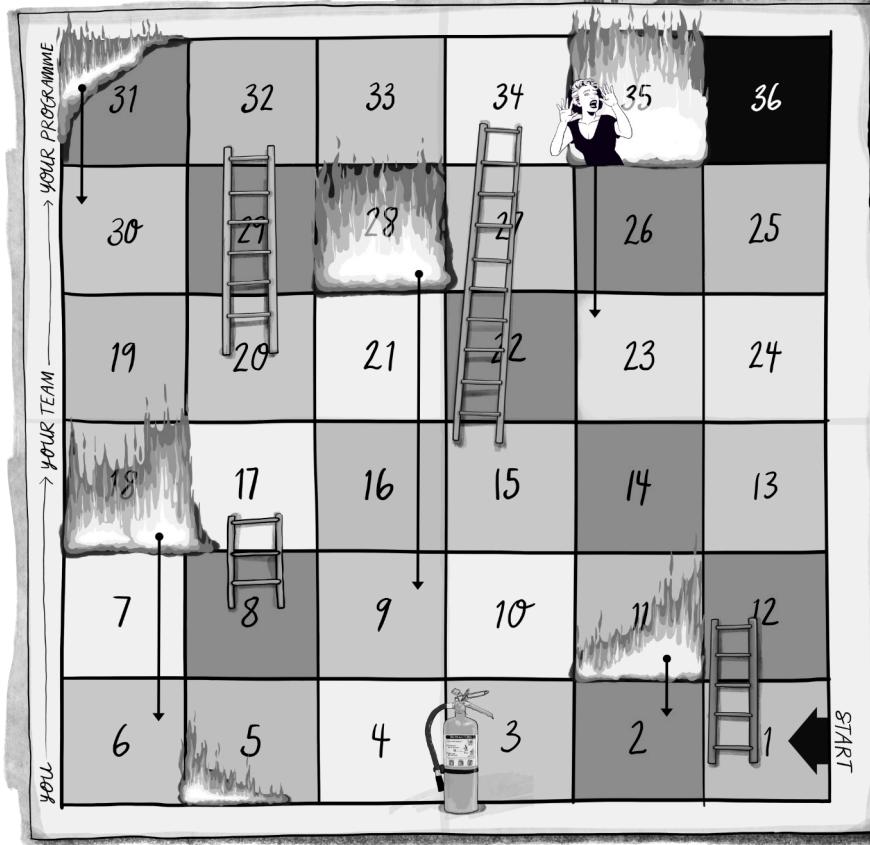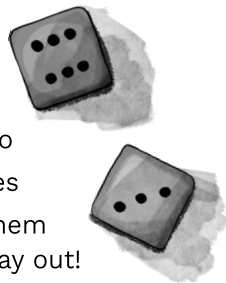**Remember:** some games are unwinnable.

If the **business case is fundamentally flawed** or if there is **major disagreement about the proposition**, then there's little chance you'll actually be able to help.

This is what an unwinnable game looks like!

If you decide to go ...

1. Don't feel guilty
2. Don't threaten, just do
3. Try not to burn bridges
4. Don't bother telling them what to fix on your way out!

[Game board labelled: YOUR PROGRAMME, YOUR TEAM, YOU, with squares numbered 1–36, ladders, fire, and a START arrow]

Nope! — *Yes, I'm going to stay!*

HELPING YOUR PROGRAMME

To get a project back on track, you need to **resolve the big issues**. There's actually no trick to this. Simply:

1. Turn up!
2. Offer to help!
3. Suggest sensible things!

Enthusiasm is criminally underrated!

You also need a **realistic plan.** A good plan is based on:

1. Understanding the business case
2. Knowledge of all the work in-flight
3. A network of stakeholders
4. A handle on the tech

Good business analysis can clarify your options, and help you to navigate your way out of this mess.

HELPING YOUR TEAM

Counter team dysfunctions by:

1. Building trust; sharing what you know!
2. Modelling healthy conflict
3. Stating the obvious
4. Volunteering for stuff!
5. Openly caring about the work!

Getting everyone on the same page requires something everyone can understand and discuss. Some tips:

1. It needs to link all the moving parts
2. Be flexible and open to feedback
3. Templates help (but can also constrain)
4. Your requirements doc probably isn't it!
5. Be creative!

STAY SANE

Your approach has a huge impact on how you'll experience the project. Some tips:

1. Acknowledge the situation
2. Find allies
3. Ruthlessly prioritise your work
4. Make (and stick to) a self-care plan
5. Keep it fun! (Cheese snacks anyone?)

Remember that there's a big difference between **venting**, and **complaining**!

Try to stay positive.