

Shackleton Leadership Project – Team 3

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The Principles and Practices Shackleton Used to Build a Strong Team

Whether Shackleton's leadership skills were the product of his upbringing or a culmination of his years of experience, there is no doubt that Shackleton possessed an uncanny knack for choosing and developing a highly functional team. Shackleton's own words provide insight into what he felt served to shape an individual, when he stated, "Men are not made from easy victories but based on great defeats" (Say, 2021). This statement not only provides insight into Shackleton's own life, which was fraught with failures which ultimately made him who he was, but also speaks to the first principle which he turned to in building a strong team. When choosing his team, Shackleton was just as concerned about who the team member was as people as he was about their accomplishments within their field of expertise.

Shackleton enacted an unorthodox approach to choosing those with whom he would share his adventures, which was key to how he earned the trust and admiration of such rugged men as those who would be willing to brave the shear cruelty of as destination like Antarctica. As Michael Smith observes, in his article entitled, *How Shackleton Recruited His Men*, Shackleton had the uncanny ability to find the best men "from the ranks of rootless sailors, carefree adventurers, and the downright curious" because he was not simply looking for the scientist or seaman, who possess the highest level of skill, but rather, he sought out those with whom there was a deeper connection. This often involved conducting little more than a cursory conversation, including some off-the-wall question for potential team members, before welcoming them to the team with little more explanation than, "Yes, I like you. I'll take you" (Smith, 2020). So, if the secret to Shackleton's success at building strong teams cannot be attributed to an extensive and regimented interview and selection process, then what were the practices which made Shackleton so successful? The answer to this question can be found, not only in his inexplicable ability to spot talent in others, but more importantly, in his ability to shape individuals into a cohesive, highly functioning team.

The second principle employed by Shackleton in developing teams which were able to conquer seemingly insurmountable odds, was his undying commitment to positive leadership. Shackleton once said, "The quality I look for most is optimism: especially optimism in the face of reverses and apparent defeat. Optimism is true moral courage" (Say, 2021), thus proving the type of courage which Shackleton demonstrated repeatedly throughout the ill-fated Endurance expedition. Whether facing encroaching ice

flows, the loss of ship, ever diminishing food supplies, bitter cold, or swelling seas, Shackleton knew that his team looked to him for leadership and encouragement. There is no doubt that there were times when Shackleton himself faced doubts and discouragement when he observed the hopelessness of their situation, especially knowing that the fate of the crew rested upon the decisions he made, however, he understood the fact that if he were to succumb to those emotions that the team would most assuredly be lost. It is this ability to inspire others, even in the direst of circumstances, which causes teams to begin buying into the vision and dreams of a great leader. It is the genuine conviction that “we will succeed; we will prevail” which is exemplified by a leader that holds teams together even in the harshest of environments, when lesser leaders suffer mutiny and desertion because they have resigned themselves to the fact that there is no longer any hope.

Positive leadership and inspiration, however, will only get a team so far before the reality of the situation and the sacrifices required by everyone involved begins to set in. This is when the leaders of strong teams must focus upon the needs of the individual and answer those needs with empathy and compassion. This practice constitutes the third practice in which Shackleton excelled in forming a strong team. The pitfall which many leaders fail to avoid is becoming so focused upon the problems they face as a team that they neglect to recognize the struggles which the individual members are facing. By realizing that his team was not only struggling to survive in the harsh conditions of Antarctica but were also struggling mentally and emotionally with the reality of their situation, Shackleton was able to meet both their need to survive as well as their needs to belong, be encouraged, and most of all, contribute to the success of the team. This took many forms throughout the course of their journey, including, ensuring that responsibilities were equally shared by all, keeping those who needed more encouragement close to him, assigning tasks which helped to appease their fears, and making sure that everyone received equal and proper rest and nourishment. By paying attention to the detailed needs of the individual, Shackleton reinforced their importance and contribution to the team and fostered those same feelings between each member of the team, thus creating a bond which connected them not only with Shackleton but with each other as well. A connection which was often forged through a simple game or a shared song in the darkness of the night.

In her article entitled, *Leadership Lessons from the Shackleton Expedition*, Nancy Koehn describes the final critical practice that Shackleton exercised to build a strong team, by stating, "When his expedition encountered serious trouble, he had to reinvent the team's goals. He had begun the voyage with a mission of exploration, but it quickly became a mission of survival" (Koehn, 2011). Shackleton was skilled at devising effective plans, then empowering those plans by providing a clear and purposeful vision throughout the team. By incorporating the insight of others into the planning processes, Shackleton not only instilled trust and promoted buy-in throughout the team, but he also unlocked the best opportunities for these often-flawed plans to succeed because these plans incorporated the ideas of all members of the team. Since the lives of all involved literally hung in the balance, Shackleton's ability to incorporate the contributions of all the team members within the decision-making process demonstrated his confidence in the team and their contribution to the success of the plan being put in place. Although most teams do not face the daily struggle to survive that Shackleton's team faced, the principle of utilizing every resource and idea available within the team to devise plans which have the best chance of success is an attribute which all great leaders possess and often is the difference between success and failure. Whether forming teams within a leadership class or preparing for a mission to Mars, these principles are the basis of creating strong teams which have the best possible opportunities to achieve success, even in the face of almost certain failure.

