

Lesson 1 Leadership Beyond Hardship

Endurance on the Endurance

On August 1, 1914, Ernest Shackleton departed London on the ship Endurance with 27 men and 69 dogs to cross the Antarctic continent. Little did they know the journey ahead would be one of the most challenging adventures in history.

The crew members were full of excitement, but when their ship got stuck in thick pack ice on January 18, 1915, their joy quickly turned to fear. "Oh, my! It's frozen like an almond in the middle of a chocolate bar!" cried one of the crew members. Shackleton and his men had to abandon their ship and set up camp on the floating ice, where they would be forced to spend the winter. Each man was given a sleeping bag and was assigned to one of five tents.

Shackleton yielded the better sleeping bags to other crew members and chose to stay with the group's more troublesome characters who could get involved in conflicts. The camping mats were not waterproof, so they were constantly wet. The men shivered in the severe cold and suffered from frostbite. Worst of all, the floating ice on which they were camped began cracking beneath them.

Shackleton walked around inspecting the ice regularly for the crew members' safety. Some nights, Shackleton and his men had to pick up their tents, moving their camp to a more secure area where the ice was less likely to break.

Days went by, and all the crew members could see for miles around was ice. Despite the hopeless situation, Shackleton tried to make the crew at ease with his humor. A crew member even played his banjo to relieve the crew members' anxiety and depression. Seldom were they happy, though. In the rare happy moments, music became a kind of mental medicine. Shackleton's open and honest communication was helpful to the crew members.

The crew members struggled in the hope of getting back on the Endurance one day, but that day would never come. "She's going, boys!" Shackleton shouted on the evening of November 21, 1915, witnessing his ship finally breaking up and sinking into the Weddell Sea.

The 28 men were now isolated on drifting ice hundreds of miles from land, with no ship, no means of communication with the outside world, and limited supplies. Realizing the need for a new survival plan, Shackleton established daily routines for his men. The crew members began each day with breakfast and performed daily tasks such as hunting for food and making improvements to the three lifeboats which were previously rescued from the sunken ship. Time was also set aside for activities like reading or exercising. The crew sang songs, celebrated their crew members' birthdays, and even played football matches on the ice. Even in these occasional moments of joy, at night, the men had to take turns watching for any ice breaking beneath their feet.

On April 9, 1916, the floating ice began to crack, and Shackleton gave the order: "Launch the boats." They traveled across the sea ice and then the open water. They fought against freezing sea water pouring into the boats before they finally reached Elephant Island 6 days later, on April 15. The island was far from any shipping routes, so they were not likely to be found and rescued.

On April 20, with four crew members, Shackleton set off on a risky journey in a small lifeboat to seek help from a whaling station on South Georgia Island, which was 1,300 km away. He took some of the troublesome characters with him so that the remaining crew would not fight while on Elephant Island. Each morning on the island, Frank Wild, whom Shackleton had left in charge, called everyone to be ready to depart. "The Boss may come today!" he declared daily.

Shackleton and the four crew members finally reached South Georgia Island on May 10. Still, their struggle was not over yet. The whaling station was located on the other side of a mountain range. They had to cross the rocky mountains on foot. They stopped to rest for a while, and the exhausted men fell asleep right away. Shackleton woke them up after only a five-minute nap, which saved them from freezing to death. When they arrived at the whaling station, Shackleton hurried to arrange for a rescue ship, the *Yelcho*, to be sent to Elephant Island.

On August 30, 1916, the crew members on Elephant Island spotted a ship. Upon hearing the news of the rescue ship's arrival, everyone rushed out of camp.

"Are you alright?" Shackleton called out. "All well!"

came the reply. All 28 men on the island were rescued alive and safe. After 634 days of drifting in the Antarctic, the crew had finally reached the end of their long and harsh journey.

"I have done it," Shackleton wrote to his wife. "Not a life lost, and we have been through hell."