

The Identity Dimension in an Ending

A practical tool for anyone deciding whether a commitment has finished.

By Federico Malatesta · August 2026

When people decide to end something, the deliberation is usually about the practical arrangements: the timing, the money, the people who will have to be told. The prior question rarely gets asked, and it is the one that decides whether the arrangements are worth making at all. This checklist covers that question.

The difficulty is that the feeling of wanting out is identical whether a commitment has finished or is simply asking for something you would rather not give. The feeling will not tell you which one you are in. These five will get you closer.

01 Is it being held out of loyalty to a past story?

A commitment can become nostalgic. It is maintained out of loyalty to the story it once told about you, not because of where it points you now. If you met it for the first time today, with the life you actually have, would you take it on?

02 Has the cost outgrown the good?

A commitment can become disproportionate: not wrong at the start, and not wrong in principle, but the cost it now imposes on you and on the people around you has outgrown what it still delivers. Name the cost specifically. Vague discomfort is not disproportion.

03 Is the reason for staying one you have examined?

A commitment can rest on something assumed years ago and never revisited. What do you believe would happen if you let it end? Where did that belief come from? And has anybody with the standing to disagree with you ever gone through it with you?

04 If none of the first three hold, what is being avoided?

This is the item that separates completion from flight. When a commitment is not nostalgic, not disproportionate and not built on an unexamined assumption, the impulse to leave is usually a way of not doing what the commitment currently asks. Sunset is not the same as walking out before dark.

05 Can the next thing be described, or only the exit?

Not a demand for certainty. Nobody knows what the next chapter contains, and waiting until you do is its own avoidance. But there is a difference between describing, however roughly, what you are moving toward and describing only what you are moving away from.

How this goes in practice

It rarely produces a single new story. It produces several, tried and discarded, until one holds. And you will not work through this list once. You will work through it, act, meet the limits of your answer, and work through it again. That is not a failure of the method. It is the method.

There is an Italian verb for this with no precise English equivalent: tramontare. To set, as the sun sets. To go down, to pass beyond the mountains. It carries the connotation of completion rather than failure.

This checklist accompanies the conversation with Rev. Dr. B. Keith Haney on Trailblazers & Titans, expanded at federicomalatesta.com/podcast/trailblazerstitans. The argument behind it is Part IV of They Are Lying to You: The Self-Help Delusion, coming out this fall.