
Leading on the Edge & Managing IT Departments

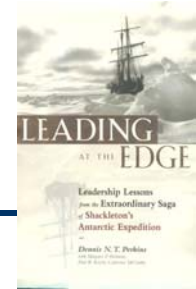
Leading on the Edge, by Dennis Perkins is a book about the management lessons learned from the 1914 Ernest Shackleton Antarctic Expedition.

Those lessons are directly transferable to the management of a software development team.



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The Voyage of the Endurance



In 1914 the explorer Earnest Shackleton boarded the Endurance with his team of seamen and scientists, intent on crossing the unexplored Antarctic continent. Endurance left England in August, while Shackleton staid behind to raise more money. Shackleton joined the ship in Buenos Aires, and then sailed to the whaling station Grytviken in South Georgia.

On December 15, they sailed on with extra clothing and a great deal of apprehension, since they received reports of thick ice moving north. As the ice thickened, the going became more difficult. As the ship rammed through the ice floes, Shackleton became worried by the lack of progress. They wormed their way through a “gigantic and interminable jigsaw puzzle devised by nature.”

On January 19, 1915 the ice of the Weddell Sea closed around Endurance and they were trapped. Working with picks, saws, and hand tools, the expedition made two attempts to break free. On February 24, they resigned themselves to stay on board and winter over.

On October 27, 1915 Endurance was finally crushed by the ice. Shackleton proposed to head toward open water by marching across hundreds of miles of pack ice, pulling the life boats and supplies. After two days and a distance of less than two miles, the men found a large ice floe and made camp. They agreed to stay on the flow until the drift ice carried them closer to Paulet Island. They stayed on their ocean camp until the end of December.

In April of 1916 the ice opened up and they were able to launch their boats. For 5 ½ days they rowed to a rocky spit of land named Elephant Island. After 497 days they reached solid ground. With food supplies running low they decided to split the crew in half and sail further on to South Georgia Island, 800 miles away. On May 10, after 16 days at sea, they landed on South Georgia Island. The bad news was they were on the wrong side of the island and took an additional 3 days to traverse a glacier to reach the whaling station.

After three attempts at rescue on Elephant Island, Shackleton reached the stranded crew at the end of August, 1916, 128 days after launching the boats from the ice floe. 634 days after departure from South Georgia they had returned. All survived with a unique level of caring and camaraderie.

“When disaster strikes and all hope is gone, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton” – Sir Edmund Hillary.

10 Lessons from Shackleton

- ◆ Vision and Quick Victories
- ◆ Symbolism and Personal Example
- ◆ Optimism and Reality
- ◆ Stamina
- ◆ The Team Message
- ◆ Core Team Values
- ◆ Conflict
- ◆ Lighten Up!
- ◆ Risk
- ◆ Tenacious Creativity

Vision and Quick Victories

Never Lose Sight of the Ultimate Goal, Focus Energy on Short Term Objectives.

- ◆ Leaders must channel energy towards both short term and long term goals.
- ◆ Long term goals are distant and uncertain but still critical to the success of the team.
- ◆ Do Something in the Short Term!
 - Cause the team to move by engaging them in productive work.
- ◆ Look beyond your own needs for action.
 - Focus on vision and decisive team actions.
- ◆ Overcome uncertainty with structure.
 - Order and structure are effective when there is nothing else to do.
- ◆ Create engaging distractions.
 - Teams are built by sharing the daily chores of operations.

Symbolism and Personal Example

Set a Personal Example With Visible, Memorable Symbols and Behaviors.

- ◆ Give the right speech.
 - When the situation is dire, the right words are striking.
- ◆ Use vivid symbols.
 - We all make mistakes, fix them and move on.
- ◆ Be visible: Let people see you leading.
 - Demonstrate through actions as well as words that leaders “do their duty.”

