



5 / LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

SHACKLETON'S WAY

Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer

LEADERSHIP LESSONS



In late October 1915, a storm far to the south of their position triggered turbulence among the massive ice-floes surrounding the ship. Dr. Macklin wrote in his journal crashing sounds - like trains colliding - went on for days. Then, abruptly, with little warning, *Endurance* was sinking.

Shackleton had prepared for this, to the extent that was possible, but when it happened, it was sudden and fast.

Image: *Endurance* with two of the three lifeboats – the *James Caird*, *Dudley Docker* and *Stancomb Wills* - that were critical to the group's survival.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Frank Hurley said, “Shackleton met the crisis with complete composure. He gave orders as if we were heading out on a sledging expedition.”

Orde-Lees recalled the Boss held on to the rigging “with a serious but somewhat unconcerned air.”



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Shackleton's serious but unconcerned attitude inspired confidence in his team, and their journal entries are notable for a complete absence of panic. In every crisis, Shackleton was very visible and set an example of how to react.

“He was a tower of strength and endurance, and he never panicked in any emergency.”

Walter How
Sailmaker, *Endurance*

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

“I think he was preeminent as a leader,
especially when things were going badly.

He had a wonderful power of inspiring
confidence and an uncanny flair for the right
thing to do.”

Reginald James
Physicist, *Endurance*



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

As they left the ship, Shackleton offered a word of encouragement to each crew-member, “Bring your banjo,” to one. “Don’t forget your journal,” to another.



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

After they abandoned ship, the crew gathered around Shackleton for what meteorologist, Leonard Hussey called “a characteristic speech – simple, moving, optimistic and highly effective.”

Reginald James said, “There was nothing in the nature of a set speech. ... We were in a mess, and the Boss was the man who could get us out.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE & COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Shackleton explained to the group it was necessary to pare down their belongings to the bare minimum – two pounds per person.

To demonstrate how important this was, the Boss tossed on the ice his grandfather's gold watch and 50 gold coins. He took the Bible that Queen Alexandra had donated to the expedition, carefully sliced out a few chapters from the Book of Job and Psalm 23 and put them in his pocket. Then he added the Bible to the growing pile.

Seaman Thomas McLeod later retrieved the Bible. Since the Bible was the only valuable item he had, he gave it to a family who hosted him in Chile after the crew was rescued. Today the Bible is at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Most of their food supplies went down with the ship.

In this image, they're retrieving what they can from the ship's hold.



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Crew-member William Bakewell said, Shackleton “had a nice way of getting into a conversation” and he was “very friendly and easy to talk to.”

Shackleton was always interested in his crew’s opinions and advice. Through, what one called, these “intimate little talks,” Shackleton formed strong bonds with each member of his team.

These strong personal connections were the glue that held the group together. Everyone knew that Shackleton cared about them, and everyone wanted to do their best for Shackleton.

That was the secret to what they called their “remarkable unanimity.”



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Three weeks after they abandoned ship, they noticed the remains of the ship were sinking.

Orde-Lees described the scene, "It gave one a sickening sensation to see it, for even mast-less and useless as she was, she was still a welcome landmark and a link to civilization. Without her our destitution seems more acute, our isolation more complete."



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Shackleton was standing apart from the rest on a small hill of ice.
He later confided to Frank Wild it was the saddest moment of his life.



MAINTAINING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Years later Dr. Macklin recalled, "It must have been a moment of bitter disappointment to Shackleton, but as always with him, what had happened had happened... without emotion, melodrama or excitement (he) said, "ship and stores have gone, so now we'll go home."



MAINTAINING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

“SO NOW WE’LL GO HOME.”

In that one short sentence, Shackleton conveyed to his team a goal and a vision. He redirected their attention away from the painful scene in front of them toward a positive outcome. And, most important of all, he communicated to them his own optimism.



For six months, they lived in tents on the ice.



KEEPING UP MORALE

Reginald James, who was one of Shackleton's tentmates, noticed the Boss "was constantly on the watch for any break in morale, or any discontent, so that he could deal with it at once.

He realized fully the enormous and almost instantaneous effect of food on morale and took all kinds of trouble to vary the ration or try some new way of cooking things, to issue a little tid-bit to commemorate something, a birthday for example, or some other anniversary."



KEEPING UP MORALE

When photographer Frank Hurley had an unpleasant job to do, Shackleton kept him company.

“I spend the day with Sir Ernest, selecting the finest of my negatives ... and dumped about 400. This unfortunate reduction is essential... owing to the very limited space that will be at disposal in boat transport.”

