

Shackleton - Leadership on Ice!

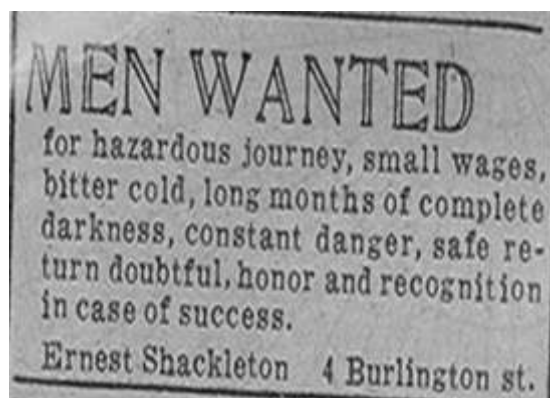
During the "Heroic Age of Exploration," the period in which Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914-1916 British Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition took place, Antarctic expeditions often became ordeals of suffering. At the time, polar explorers were revered for their sacrifices and held up as heroes, albeit often tragic ones.

At this same time, Shackleton distinguished himself as a hero, not only among the masses, but also among the 27 men - officers, scientists and seamen - who were his crew members and team on the expedition. Shackleton earned the respect of these men, not to mention the respect of millions today, by being a leader who put his team's well-being, both mental and physical, above all else.



Shackleton's extraordinary leadership skills contributed to these 27 men successfully braving the nearly two years they were stranded in the Antarctic, when the expedition ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped and then crushed in the pack ice of the Weddell Sea.

Shackleton's accomplishment as a leader started with his selection of the *Endurance* crew. He handpicked some members, including two who had served him faithfully and performed exceptionally on a previous expedition. To recruit the rest, it is said that he posted the following notice:



Shackleton's recruitment notice was brutally honest about the discomforts and dangers to be faced. When the *Endurance* crew members indeed encountered all of the above-mentioned conditions, they accepted them as best they could, for they had been forewarned. And they looked to Shackleton, whom they called "The Boss", for guidance about how to survive the elements, both physically and emotionally.

When the *Endurance* became locked in pack ice, Shackleton ordered the men to pursue every possible means of extricating the ship from the icy jaws of the Weddell Sea, including using ice picks and saws in attempts to reach leads sighted sometimes hundreds of yards away. While these labours were ultimately futile, it was useful to have the men experience this firsthand, so they



would neither question their predicament of having to "winter in the pack" nor become bitter with "what ifs," such as "if we had only been allowed to cut our way out of the ice, we'd have reached the Antarctic continent by now."

Shackleton's calm and confidence in the more dire circumstances were heartening to his crew. Commenting on Shackleton's reaction to their inability to free the *Endurance* from the ice, Alexander Macklin, the ship's doctor, said, "It was at this moment Shackleton...showed one of his sparks of real greatness. He did not...show... the slightest sign of disappointment.



He told us simply and calmly that we would have to spend the winter in the pack."

Shackleton sustained morale and created a unified team by keeping everyone busy - and equal. For example, during the long months in which the crew lived on the *Endurance* as a winter station, Shackleton ignored the predominant class system of the time and had scientists scrubbing floors alongside seaman and university professors eating beside Yorkshire fisherman.

In addition, Shackleton encouraged more than work-based camaraderie. The men played football on the ice, participated in nightly sing-alongs and toasts to loved ones back home, organised highly competitive dog-sled races- and even collectively shaved their heads, posing for expedition photographer Frank Hurley.

In the few circumstances in which crew members did not subscribe to the teamwork philosophy, such as when seaman John Vincent was reported to be bullying others, Shackleton swiftly reprimanded them, setting an example. Called to Shackleton's cabin, Vincent left it humbled and demoted. While his men called Shackleton "The Boss", he did not differentiate himself from them. When the crew moved off the debilitated ship to a camp on the ice, Shackleton ensured that neither he nor his officers received preferential treatment.

