

# 1 Deckchairs on the Titanic

According to stories from the time, when the iceberg struck the ship, many of the passengers and crew were completely unconcerned – due to the ship’s reputation as ‘unsinkable’. The band played on, and some stewards set about rearranging the deckchairs (‘steamers’) that

It’s like rearranging  
deckchairs on the titanic



had been knocked askew in the collision. The view now, of course, is that time might have been better spent addressing the real problem, the hole below the water line, than messing about with superficial issues like deckchairs.

The quotation has lots of useful messages.

The main message is to do with focusing on what's important, rather than what's trivial - and that this might require dealing with

stuff which is less obvious, immediate and urgent. It helps reinforce the point that we can easily get distracted by what's in front of us; stuff that might be more crucial is often hidden away.

However the main message, from our point of view, is the way in which the deckchairs and the hole represent behaviour and attitude. If we can see the deckchairs as behaviour, and the hole as attitude, then sometimes effort can be made on trying to improve key

behaviours and skills, when in fact, a lot of our abilities (externally) are driven by how people feel, think and believe – their attitude. So to make significant progress, attention needs to be given to the internal state – often completely hidden from view – rather than on the skills and behaviours themselves.

In our view, this is a major reason why behaviour-focused training often fails: learners, in the safe and supportive environment of a training room, may easily

demonstrate the key skills being taught; but once out of that environment, the internal doubts and fears re-emerge, and disable what has already, apparently, been ‘learned’.

Finally, to confirm the power of our internal beliefs, consider this relevant quote:

**It wasn't the iceberg  
that sank the Titanic  
...but the belief that it  
was unsinkable**

“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten” (R. Kipling)

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