How Shackleton Team Three Built a Strong Team

The short timeframe given for the group project did not hinder the ability to establish a strong team, rather it made it stronger faster. In the beginning, the students were connected by communicating through GroupMe chat. The entire class was participating and asking questions that everyone else was curious about. Though they were studios questions, the rest of the students were able to speculate that everyone was new to the subjects and to not be so hard on themselves for not understanding instantly.

By week two, the class was broken into groups of seven, and the same format of introduction were repeated. Because it was fewer students, however, there was more time for specific questions and using other platforms of communication. It seemed that everyone agreed on the same vision of knocking the assignment out and receiving a great grade. The group all wanted to quickly jump to the details and start work but doing so made working in a group unmanageable. In time, most of the group was able to lay out the need to nominate a leader and a co-leader. From that time forward the vision and direction within meetings improved which enabled better teamwork and a growth sense of purpose.

Again, it seemed that everyone in the group wanted to participate and did not want to miss a beat. Since it was still fresh in establishing roles for each person, the leadership was also having to manage their time to give orders around their busy schedule, much like everyone else with the extra steppingstones to develop the project. It seemed that members were able to manage up at the right time. Managing up means that each of the members must focus on those things which can be controlled, and this takes persistence, this is because simple things are not always easy. This was performed by casting polls on meeting times, electing the leaders, and elaborating more on the project requirements. At that moment it seemed to be a great team, but it was not until each member was assigned their own roles that the team was then able to see their full potential.

By week three, everyone was beginning their research, however for some unknown reason, the work was not progressing as expected. The project is about leadership and team building, yet there was none established, fortunately, it was recognized swiftly and timely.

Because the team was working virtually, there were a few aspects of team building that needed to be molded for this situation. It was like Shackleton “ensuring the crew played and not focus solely on hardship” however, the group demonstrated this virtually (Dr. Ferguson, n.d. p.16).

As any first meet and greet would go, it was a little embarrassing because of the confusion of names and who was and was not there. Unintentionally, there was some discouragement when not everyone was there for the first meeting, but any poor comments were kept in secrecy and anticipation stirred that at the next meeting everyone would participate. Soon enough, there was consistent attendance of members, and follow-up questions were common to ensure understanding.

The team building that was incorporated with each meeting would begin with a little hesitation but would finish so smoothly. The first exercise implemented was called “Let’s hear you ramble”. The point was to let each member talk on a topic that they are extremely interested in and would find themselves in a position rambling on and on about it. Then, the other members would ask at least one question they found curious about the subject. It was repeated until each member had a turn.

Having this as the first group exercise, helped make an upbeat environment that encouraged positivity and creativity. It stayed true to one of Carnegie's key points, “take interest in other’s interests” (Carnegie, 2011). Quickly the group knew that there was a motorcycle enthusiast, maybe a future politician, and a creative vegetarian. Knowing the fun stories everyone had shared gave a bit of peace to know that the group project is not just about research and submitting it on time. Rather, the group was able to put the stressful pressure of schoolwork aside and have fun. This is how the group reflected Shackleton and did not focus only on the hardship.

By the next couple of meetings, the group was unaware of the impact the exercise gave, because the conversations were effortless. During the meeting, the topics jumped around from what was important for the project, how well they thought they did on the mid-term, and how refreshing eating snow really is while staying hydrated on a long journey. The members had developed trust and knew where similarities lied even with the many differences each had.

The project has been attainable because as Theodore Roosevelt once said, “The best leader is one who has enough sense to pick good people to do what he wants done, and the self-restraint to keep from meddling while they do it.” (Manning, 2022.p.352). Near the time of accomplishment, most of the

group would boldly agree on how true this is. Everyone knew what their assignments was and how to apply their strengths to it. The group worked in unity instead of as individuals.

How The Leadership Lessons of Shackleton Apply to Issues the Mars One Teams May Face

When considering the application of leadership the Mars One crew should use, there are ten important lessons from Shackleton the leadership of Mars one should keep in mind. In no particular order of importance, these ten lessons and rules of thumb displayed by Shackleton on his expedition can prove to be invaluable to the leaders of the Mars one crew, who would lead an expedition beyond even the endless bounds of curiosity of Sir Ernest Shackleton, who led the first trans-antarctic expedition.

