



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Hugging the Anchor of the Titanic ***July 27, 2007***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we consider personal change, Newton, inertia, consistency, and tragedy.

"Every object persists in its state of rest or uniform motion...unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it." - Newton's First Law of Motion

The same could be said about many of us. For better or for worse, we seem to prefer staying who we are. We don't really want to change, even if it's in our best interest to do so. Truly. For those that disagree, I ask you to think for a second. If you're like most people, there's probably a couple of things about yourself that you'd like to change. Maybe it's something you truly wish you could stop doing. Or maybe it's something you'd like to *start* doing, but for some reason you just don't. Maybe there's an aspect of yourself that you'd just like to be different. You've probably thought about these one or two things for a long time; maybe a day doesn't go by that you don't think "I wish I could do X", or "I wish I could be more this or less that." But for some reason, even though you want this change, and even though you know you'd truly benefit from this change, you still don't change. As per Newton's Law, we seem to prefer to stay at rest or continue in our uniform state.

Not surprisingly, people tend to get blamed for this display of inertia (which was, in fact, what Newton was defining by his First Law). However, when you look at it honestly, we all know how difficult it is to change who we are. But that awareness doesn't seem to stop us from criticizing others (e.g. leaders, colleagues, spouses, partners, etc.) for their continuing to behave the same way they do. So we end up living by a double standard: We excuse or understand our inability to change ourselves, but we hold others immediately accountable when they don't change. Which can at times create just a few problems in both work and personal relationships....

A fascinating aspect of the human experience based on observations in my work is that many of us seem afraid of what we want most, whatever that might be. And it doesn't seem to matter when we know it would benefit us or make us happy to get it or do it. It's an interesting

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paradox I've seen play out again and again. If you ask people in this state why they're not able to have what they want (and we're not talking the physically impossible), they are readily able to bring forward a series of reasons why it's just not reasonable to expect that. In fact, if you question them a bit more, they may become offended that you would even suggest they could be happier or that you would suggest they may have a role to play in their present state of happiness. In effect, they become their own cross-examining attorney, shooting down all of their own arguments and hope for a better possibility.

In working with executives, I have called this situation "Hugging the anchor of the Titanic." From the movie and literary accounts, we know that a deep concern for survivors was to row away as far as possible from the sinking ship. The fear was that if survivors were too close to the ship, they would be drawn down into the vacuum created as it submerged. Similarly, many of us know that we should be rowing away from current aspects of ourselves, and yet we are drawn to stay with the ship. Some of us will hold on to the anchor all the way down. I've even experienced some who flip you the finger as they go under the waterline. Be it for a sense of safety, security, or righteousness, there is truly a paradoxical and tragic quality to staying with the tried and true when you know it's not working. This is an issue we'll examine further in the next 60-Second Email™.

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Until next month,

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