

OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Lessons from a Failed Expedition

My friend Matt Tredway is an educator, craftsman and mountaineer who has spent his life understanding, pursuing and sharing adventure — experiences that have uncertain outcomes.

These adventures are not larks, devil-may-care outings, nor those made for social media nonsense. Rather, they have been intentional and well-thought-out expeditions designed to grow and learn, to embrace challenge amid beautiful and rugged places and to live the adage of “be present where your feet are placed.” Interestingly, despite having climbed ice, rock and snow on nearly every one of the earth’s continents, Tredway’s greatest joy comes from guiding others to develop their skills and to embrace adventure on their own terms.

Exploration and adventure create an environment in which leadership can best be developed and perfected. Consider the case of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Antarctic exploration from 1914-1916, much of it spent stranded after his ship *Endurance* became stuck in the ice.

Shackleton’s leadership during the crisis serves as a model for those tasked with guiding people amid difficult and uncertain times. More than 1,000 miles from civilization, Shackleton and his crew of 27 would endure 24 months of isolation and deprivation, but all would survive. The crew credited their commander for his capacity to sustain hope and maintain focus and a deep sense of community for their remarkable safe return home.

His leadership has been characterized by the authors of *Shackleton’s Way* as having originated from his capacity to exemplify the following ten principles.

- Develop a strong sense of compassion and responsibility for your team.
- Once you decide to pursue a professional goal, commit to the process of tough learning, which is often required.
- Help to create a positive and uplifting environment.
- Go beyond your comfort zone to create an eclectic circle of friends and associates, so problems can be examined from multiple angles.
- Be willing to go beyond what you know — embrace curiosity.
- Overcome adversity and failure.
- Be bold in vision and careful in planning.
- Learn from past mistakes.
- Never insist on reaching a goal at any cost.
- Don’t be drawn into conflicts played out in public.

Morrell and Capparell conclude Shackleton is rightly admired because “in him we catch glimpses of who we want to be ... we want his energy, his optimism, his courage, his sense of camaraderie and his unstoppable drive to push forward.” Lessons that reside in this century-

old tale of courage, resilience and teamwork offer business leaders a blueprint. Regardless of industry, the challenge of attracting and retaining talent is paramount to success. While monetary rewards are important in the choices employees make, financial considerations are only part of the equation. The work environment, leadership style and sense of community within the company ultimately play a major role in building, developing and sustaining a team.

Ernest Shackleton’s example and words offer a path to be considered: “Life to me is the greatest of all games. The danger lies in treating it as a trivial game, a game to be taken lightly and a game in which the rules don’t matter much. The rules matter a great deal. The game has to be played fairly, or it is no game at all. And even to win the game is not the chief end. The chief end is to win it honorably and splendidly.” ^{AJ}

Editor’s note: Recommended reading: Shackleton’s Way by Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell. Tom Field is a rancher from Parlin, Colo., and the director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.