"There were only 18 skin [sleeping] bags & we cast lots for them," wrote ship's carpenter Chippy McNeish. "I was lucky for the first time in my life for I drew one."

"There was some crooked work in the drawing," able seaman Bakewell wrote, "as Sir Ernest, Mr. Wild...Captain Worsley and some of the other officers all drew wool [sleeping] bags. The fine warm fur bags all went to the men under them."

In addition, in an attempt to help his crew get over the trauma of abandoning the *Endurance*, Shackleton literally served his men: Rising early in the morning, he made hot milk and hand-delivered it to every tent in the camp. Shackleton's mantra of unity and show of humanity was infectious. While his men were suffering from the most terrible deprivation, they often rose to his example and showed tremendous compassion for each other. When First Officer Lionel Greenstreet spilled his much-needed milk on the ice, he seemed almost despondent over the loss, and, one by one, the seven men who shared his tent silently poured some of their equally precious ration into his mug, refilling it.



During the brutal, seven-day lifeboat journey to Elephant Island, Shackleton literally stood tall, boosting the morale of his suffering men by standing at the tiller, hour after hour. Later, during the 17-day sail to South Georgia Island, Shackleton monitored the health of his five companions constantly. Captain



Frank Worsley later wrote, "Whenever Shackleton notices that a man seems extra cold and shivering, he immediately orders another hot drink served to all." Worsley explained that Shackleton was careful not to single out the man suffering the most, for he would not want to frighten him about his condition. In the face of changing circumstances and constant danger, Shackleton remained positive and decisive, which buoyed his crew. Further, throughout the 22-month *Endurance* expedition, Shackleton was able to bring the best in each of his men.

Each crew member contributed to the team's survival, from Captain Frank Worsley, whose exceptional navigation guided the men to both Elephant and South Georgia Islands; to carpenter Chippy McNeish, who reinforced the lifeboats; to cook Charles Green, who created meals day after day with limited resources; to Alexander Macklin and James McIlroy, the two doctors, who saved steward Perce Blackborow from gangrene resulting from frostbite; to second-in-command Frank Wild, who served as leader of the 21 men on Elephant Island after the departure of Shackleton and companions for South Georgia.



Twenty-eight ordinary - turned-extraordinary men, led by Shackleton's example, survived nearly two years of unimaginable hardship at the end of the Earth. An inspirational story and example of leadership that remains unparalleled, even one hundred years on!

Shackleton – Leadership Lessons ‘on Ice’!

He has been called “the greatest leader that ever came on God's earth, bar none,” yet he never led a group larger than 27, he failed to reach nearly every goal he ever set and, until recently, he had been little remembered since his death in 1922. But once you learn the story of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his remarkable Antarctic expedition of 1914 you'll come to agree with the effusive praise of those under his command. He is a model of great leadership and, in particular, a master of guidance in crisis.



That's because Shackleton failed only at the improbable; he succeeded at the unimaginable. “I love the fight and when things [are] easy, I hate it,” he once wrote to his wife, Emily. He failed to reach the South Pole in 1902, when he was part of a three-man Farthest South team on the Discovery expedition of the great explorer Captain Robert F. Scott. But the men turned back only after walking their scurvy-ravaged bodies to within 463 miles of the Pole in a terrifying cold experienced only by a handful of human beings at that time. Six years later, commanding his own expedition aboard the Nimrod, Shackleton was forced to stop a heartbreaking 97 miles short of the Pole, but only after realising it would be certain death by starvation had his team continued. He was forgiven that failure in light of the greatness of the effort; he was knighted by King Edward VII and honoured as a hero throughout the world.

His greatest failure was his 1914-1916 Endurance expedition. He lost his ship before even touching Antarctica. But he reached a new pinnacle in leadership when he successfully led all 27 members of his crew to safety after a harrowing two-year fight for their lives.

Shackleton faced many of the same problems encountered by leaders and managers today: bringing a diverse group together to work toward a common goal; handling the constant nay-sayer; bucking up the perpetual worrier; keeping the disgruntled from poisoning the atmosphere; battling boredom; bringing order and success to a chaotic environment; working with limited resources.

