
Shackleton's journey.

He lost his ship, never reached his goal and still brought every one of his men home. The story, a timeline and ten leadership lessons.

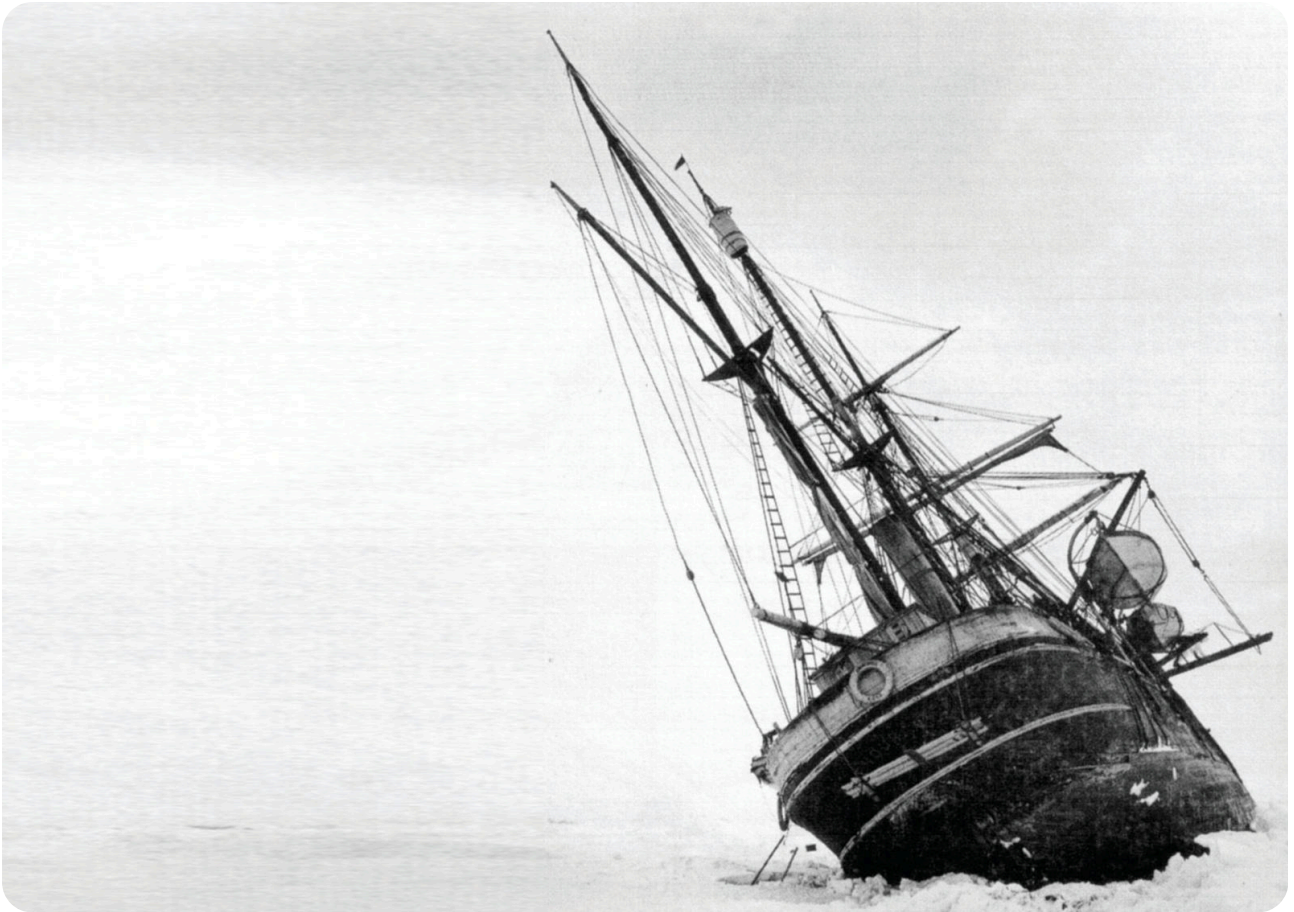
Shackleton's journey.

In August 1914 Ernest Shackleton set out on the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. His goal was to be the first to cross Antarctica on foot, from coast to coast. He never set foot on the continent.

In one of the worst Antarctic seasons on record, his ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped in the pack ice of the Weddell Sea and slowly crushed. Shackleton and his 27 men were left camped on drifting ice, with no way to call for help and almost no hope of rescue.

What followed is often called the greatest survival story in polar history. Shackleton beat the weather, the pack ice, two journeys in open boats, one of them across about 1,300 kilometres of the Southern Ocean, and a mountain range no one had ever crossed. Most of all, he overcame the fear and despair of a group of men who seemed certain to die.

Almost two years after the *Endurance* was trapped, every one of the 28 men who sailed on her was alive.