Optimism and Reality

Instill Optimism and Self-confidence, but Stay Grounded in Reality

- ◆ Cultivate optimism in yourself
 - Shackleton's family motto – *Fortitudine Vincimus* (By endurance we conquer)
- ◆ Spread the spirit of optimism
 - Research clearly shows optimist do better than pessimist
- ◆ Build the right team “optimism quotient”
 - Put the right team members in the right job
 - An individuals tendency toward optimism or pessimism is just as important as skills, knowledge, or ability.
- ◆ Know how to “reframe” in a tough situation
 - The Chinese character for “crisis” is made from two characters: danger and opportunity
- ◆ Stay grounded in reality
 - Optimism is important but denial is deadly

Stamina

Take Care of Yourself: Maintain Your Stamina and Let Go of Guilt

- ◆ Look out for yourself as well as your crew
 - Effective leaders have high energy levels, stamina, and the ability to deal with stress
- ◆ Beware of “summit fever”
 - Avoid target fixation
 - Provide periodic “process check” meetings
- ◆ Find outlets for your own feelings
 - Enlist the support and guidance of those around you
- ◆ Let go of guilt – learn from mistakes
 - While mistakes should be avoided dwelling on them simply compounds the problem

The Team Message

Reinforce the Team Message Constantly: “We Are One – We Live or Die Together.”

- ◆ Establish a shared identity
 - Value statements
 - Shared outcomes, risks, and rewards
- ◆ Maintain the bonds of communication
 - Personal communication is mandatory for a successful team
- ◆ Keep everyone Informed, Involved, and Thinking about solutions
 - Information really is power
- ◆ Leverage everyone’s talents and deal with performance problems constructively
 - Team effectiveness is never advanced by overlooking individuals who fail to pull their own weight

Core Team Values

Minimize the staff differences and insist on courtesy and mutual respect

- ◆ Minimize status differences and special privileges
 - Rigid stratification is not conducive to teamwork
 - “We’re all in this together” must be believed by the team
- ◆ Insist on mutual respect and courtesy
 - Leaders who want team members to care about each other need to model that behavior themselves.

Conflict

Deal with anger in small doses, engage dissidents, & avoid needless power struggles

- ◆ Deal with anger in small doses
 - Conflict is a pervasive element of any organization, especially when limits are being pressed
 - Teamwork tends to drive conflict underground
 - Be proactive about dealing with conflict
 - Create an effective process to encourage the team to surface differences
- ◆ Engage dissidents
 - Identify groups or individual who undermine leadership
 - Keep them close by
 - Minimize their impact
 - Treat everyone, even the dissidents with respect
 - Set limits
 - Avoid the temptation to denigrate the malcontents
- ◆ Avoid needless power struggles
 - Pick your battles

Lighten Up!

Find something to celebrate and something to laugh about.

- ◆ Find something to celebrate
 - Build celebration into the culture
 - Conduct both large scale and small scale celebrations
 - Heartfelt awards are useful means for celebration
- ◆ Find something to laugh about
 - Humor is an effective leadership tool
 - Think funny
 - Adopt a playful attitude
 - Be the first to laugh
 - Laugh with, not at
 - Laugh at yourself

Risk

Be willing to take the BIG Risk

- ◆ Never take an unnecessary chance
 - “A man sits as many risks as he runs,” — Thoreau
 - Making times doing nothing is a big risk
- ◆ When a risk is justified, do not hesitate
 - “You can not steal second base with one foot on first base,”
— Jeremy Pottruck, Co-CEO Charles Schwab

Tenacious Creativity

Never Give Up – there's always another move

- ◆ Encourage relentless creativity
 - We are seldom surprised when things go wrong
 - But when the pressure is on even little things cause great pain
 - Continually reinvented ourselves and the team requires tenacious creativity
 - Think the unthinkable, encourage others to do the same
 - When a strategy fails, acknowledge it and find another
 - When all the obvious moves are exhausted, keep looking for new ones
 - Do not dismiss any idea, no matter how farfetched
 - The unshakable belief that there is always another move will give you the energy to search for solutions, and creativity will give you the ability to find them