

The Gottman Island Survival Game

Adapted from “Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work”. pg. 123-126 by John Gottman,

Imagine that your cruise ship just sank in the Caribbean, and you awaken to find yourselves on a tropical desert island. Gilligan and Ginger are nowhere in sight—the two of you are the only survivors. One of you is injured. You have no idea where you are. You think there’s some chance that people know of the ship’s distress, but you are not sure. A storm appears to be on the way. You decide that you need to prepare to survive on this island for some time and also to make sure you’ll be spotted by a rescue party. There is a bunch of stuff from the ship on the beach that could help you, but you can only carry ten items.

Your Mission

Step 1: Each of you writes down on a separate piece of paper what you consider the ten most important items to keep from the inventory list below, based on your survival plan. Then rank-order these items based on their importance to you. Give the most crucial item a 1, the next most crucial a 2, and so on. There are no right or wrong answers.

Ship’s Inventory

1. Two changes of clothing
2. AM-FM and short-wave radio receiver
3. Ten gallons of water
4. Pots and pans
5. Matches
6. Shovel
7. Backpack
8. Toilet paper
9. Two tents
10. Two sleeping bags
11. Knife
12. Small life raft with sail
13. Sun block lotion
14. Cook stove and lantern
15. Long rope
16. Two walkie-talkie send-receiver units
17. Freeze-dried food for seven days
18. One change of clothing
19. One fifth of whiskey
20. Flares
21. Compass
22. Regional aerial maps
23. Gun with six bullets
24. First-aid kit with penicillin
25. Oxygen tanks

Step 2: Share your list with your partner. Together come up with a consensus list of ten items. That means talking it over and working as a team to solve the problem together. Both of you need to be influential in discussing the problem and in making the final decisions.

Scoring For Gottman Island Survival Game

When you've finished, it's time to evaluate how the game went. You should both answer the questions below.

1. How effective do you think you were at influencing your partner?
 - a. Not at all effective
 - b. Neither effective nor ineffective
 - c. Somewhat effective
 - d. Very effective
2. How effective was your spouse at influencing you?
 - a. Not at all effective
 - b. Neither effective nor ineffective
 - c. Somewhat effective
 - d. Very effective
3. Did either of you try to dominate the other, or were you competitive with each other?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. A little
 - d. Not at all
4. Did you sulk or withdraw?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. A little
 - d. Not at all
5. Did your partner sulk or withdraw?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. A little
 - d. Not at all
6. Did you have fun?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. A little
 - d. Not at all
7. Did you work well as a team?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. A little
 - d. Not at all
8. How much irritability or anger did you feel?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. A little
 - c. Somewhat
 - d. A lot
9. How much irritability or anger did your partner feel?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. A little
 - c. Somewhat
 - d. A lot
10. Did you both feel included?
 - a. A lot
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. A little
 - d. Not at all

Scoring: Give yourself one point for each "a" answer, two points for each "b" answer, three points for each "c" answer, and 4 points for each "d" answer. Tally your score.

If your final score is over 24, you're doing a good job of accepting each other's influence and working together as a team. If you scored 24 or below, your partnership needs further work in this area.

Ship's Inventory

	Need	Rank	Partner	Final
1. Two changes of clothing				
2. AM-FM and short-wave radio receiver				
3. Ten gallons of water				
4. Pots and pans				
5. Matches				
6. Shovel				
7. Backpack				
8. Toilet paper				
9. Two tents				
10. Two sleeping bags				
11. Knife				
12. Small life raft with sail				
13. Sun block lotion				
14. Cook stove and lantern				
15. Long rope				
16. Two walkie-talkie send-receiver units				
17. Freeze-dried food for seven days				
18. One change of clothing				
19. One fifth of whiskey				
20. Flares				
21. Compass				
22. Regional aerial maps				
23. Gun with six bullets				
24. Fifty Packages of condoms				
25. First-aid kit with penicillin				
26. Oxygen tanks				

