

# Quit Smart: Why Failing Fast Isn't Failing at All

By Patty Sipes



A former colleague of mine—a sharp executive from Microsoft—once sat in on a leadership strategy meeting and asked, genuinely confused:

**“Why do people hang onto things so long?”**

She had a point.

In her world, if something wasn't working, you pivoted—fast. You didn't wait until the wheels fell off. You didn't over-rationalize or drag things out just because you had already invested time or money. You made the call and moved on.

That conversation came to mind recently as I read *Quit: The Power of Knowing When to Walk Away* by Annie Duke. The book challenges a long-held belief in business culture—that quitting equals failure. Knowing *when* to quit is one of the most valuable, underrated leadership skills.

**Hanging On Too Long Happens Everywhere**

I've seen it in nearly every industry—healthcare, tech, startups, legacy businesses. We keep underperforming products alive too long. We delay reorgs we know are necessary. We maintain partnerships that no longer make sense. We convince ourselves that *one more month* will turn it around.

We do this not because we're lazy—but because we're human. We get emotionally attached. We fear looking like we made a bad decision. And we've been taught that persistence is always noble.

But here's the reality: **the longer you delay the hard call, the more costly it becomes—financially, operationally, and culturally.**

### **Quitting Is a Strategy, NOT a Character Flaw**

Duke introduces the idea of “kill criteria”—clear checkpoints that allow you to walk away from an initiative or plan *before* it consumes more than it's worth. These criteria take emotion out of the equation and help leaders act from a place of clarity.

I've helped teams across industries create these structures. Whether it's a service line, a system rollout, a business unit, or even a leadership hire that's just not clicking—the goal isn't to avoid mistakes. The goal is to *stop compounding them*.

### **“Fail Fast” Isn't Reckless—It's Responsible**

That same Microsoft colleague would often say, *“If you fail, fail fast.”* She didn't mean to be careless—she meant *to be honest, early. The most agile companies and leaders aren't fearless—they're self-aware. They pay attention to signs that something isn't working and adjust before the damage spreads. That's not a weakness. That's wisdom.*

### **Normalizing the Smart Exit**

*If we want to build strong organizations, we need to shift the narrative: quitting doesn't mean giving up. It means getting focused. It means acknowledging the reality in front of you—and making space for a better direction.*

### **Final Thought:**

*The strongest leaders aren't the ones who gut it out no matter what—they're the ones who know when to walk away and have the courage to do it.*

*If your gut's been telling you something's not right, maybe it's time to stop resisting the obvious.*

*You're not failing. You're leading.*