

Shackleton's Way

Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer

by Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell

Discussion Points for Book Clubs

This discussion guide is designed to help students or book clubs explore timeless leadership lessons drawn from Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition.

Use these questions to spark conversation, encourage personal reflection, and connect the Antarctic story to leadership challenges in today's workplaces, communities, and personal lives.

Opening Reflections

1. What first drew you to this book? Had you heard of Ernest Shackleton or the *Endurance* expedition before reading it?
2. Which moment in the story of the *Endurance* most surprised or moved you, and why?

Shackleton's Character and Foundations of Leadership

3. Shackleton placed the needs of his team above his own and led by example, even taking on the hardest jobs himself. How important is "leading by example" in the organizations or groups you are part of today?
4. The authors emphasize Shackleton's optimism and his insistence that optimism is "true moral courage." Do you agree? Can optimism ever be unrealistic or harmful in a leadership role?
5. Shackleton was described as an outsider in his early life. How do you think his experience of feeling different shaped the kind of leader he became?

Building and Leading Teams

6. Shackleton carefully selected his crew not only for skills but also for character and the ability to get along. What qualities would you prioritize if you were choosing a team for a high-stakes project?
7. He created routines, celebrations, and opportunities for camaraderie even in the harshest conditions. How can leaders today intentionally build a sense of community when teams are under pressure?
8. Shackleton never publicly chastised anyone and focused on solving problems rather than assigning blame. How does this approach compare with the feedback cultures you have experienced?

Leading Through a Crisis

9. When the *Endurance* was crushed by ice, Shackleton immediately shifted the goal from crossing Antarctica to pure survival. What does this teach us about flexibility and contingency planning?
10. During the most desperate moments, Shackleton maintained calm, communicated clearly, and asked for input while still making the final decisions. How do you balance collaboration and decisive authority in a crisis?
11. Which of Shackleton's crisis-leadership tactics (keeping routines, monitoring morale, containing negativity) do you think would transfer most effectively to a modern business, healthcare, or community crisis?

Personal Application and Modern Relevance

12. The book presents practical "Shackleton's Way" principles that can be applied in everyday leadership. Which single principle feels most relevant to a challenge you are currently facing?
13. Shackleton believed great adventures were "worth the hardships of training for them." How does this mindset apply to the long-term development of leadership skills in your own career or life?
14. In what ways does Shackleton's leadership style challenge or reinforce the leadership models popular in your industry or organization today?

15. If you could ask Shackleton one question about leading people through uncertainty, what would it be—and how do you think he might answer based on what you have read?

Closing Questions

16. After reading *Shackleton's Way*, has your definition of effective leadership changed? If so, how?
17. What is one concrete action you will take in the next month as a result of the lessons in this book?

Facilitator Tip: Encourage participants to share specific examples from their own experience and to refer back to passages in the book.