He embodied the attributes of today's best leaders, those who have adroitly adapted to an accelerating revolution in the workplace. The principles of democracy that changed the map of the world in the late twentieth century have finally trickled down to the workplace. Hierarchies are being flattened and formalities abandoned. Even the highest-ranking bosses are rejecting many of the perks and trappings of the privileged taskmaster. They want success, but they also want to make a contribution to their fields and to their communities.

The myths that have been built around Shackleton imply he possessed superhuman qualities; but if you take a close look at his story, you will see the best qualities of his leadership are eminently learnable. Shackleton was an average person; he taught himself how to be an exceptional one. He rose above his peers and earned the unfailing loyalty of his men. His story is, in its essence, an inspirational tale about unleashing strengths in individuals that they never knew they had in order to achieve goals from the small to the miraculous.



"Shackleton's Way" is an example for the new generation of leaders. It shows how Shackleton's leadership strategy separated the explorer from less-successful and less-admired expedition leaders, and brought him the unfailing loyalty of his team. From him, leaders learn how to develop and unify a team despite various backgrounds and abilities, how to organise limited resources, and how to make individual workers feel valued and inspired to do their best. His story assists leaders and managers who accept new workplace sensibilities but are baffled by how to implement them. He demonstrates how to handle crises, particularly how to break bad news, bolster morale, and quickly change course in the face of the unexpected.

Shackleton's example also shows the importance of injecting humour into a situation, how to bond with a staff without losing status as the boss, and when to nurture. His story is, in its essence, an inspirational tale about unleashing personal strengths you never knew you had in order to achieve goals, from the small to the miraculous.

The Path to Leadership

The values Shackleton learned from his family helped form his uniquely progressive leadership style. He worked his way to the forefront of a new field. He turned bad experiences into valuable work lessons. He insisted on respectful competition in a business climate that often demanded co-operation.

Hiring an Outstanding Crew

Shackleton built a crew around a core of experienced workers. He conducted unconventional interviews to find unique talent. His second in command was his most important hire. He looked for optimism and cheerfulness in the people he hired. He gave his staff the best compensation and equipment he could afford.

Creating a Spirit of Camaraderie

Shackleton made careful observations before acting. He established order and routine so all workers knew where they stood. He broke down traditional hierarchies. He was fair in his dealings with his staff. He used informal gatherings to build esprit de corps.

Getting the Best from Each Individual

Shackleton led by example. He understood and accepted his crewmen's quirks and weaknesses. He used informal one-on-one talks to build a bond with his men. He was always willing to help others get their work done. How he helped each man reach his potential.

Leading Effectively in a Crisis

Shackleton let everyone know that he was in charge and confident of success. He inspired optimism in everyone. He put down dissent by keeping the malcontents close to him. He got everyone to let go of the past and focus on the future. He worked to keep spirits high. He sometimes led by doing nothing.

Forming Teams for Tough Assignments

Shackleton balanced talent and expertise in each group. He ensured all his groups were keeping pace. He remained visible and vigilant. He shored up the weakest links. He got teams to help each other.

Overcoming Obstacles to Reach a Goal

Shackleton took responsibility for getting the whole job done. Even "Old Cautious" sometimes took big risks. He found the inspiration to continue. He kept sight of the big picture. He stepped outside his work to help others.

Leaving a Legacy

Shackleton's leadership had a lifelong impact on his crew. His appeal spans generations. He made lasting contributions to leadership. His influence on a pioneer project in space. Using his example to promote social change. How we view Shackleton's success today.

Shackleton's wisdom is by no means simple or obvious. Much of it is counterintuitive, especially for those schooled in more conventional leadership and management tactics. Shackleton served tea in bed to the ship's 'crybaby', flattered the egomaniacs, and kept close to him the most abrasive personalities. Often, he made great personal sacrifices. Sometimes he led by not leading at all. R. W. Richards, a scientist on the Ross Sea party of the ill-fated expedition, said simply, "Shackleton, with all his faults, was a great man, or should I say a great leader of men."



