

# Lessons from an Iceberg

By Tony Guerrero

**E**rnest Shackleton has been called one of the greatest leaders of the past century, even of all time. Quite an odd description for a man who basically failed at every attempt he made to reach his goal. A British explorer who, on more than one occasion, set out to be the first to reach the South Pole, Shackleton not only never accomplished his dream but met with many great defeats and disasters, which would have crushed most men. So, how did he come to be known as a great leader?

In 1914, Shackleton captained a ship called the *Endurance* on a journey to the Antarctic. The ship became trapped in an ice flow and the crew was stranded on the ice for two years. This was long before satellite communication and there was no way to get word to England (or anywhere) that they were stuck in the middle of nowhere. Their surroundings were harsh—nothing but ice, freezing water and cruel weather conditions for hundreds of miles around them. The ice was quickly destroying the ship so waiting for a thaw was useless (the *Endurance* was eventually crushed and sunk). The entire crew held little hope of ever surviving, much less of seeing home again. Yet somehow, Shackleton managed to not only keep his entire crew alive and in good spirits, but after two long hard years on the ice, he returned them all safely to England.

## Many Personalities

One of Shackleton's greatest attributes and contributions to the ideology of leadership is his strong example of leading individuals within a team. His team, like every team, consisted of a variety of personalities and needs. He did not simply impose a single method of leadership for all men but rather tailored how he dealt with each man on an individual basis. While some rules and strategies work as a rule for all, there are times when the varying personality needs of the individuals involved need to be dealt with separately. Blanket rules do not always apply. And the responsibility is the leader's to be sure the pieces of a team's "personality puzzle" fit well together. As you lead your team, probably most them being volunteers, remember that they all have individual needs and abilities. This is where understanding each person on your team really comes into play. Some of your volunteers have families and have important time requirements that you need to help guard. Others



may be in college and need more work in leadership skills and discipleship, and they happen to have more time. One encompassing law may rule out the seasoned player and you could find yourself losing valuable experience. Knowing the unique lives of each individual is key here.

This leadership style requires more work than simply having dogmatic rules, but the payoff is worth it. You will be able to build each person where they need work, and they will have ownership and pride in the specific steps they are taking on their individual journeys. Of course, there is a possibility of dissention and grumbling from someone who feels more is being asked of them than everyone else. This is why we need

to be honest about our expectations from each individual from the start. Working from this model, the other important part of your job will be meeting and engaging your team. Setting up lunches, meeting at the local coffee shop just to chat about life and both of your goals—this is the most important thing you can do. That way you can ask how they feel about their requirements and you can explain why you are setting unique parameters for each individual.

## Real Commitment

Always remember, your team is made up of different people with different needs and responses, but God has chosen you to lead them, which means it is up to you to learn who they are as individuals—what makes them tick, how you are to meet their needs so that they can then meet the team's needs. Make the effort to lead your team as individuals as well as a whole. You may not have to get them off a desolate continent, but church work can be scary in its own right. It isn't always easy being the leader (leadership, like an iceberg, can get rather chilly), but borrowing a method from one of the greatest leaders of all time (Shackleton) is undoubtedly a good choice to make, especially when it is tempered and forged by your devotion to the greatest leader of all time, Jesus Christ.

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