

Special Management Series

# Leadership on the Brink

This is a series of Training for your  
Management TEAM

Presented by J.W. Owens



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Perspective 303 Series

Management - JWO 341



# Leadership on the Brink



## Leadership on the Brink

**This courageous story of adventure can inspire you to lead your crew to victory**

*By Malcolm Fleschner* Millions of readers and adventure fans around the world have thrilled to the inspiring struggle for survival

**Sir Ernest Shackleton and his crew faced aboard *Endurance* during their harrowing expedition to Antarctica in 1914.**

Now in *Leading at the Edge* (AMACOM, 2000) author Dennis N. T. Perkins has encapsulated the motivational lessons of Shackleton's voyage into the **following 10 strategies.**

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## 1. Eye on the prize, hand on the rudder

When his ship was destroyed by ice floes, leaving him and his crew abandoned at the frozen end of the earth, Shackleton quickly abandoned thoughts of crossing the Antarctic and focused instead on keeping his men alive and returning them to civilization.

**By constantly keeping his men busy, with tasks both vital to the expedition and frivolous, Shackleton did not allow them to become disconsolate or defeated.**

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## 2. Set the tone

In good times and bad, people look to leaders for direction. Shackleton exhorted the stranded men to abandon any item that was not absolutely necessary, regardless of sentimental or actual value.

Then he took out his gold cigarette case and gold coins and threw them into the snow.

**True leaders set an example with visible, memorable symbols and actions.**

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## 3. Optimism is contagious

Despite the overwhelming odds facing the crew of the Endurance, Shackleton nearly insisted on an air of positivity.

**Not only will a leader's optimism affect others, but their reflected confidence in turn buoys the leader's spirits as well.**

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## 4. Don't push it

Shackleton and his men faced myriad extremes – cold, hunger, fever, weather, social isolation and physical hardships – that taxed their stamina beyond the human body's normal endurance.

**Leaders typically have large stores of energy, yet they also frequently err by pushing themselves too hard. While this may make sense in the short term, in the long run leaders serve their organizations best by taking care of themselves and not exceeding their limits.**

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## 5. No “die” in team

Shackleton understood that to fracture and fragment his crew would spell disaster. They did not have the energy to spare for disharmony.

He chose his group not based on homogeneity, but partially on the individuals' ability to work with one another.

**Effective leaders establish a sense of shared identity among team members, then build and nurture the bonds of communication and connectedness wherever possible.**

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## 6. Downplay status

Unlike many of his cohorts in Britain's Royal Navy, Shackleton gained his sea legs working from the bottom ranks up.

He learned to make friends with all classes of seamen, even as a product of the highly class-conscious British social system.

Regardless of station, everyone on Endurance contributed whatever labor needed doing.

**Although hierarchies are unavoidable in a corporate structure, leaders emphasize the need for mutual respect and courtesy. This attitude begins at the top of the organization.**



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## 7. Control conflict

Throughout the ordeal faced by the crew of Endurance, tension and festering irritations continually threatened to undermine the men's chances for survival. Though a man of quick temper, Shackleton maintained his cool in difficult circumstances, smoothing ruffled feathers and encouraging calm reflection in the face of strife.

**Yet he also gave the men constructive opportunities to blow off steam, always stepping in before fists were raised. Effective leaders understand the power of conflict, and channel it in ways that strengthens rather than tears apart the team.**

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## 8. Lighten Up

In times of tension, laughter is a commodity in short supply. Yet Shackleton realized that humor could help his men fend off depression and build a sense of camaraderie. He encouraged group sing-alongs, dogsled races and other diversions that buoyed the men's spirits immensely.

**As Shackleton understood, humor and celebration are not luxuries, but necessities that actually help a team maintain focus in the face of great challenges**

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## 9. Measure, then cut

Though an adventurer, Shackleton was known for his extreme caution and minimization of risk. When preparing even the most dangerous tasks, he always considered the circumstances carefully and thoughtfully.

**Great leaders take no unnecessary chances and eliminate carelessness. But once decided upon a course of action, they throw themselves at the task, confident that their calculations have determined the best possible course of action.**

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## **10. Never say, uh, that word**

The story of the Endurance reads like a handbook to finding creative solutions to increasingly impossible predicaments.

**More than mere persistence, creativity under pressure** is what marked Shackleton's men for survival when others would have surely perished.

**Successful leaders anticipate that challenges** will arise and create an environment where problem solving rules the day. Then, rather than expending energy rallying the troops and boosting morale, **the leader can focus the group's attention on rising to the challenge at hand to find a solution.**

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# Good Selling !



J.W. Owens - 561-372-5922  
results.jwowens@gmail.com

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