The *Endurance* trapped in the Weddell Sea ice, 1915. Photo: Frank Hurley.

He just kept deciding.

Shackleton didn't achieve the goal he set out to achieve. What he did was keep a group of men together through the darkest times, literally and figuratively, and lead them for nearly two years back to safety.

He made the right decisions when he needed to, and he never asked his men to do anything he wouldn't do himself. His will never failed under pressure.

Ship crushed by the ice? Camp on the ice. Ice breaking up? Sail for the nearest island. No chance of rescue? Sail 1,300 kilometres to find it. Landed on the wrong side of the island? Climb over the mountains.

Every time, he asked himself one question: what's the right thing to do here? Then he did it.

Timeline of major events.

Day 1 is the day the *Endurance* left London.

1 August 1914	Day 1	The <i>Endurance</i> leaves London.
5 December 1914	Day 127	Leaves the whaling station at Grytviken, South Georgia, the last port of call.
30 December 1914	Day 152	Crosses the Antarctic Circle.
18 January 1915	Day 171	Trapped in the pack ice of the Weddell Sea. The ship drifts with the ice for the next ten months.
27 October 1915	Day 453	The ice crushes the hull. Shackleton orders the men to abandon ship and camp on the ice.
21 November 1915	Day 478	The <i>Endurance</i> sinks. The crew's only hope is to reach open water in the ship's three small lifeboats.
9 April 1916	Day 618	The ice breaks up under the camp. The men launch the lifeboats.
15 April 1916	Day 624	After a week at sea, all 28 men land on Elephant Island, their first solid ground in 16 months.
24 April 1916	Day 633	No one will search for them here: the island is far from the whaling routes, and the world is at war. Shackleton and five others set out in the lifeboat <i>James Caird</i> for South Georgia, about 1,300 kilometres away.

10 May 1916

Day 649

After more than two weeks in bitterly cold seas, with little fresh water, they land on South Georgia. It is the wrong side of the island, cut off from the whaling station by unmapped mountains and glaciers.

20 May 1916

Day 659

Shackleton, Frank Worsley and Tom Crean cross the mountains in about 36 hours, without rest, and walk into the whaling station at Stromness.

30 August 1916

Day 761

On the fourth attempt, after three were turned back by the ice, Shackleton reaches Elephant Island on the Chilean tug *Yelcho* and brings home all 22 men waiting there.



The crew on the ice beside the *Endurance*, 1915. Photo: Frank Hurley.

The greatest leader on God's earth.

Shackleton has been called the greatest leader that ever came on God's earth, bar none, for saving the lives of the men stranded with him on the Antarctic ice.

From 1914 to 1916 they survived the loss of their ship in the crushing ice, more than 1,900 kilometres from civilisation, with no means of communication and no hope of rescue. It was so cold the men said they could hear the ice freeze. They lived on penguins, seals and, in the end, their dogs.

Unlike many polar expeditions of the time, every man survived, and in good spirits. That came down to Shackleton's leadership.



Working on the ice beside the *Endurance*. Photo: Frank Hurley.

Ten leadership lessons we can learn.

1 Care for your people

Cultivate compassion and a sense of responsibility for others. As a leader you affect the lives around you more than you can imagine.

3 Keep spirits up

Play your part in creating an upbeat environment. A positive, lively workplace is a productive one.

5 Be inventive

The world changes quickly. Be willing to try new things, seize new opportunities and learn new skills.

7 Bold vision, careful planning

Dare to try something new, but be meticulous with the plan, so your ideas have a good chance of succeeding.

9 Never win at any cost

Don't insist on reaching a goal at any price. Reach it at a reasonable cost, without undue hardship for the people involved.

2 Stick with your decisions

Once a decision is made, commit to it through the tough learning period.

4 Widen your horizons

Look beyond your own experience. Seeing life from different points of view gives you more options when you solve problems.

6 Use your setbacks

Find ways to turn setbacks and failures to your advantage. They are often the moment to step forward.

8 Learn from mistakes

Yours and other people's. Sometimes the best teachers are the worst examples.

10 Compete with respect

Don't be drawn into public fights with rivals. Compete respectfully. You may need their help one day.

Next time you're worried about writing a brief or asking a client for another week, take a moment to remember what real problems look like.

Then do the right thing: by your client, by your team and by yourself.



What was left of the *Endurance*, 1915. Photo: Frank Hurley.

Photos by Frank Hurley, the expedition's photographer, 1915. The original timeline was supplied by the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

NED COTEN

**Don't seek to be a person of
Importance.**
Seek to be a person of Value.

Email

ned@nedcoten.com

Website

nedcoten.com

LinkedIn

linkedin.com/in/nedcoten

Ned Coten AM is an investor, board chair, and passionate volunteer in basketball & other sports. He has over 30 years of experience at every level of business, sport & technology within Australia and globally, based in Melbourne, Australia.

nedcoten.com