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Tracy Edwards and *Maiden* (B): Background

Tracy Edwards, Gerard Seijts, and Ann Frost wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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In 1986, Tracy Edwards, then 24 years old, decided to assemble an all-female crew to enter the perilous nine-month Whitbread Round the World Race. The 1989–90 edition would be a 59,264-kilometre (32,000 nautical mile) race from Southampton, England, to Uruguay, Australia, and New Zealand and then back to Southampton via Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Edwards was aware of the myriad risks of the race and knew that a mistake could be fatal. “The world I lived in didn’t allow women to [sail in the Whitbread],” Edwards reflected. “I just thought, I want to do this, so I need to change my world and my place in it.”[[1]](#footnote-1) She placed an advertisement in *Yachts & Yachting*, a performance sailing magazine. The ad just said, “Wanted: Girl Sailors.”

Edwards reflected on her motivation to have a crew of all women. She acknowledged that men and women did occasionally race together, but she knew that if there was even one man on the boat, the race would become *his* project and all the women would end up deferring to him. Edwards wanted to prove, once and for all, that women could be competitive and race around the world.

Edwards quickly learned that highly skilled, professional female sailors existed and that they wanted to be part of an extraordinary experience. Once it was announced that the first-ever all-female crew was entering the Whitbread race, the news spread swiftly. However, despite the interest and the existence of professional female sailors, there were not enough women in the United Kingdom with the necessary experience. Even though the project was British, Edwards would not be able to put together a British crew. She was going to need to manage a multi-cultural team.

Sailing experience, it turned out, came in two varieties: technical sailing and ocean racing. The former required tactical execution and technical skills and was mainly exercised on inshore waterways. Ocean racing was the marathon equivalent: it required stamina, guts, determination, and courage to survive the long miles in open ocean. The challenge was that women who were technically skilled sailors did not have vast experience with sailing the open ocean, and the women with miles of open-ocean experience did not necessarily have the same level of technical skills. Edwards also knew that the Whitbread, given its duration, would put considerable interpersonal stress on the team. She needed to find women who, in addition to their sailing skills, were also possessed of a good sense of humour, emotional intelligence, team spirit, and passion for the undertaking.

How should Edwards select and forge the team that would become her 12-woman crew? She had not grown up in a sailing family, and her youthful inexperience limited her insight and skills related to building a team. The only advice she relied on at the time had been provided years earlier by King Hussein of Jordan—a friend and mentor Edwards had met when she was working the luxury yacht-cruising circuit. She explained that King Hussein “taught me you don’t have to be the best. . . . You have to believe in people, trust people, and, if you truly love human beings, which I do, and understand them, then that’s the way you lead.”[[2]](#footnote-2) He also said, “When picking a team, always make sure you are the most stupid person in the room. Your job is to motivate and lead, not to be the best at everything, or indeed anything, except making sure your team know how important they are and how much you value them.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. “Leadership Character Candour Conference 2021,” Ivey Business School, February 9, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mary Alice Miller, “The King, the Sailor, and the Open Sea: The Remarkable True Story of *Maiden*,” Vanity Fair, June 27, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/06/maiden-documentary-tracy-edwards-sailing-interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Leadership Character Candour Conference 2021,” Ivey Business School, February 9, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)