KEEPING UP MORALE

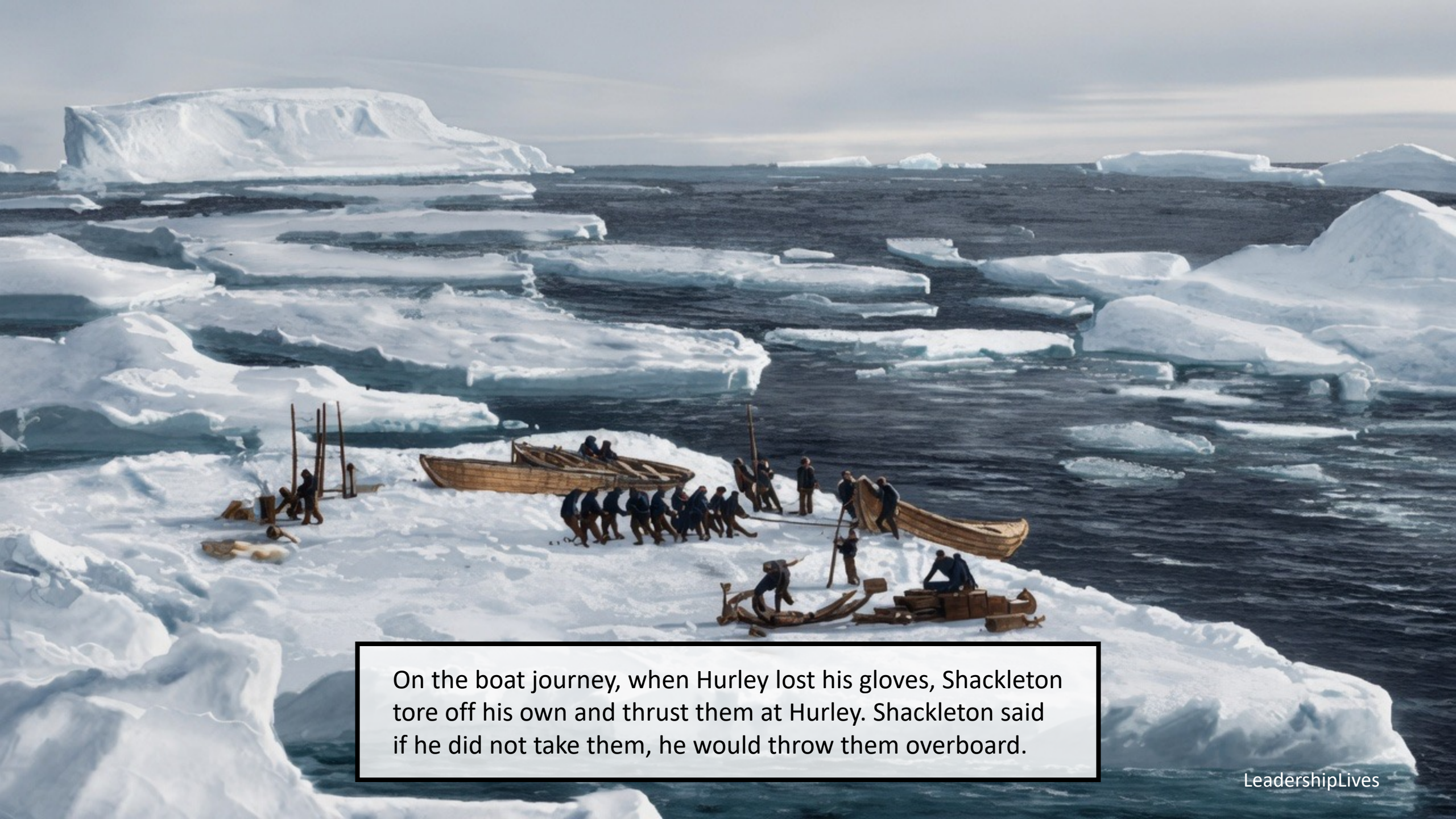
Lionel Greenstreet said, Shackleton's "first thought was for the men under him. He didn't care if he went without a shirt on his own back so long as the men he was leading had sufficient clothing.

He was a wonderful man that way; you felt that the party mattered more than anything else."