The first important lesson the leaders of the Mars One crew could take from Shackleton is that positive leadership is infectious. Shackleton was constantly, incessantly, remaining optimistic about his and his crew's conditions while braving the frostbitten frontier of Antarctica. Though the endurance crew faced the bleakest of probabilities Shackleton remained stout in his positive leadership. This would be objectively important for the leadership of Mars one crew as a voyage to planet Mars would undoubtedly face its due burden of unbearable challenges while drifting among the cosmos. It is important to note that Shackleton was not solely focused on attaining his means to an end, Shackleton put his crew first. Shackleton was people-oriented and hired a crew that was task-oriented. The crew of the endurance shared the same dream as Shackleton, They wanted to be part of Shackleton's mission. the example of Shackleton's positive leadership is so important because when the times were bleak during their expedition Shackleton was able to keep his men on the same wavelength using his high emotional intelligence and impressive empathy-focused leadership, followed by a reminder of the tasks they set out to accomplish.

The next lesson that the mars one crew should take from Shackleton is to devise an effective plan. A critical component of people-oriented leadership is not leaving crew members out in the dark when it comes to what is going on. The balance between compassionate leadership and goal-driven leadership is the agenda that the team is following. For example, upon setting sail the members of the endurance knew just as well what the plan was as Shackleton did. This meant that when something was changing everyone was aware, this also meant that Shackleton would have everyone's ears when it was time to change or devise a new plan and make sure that everyone's hearts were still devoted to achieving their goal for the expedition. This is proof to the leaders of the Mars one crew that devising an effective plan it's paramount to retaining the hearts and minds of the members of the team.

Naturally, with any plan comes change. Seldom does everything go according to plan within any project. The leadership of Mars one, just as Shackleton did, needs to be adaptable. Change is inevitable, leadership of Mars one needs to be able to foresee potential issues that may arise, potential qualms from the crew, and get ahead of these issues without appearing too flustered to the crew. Being adaptable is a large part of being successful. Shackleton's expedition quickly turned from structured to impromptu. With every half plan that Shackleton made, there was half improvisation, as the elements changed by the minute. This is no doubt an important lesson and value for the Mars One crew to hold dear to them as setting off into outer space undoubtedly comes with a lot of unanswered questions about the conditions of the expedition.

The next lessons the Mars One crew needs to be sure to follow are to show empathy and compassion to the members of the crew. At one point in Shackleton's expedition, one of his men spills their milk. Then, it is said that Shackleton and the members of the crew silently refill this man's milk cup with a little bit of each of their own. This act of compassion and empathy is the ultimate form of camaraderie. That display of brotherhood goes even beyond people-oriented leadership and extends into people-oriented livelihood. An expedition to Mars would almost certainly come down to each individual member of the Mars One crew living these values at some point. As the saying goes "the fish rots from the head down", so if the leadership of Mars One does not live by those values it would be hypocritical of them to expect the crew members to live by them. This lesson by extension leads to the next important lesson to be taken from Shackleton.

It is important for the Mars one leadership and any leadership for any project to be active members of the team. No one enjoys tyrannical leadership. Is a leader truly a leader of a team if they just sit back and fire off orders? Those actions are more akin to a king or queen ruling over subordinates than a member of a team. It is important for each member of a team including the leader to have an active role in daily operations. Everyone has to pitch in and make sure that things are going according to plan and that each duty is being fulfilled. Mars one leadership needs not to simply assign jobs they don't want to do to other people, but they must be willing to get their hands dirty sometimes and give members of the team reprieve. It is important to recognize that people are a part of the task at hand. There cannot be task-oriented leadership without the collective effort from the crew to get the tasks done.

The final lessons to be taken from the Shackleton expedition by the leaders of Mars One are to trust the members, listen to their needs, and show the determination to succeed. When it comes to trusting the members of the team, a lack thereof may sow dissent or create disdain toward leadership. No one likes to be micromanaged, and an expedition to Mars would require that each person on the ship know how to do their job. The leaders must trust in the training of their members. The leadership of Mars One must recognize that the members of the team are trusting them with their lives and that the leadership must trust the members just the same. This same example of reciprocity also extends to listening to the needs of the members. Members are expected to listen to the needs of leadership and adhere to their requests. Leadership must listen to the needs of the members and consider the needs of their requests to make sure the human needs of team members are being met. Lastly, the Mars One crew leadership must take Shackleton's most important value and implement it in a way that is their own. That is, throughout his expedition, Shackleton remained determined to achieve the goal. Shackleton showed the utmost will and skill when it came to protecting the lives of his crew members and leading them to safety and success. Without a doubt, if the Mars One crew leadership takes these lessons into account when they set off on their expedition, then perhaps, they could do what Shackleton could not and fulfill their original plan of colonizing planet Mars.

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