Shackleton made his men want to follow him; he did not force them to do so. In the process, he changed the way his team saw themselves and the world. His work continued to inspire them for as long as they lived, and to inspire others around the world long after that. There is no greater tribute to a leader. His tools were humour, generosity, intelligence, strength, and compassion. That's "Shackletons Way".

Dear Sir Ernest,

We "three sporty girls" have decided to write and beg of you to take us with you on your expedition to the South Pole.

We are three strong, healthy girls and also gay and bright, and willing to undergo any hardships that you yourselves undergo.

If our feminine garb is inconvenient, we should just love to don masculine attire. We have been reading all books and articles that have been written on dangerous expeditions by brave men to the Polar-regions, and we do not see why men should have all the glory, and women none, especially when there are women just as brave and capable as there are men.

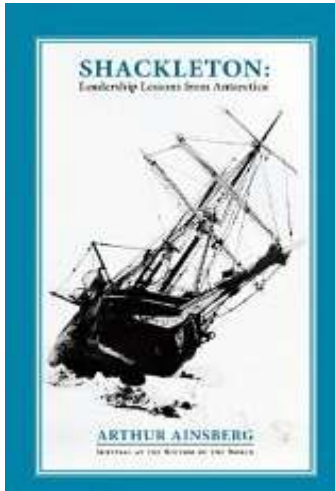
Trusting you will think over our suggestion,

We are: Peggy Pegrine Valerie Davey and Betty Webster

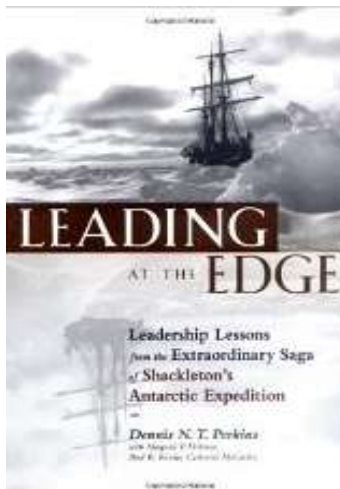
P.S. We have not given any further particulars, in case you should not have time to read this, but if you are at all interested, we will write and tell you more about our greatest wish.

Sir Ernest Shackleton

Leadership Lessons and Themes

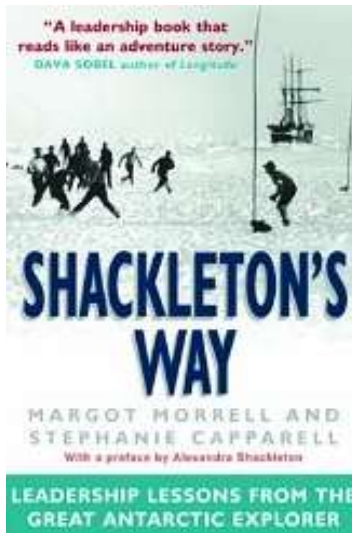


- **The Fire Within** - Feel the Purpose in your Gut
- **A Captain Needs a First Mate** - Choose a Powerhouse for your Number Two
- **Can You Sing?** - It's All About the Team
- **Camaraderie at 20 Below Zero** - Creating an Optimal Work Environment
- **Sailing Uncharted Waters** - Adapt and Innovate
- **Be my Tent Mate** - Keep Dissidents Close
- **Breaking the Ice** - Communicate



1. Never lose sight of the ultimate goal and focus your energy on short-term objectives.
2. The power of personal example, memorable behaviours and symbolism.
3. Instil optimism & self-confidence, yet stay grounded in reality.
4. Take care of yourself and let go of guilt.
5. Establish a shared identity and reinforce the team message constantly.
6. Minimize status differences and insist on mutual respect.
7. Master conflict and avoid needless power struggles.
8. Find something to celebrate and something to laugh about.

9. Have the courage to take big risks.
10. Never give-up and reward creativity.



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