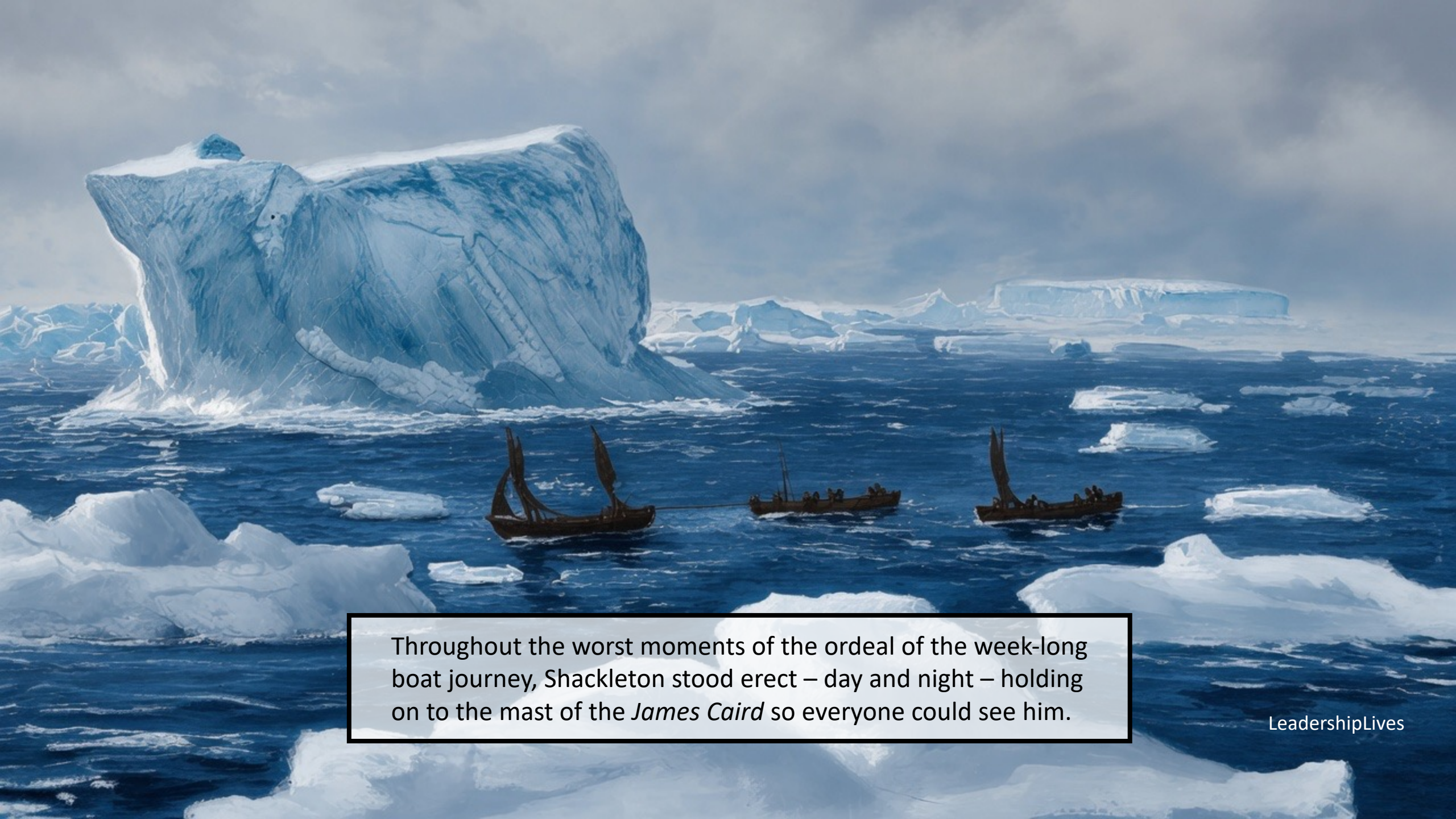




In early April 1916, their floe reached open ocean and began to disintegrate. Shackleton wrote, “Our home was being shattered beneath our feet, and we had a sense of loss and incompleteness hard to describe.”



On the boat journey, when Hurley lost his gloves, Shackleton tore off his own and thrust them at Hurley. Shackleton said if he did not take them, he would throw them overboard.



Throughout the worst moments of the ordeal of the week-long boat journey, Shackleton stood erect – day and night – holding on to the mast of the *James Caird* so everyone could see him.



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They spent a miserable week in the boats and slowly made their way to inhospitable Elephant Island.



