

Titanic: The Sinking Ship

Dealing with sunken cost fallacy in relationships

When word of Titanic, the unsinkable ship, hit the lips of civilians back in 1912, no doubt people were excited to hop aboard. What an opportunity to sail the seas, a head full of hopes and a suitcase of dreams. People boarded that ship with excitement, anticipation, wonder, curiosity, and a romantic promise of the future, much like a bride and groom on the day of their wedding. But just like the ocean, life has a way of laying things in our course that we don't expect and haven't prepared for. What happens when you realize that you are aboard the Titanic, the iceberg has hit and your ship is sinking?

What is sunken cost fallacy?

SCF is a phenomenon or cognitive bias where a person is reluctant to abandon a strategy or course of action because they have heavily invested in it, even when it is clear that bailing would be more beneficial. We see this all the time in our observations of other couples. You know the ones I'm talking about; they argue constantly, there is a coldness between them, the family unit is disconnected and there is little to no intimacy. You sit back and think to yourself "why don't they just break up?" While it's easy to determine when other relationships have passed their expiry date, it's much harder to recognize our own, and more so to face up to the fact that it might be time to take action.

Why is it so hard to see a sinking ship?

Just like the Titanic, it's difficult to recognize a sinking ship if you are on it. You don't have the perspective of the drone, or a rowboat or the iceberg radar. You perceive your situation from your standpoint. It's hard to know how bad it really is which makes it even harder to know when the right time is to sound the alarm. That's why it is imperative that you seek trusted counsel (friends/family/therapist/educational resources) to help you get a snapshot of a more objective reality.

Why does it take so long for people to jump?

So many reasons! Social and cultural beliefs such as "if I divorce, I'm a failure", logistical challenges such as money, housing, parenting plans, documentation, and legal issues. Then there are emotional hurdles like pain, sadness, loneliness,



Rose knew when to let go, her heart will go on

fear, abandonment, isolation, instability and uncertainty and psychological obstacles of re-discovering who you are and your place in the world. That's a lot to take on, so it's no wonder people feel overwhelmed by the task, and many choose to make a non-decision and stay. While this may appear easier in the short term, it can cost you big time down the track.

What is the cost of non-decision?

Resentment and regret, and those are two gnarly beasts to live with. This existential inertia will rumble in the pit of your gut despite your best efforts to avoid, numb, soothe, or alleviate. It will take time for you to see, but not jumping off a sinking ship can lead to emotional, psychological, and spiritual bankruptcy. You may passively forfeit your happiness, well-being, physical and mental health, joy, love, time, new experiences and authenticity which is an excruciating cost when we only have one life, and it gets shorter every day. Yes, it's bloody hard to decide, but are you willing to sacrifice the rest of your life?

Words: **Scout Smith-O'Leary**

Scout is a Relationship Therapist & Educator working with singles and couples based in Manly. For more info visit www.thelovescout.com or call **0410 030 463** to book in a session.

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