Chile

South
Atlantic
Ocean

SC

RS

PR

Uruguay

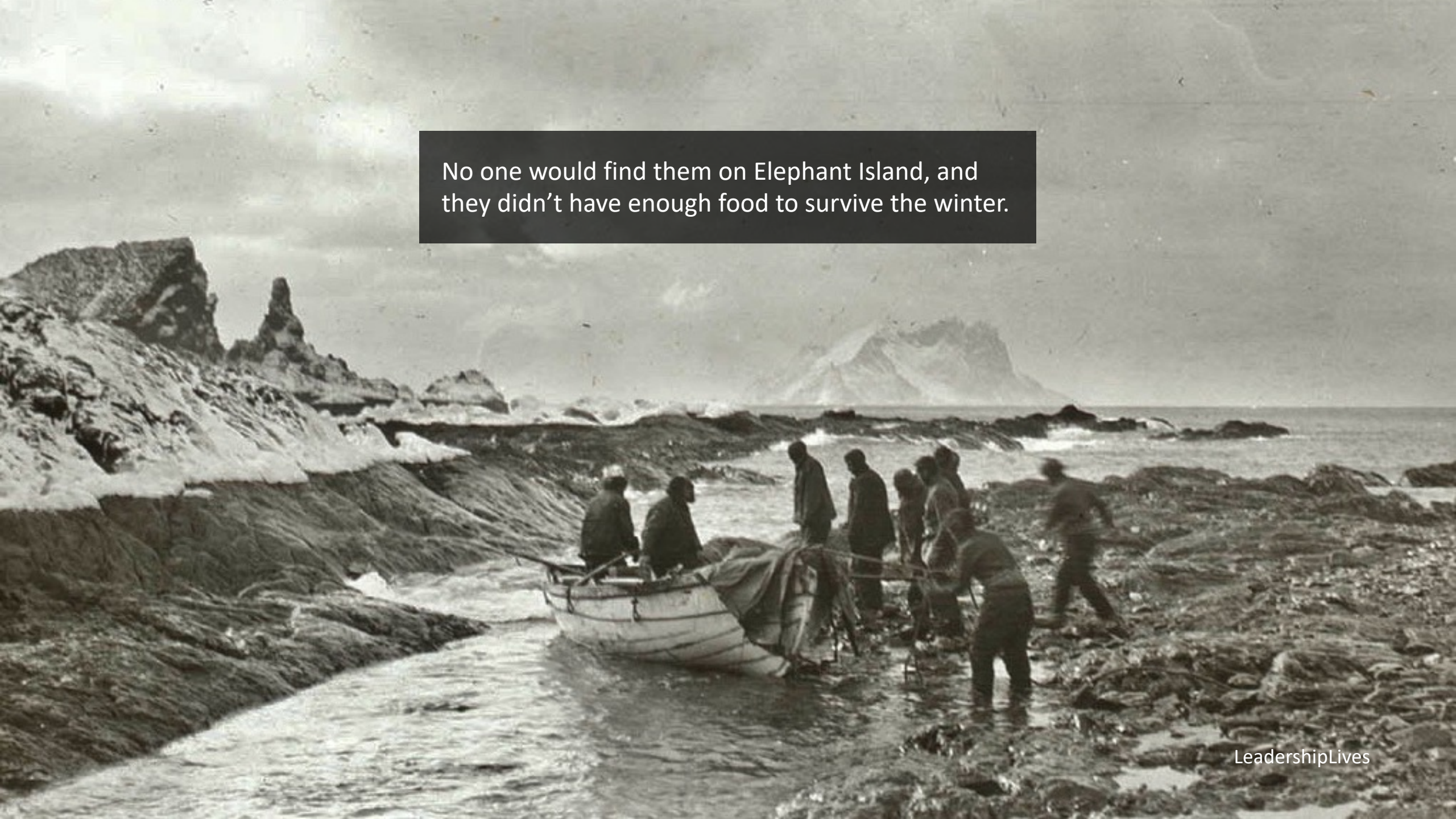
Argentina

South Georgia

Elephant Island

Antarctic Peninsula

LeadershipLives

A black and white photograph showing a group of about ten men on a rugged, rocky coastline. In the center, a small wooden boat is partially beached. Several men are standing on the rocks, while others are in the shallow water. The background features dramatic, jagged rock formations and a cloudy sky. The overall scene suggests a remote, possibly Antarctic, location.

No one would find them on Elephant Island, and they didn't have enough food to survive the winter.



Shackleton decided to take the best lifeboat, the *James Caird*, and five men and attempt to reach the whaling stations on South Georgia, 750 miles away through the roughest ocean in the world.



It took 17 grueling days to make the journey.

The *Caird* almost sank when a thick coat of ice formed on the boat.

And when hit by a 50' rogue wave.

Off the coast of South Georgia, a hurricane blew up and almost sank the *Caird*.

Shackleton said later, "I have often marveled at the thin line which separates success from failure."



They landed on the wrong coast of South Georgia – the uninhabited side of the island. Shackleton refused to take the risk of sailing around the island and possibly getting blown out to sea.

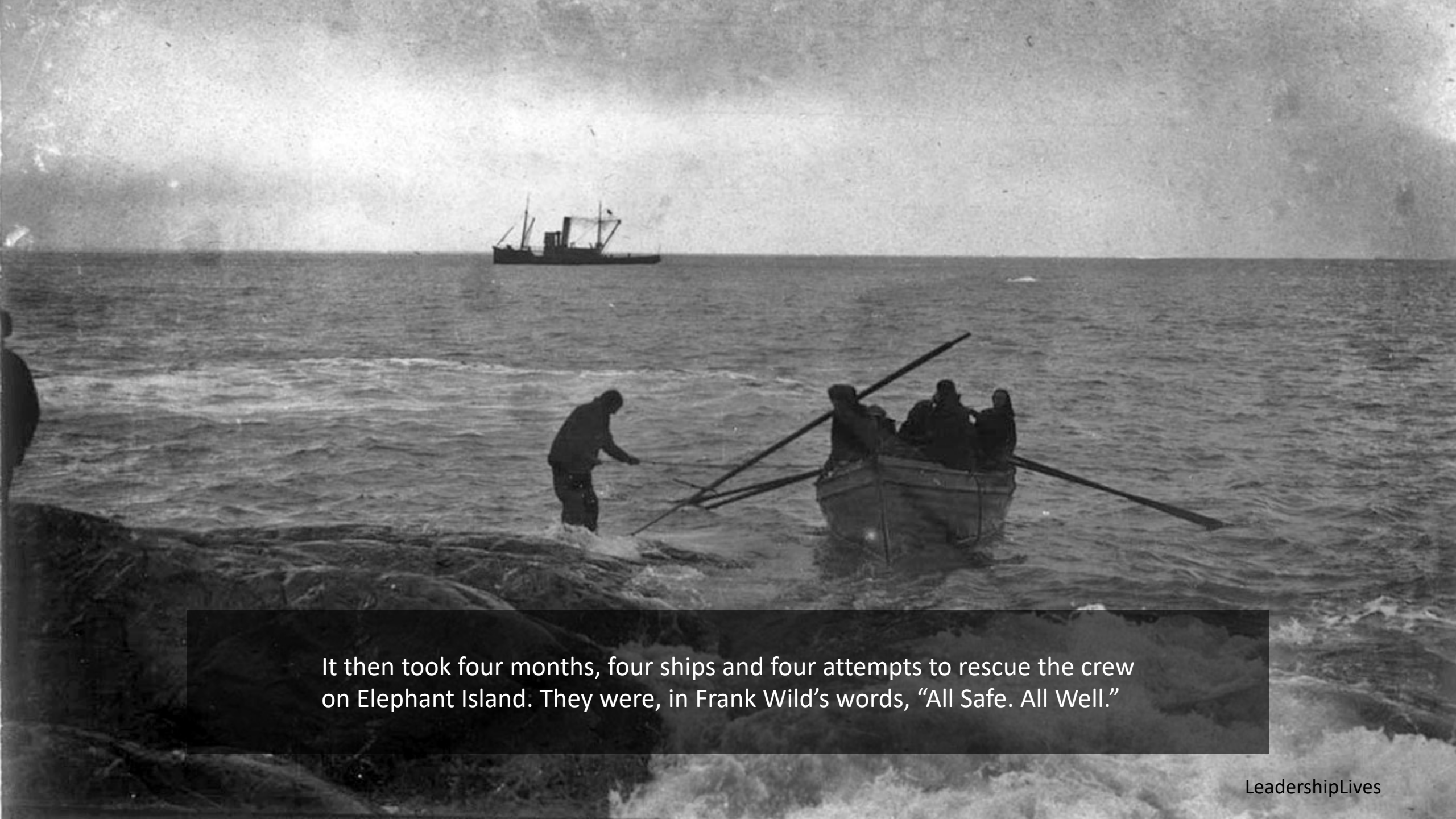


They would have to trek across the island. Crossing the island had never been done and was considered impossible.



Shackleton with *Endurance*'s captain, Frank Worsley, and Second Officer Tom Crean, did it. They hiked 30 miles up and down ice-covered mountains and across crevasse-riddled glaciers in 36 hours.

Shackleton said later things might have turned out differently if they'd only had themselves to think about. It was the thought of the men on Elephant Island that kept them going.



It then took four months, four ships and four attempts to rescue the crew on Elephant Island. They were, in Frank Wild's words, "All Safe. All Well."



Endurance crew safe in Punta Arenas, Chile.

A large, flat-topped iceberg floats in a dark sea. Two dark, cave-like openings are visible in the base of the iceberg. In the foreground, several smaller ice floes are scattered across the water. Two people in kayaks are positioned near the left-hand opening of the iceberg. The sky is a uniform, overcast grey.

THE END