



LEADERSHIP AT THE EDGE

Leadership Lessons from the Extraordinary Saga of Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition

About the Program

The **Leadership at the Edge**[®] program is built around the **Metaventure**[®] approach to teaching strategies for effective leadership and teamwork, especially under conditions of adversity and change. This approach uses the power of adventure story and metaphor to help participants go beyond traditional learning to experience material in a way that allows for deeper understanding, better retention and immediate application to their work. ASCENT has successfully used this approach for more than 10 years.

The central story for **Leadership at the Edge**[®] is the 1914-16 trans-Antarctic expedition led by Sir Ernest Shackleton. This compelling story of inspiring leadership and teamwork under “life and death” circumstances becomes a metaphor that connects the experience, exercises and discussions. Using actual photographs, drawings and journal entries from the expedition, participants feel like they were part of the crew as the gripping narrative becomes the departure point for an intense and unforgettable experience. Facilitated group discussions, exercises, assessment, reflection and action planning allow participants to leave with powerful strategies that they can apply immediately back on the job.

Areas of Focus

Every **Leadership at the Edge**[®] interactive program is customized and the length varies to reflect your objectives and the needs of your group. (Options might include a 90-minute keynote address; a three- or four-hour program, or one to four-day versions.) Although longer programs clearly offer more opportunities for in-depth exercises and discussions, we can design a program to address your specific management and leadership challenges, including:

- Leading through change and transition
- Developing and sustaining a vision and core values
- Finding your voice / providing direction as a leader
- Overcoming adversity and remaining optimistic during challenging times
- Building and leading high-performance teams
- Appropriate risk taking and ongoing risk management
- Managing conflict and business challenges
- Achieving work/life balance to improve performance



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Overview of Content

Leadership at the Edge[®] explores the challenges associated with leadership and teamwork by examining the *Ten Strategies for Success*:

1. **Never lose sight of the ultimate goal, and focus energy on short-term objectives.**
 - Many leaders do one or the other, but when they must lead change, motivate a team, conduct strategic planning and provide vision and direction, they must focus on both short- and long-term objectives at once..
 - Questions for consideration include: Do you clearly communicate your target? Do you break the goal down into manageable steps so people can mark their progress? Does everyone know your long- and short-term objectives?
2. **Set a personal example with visible, memorable symbols and behaviors.**
 - Consciously or unconsciously, leaders provide an example to their team. The key is to be more aware of the example that you need to provide and to underscore what needs to be done by using personal example and symbols.
 - Questions for consideration include: When did you last deliberately use a symbol or personal example to set a tone or send a message? Are you conscious of your actions and the example you are setting each day? What is your equivalent of the gold coins that Shackleton tossed in the snow to lighten the load?
3. **Instill optimism and self-confidence, but stay grounded in reality.**
 - Leadership is both aptitude and attitude. The power of remaining optimistic while staying grounded in reality, especially under adversity, can make the difference between success and failure.
 - Questions for consideration include: How do you handle a setback? Do you demonstrate a positive, upbeat attitude about the challenges you face? Do you listen to all the information around you to ensure you have a full sense of what is going on?
4. **Take care of yourself: Maintain your stamina and let go of guilt.**
 - Today's leaders are expected to do more with less and to push themselves to their limits each day. Those who do not pay attention to their physical and mental health, will not be able to maintain performance and eventually will burn out.
 - Questions for consideration include: Do you get enough sleep? Do you eat well? Is your life balanced between work and personal life? Do you let go of guilt when mistakes occur? What steps should you take to tip the scales in your favor?
5. **Reinforce the team message constantly. "We are one—We live or die together."**
 - A high-performing team can overcome any obstacle, especially if they believe every one of them is essential to the group's success: The leader must constantly reinforce this message.



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- Questions for consideration include: Do you look to foster teamwork at every turn? Do you hold others accountable for acting collaboratively? Does your team have a common identity? Do they view the team's success as their success?
6. **Minimize status differences and insist on courtesy and mutual respect.**
- Nothing fragments a team more than unnecessary differences in status and double standards for the types of benefits and work expectations that the leader enjoys versus the team. The leader must maintain a culture in which fairness, courtesy and mutual respect are the expected norms.
 - Questions for consideration include: Do you remove structures that create unnecessary status differences? Do you ensure everyone feels respected and that his or her contributions are valued? Would they “share their milk” with each other?
7. **Master conflict—deal with anger in small doses, engage dissidents and avoid needless power struggles.**
- Despite adversity, decisions must be made and conflict is inevitable. Managing conflict appropriately and understanding the importance of doing it constantly are essential to good leadership and team work.
 - Questions for consideration include: Are you proactive with conflict? Do you pull people “into your tent” who need close attention? Do you avoid needless power struggles?
8. **Find something to celebrate and something to laugh about.**
- Holding yourself and the team to high standards is an important part of performing “at the edge,” and using celebration and recognition can help you maintain momentum. Celebration and humor can often break the tension and help manage anxiety during adversity.
 - Questions for consideration include: What are your views on celebration and recognition? When did you last recognize and reward your team? How often do you encourage laughter and fun among colleagues? Can you find humor in challenging situations? Can you laugh at yourself?
9. **Be willing to take the Big Risk.**
- Appropriate risk-taking is a critical part of performing “at the edge.” Often, leaders must be able to take creative actions to move their expedition forward. Often, the risk of doing nothing outweighs the risk of taking action, and the leader's role is to identify the risks that are worth taking.
 - Questions for consideration include: What are your attitudes about risk-taking? Do you step up to the risks that are worth taking? Do you make it possible for people on your team to take appropriate risks?



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10. Never give up—there's always another move.

- Finding solutions to daunting problems is difficult under any conditions, and even more so when faced with adversity or change. Leaders must instill a sense of confidence in themselves and the team that they can overcome any obstacle by working together.
- Questions for consideration include: Is there a new approach you can take to overcome an obstacle you face? What could you do differently that might change the outcome of a situation you are involved in? How do you usually respond when obstacles seem insurmountable?

Program Objectives

As a result of the **Leadership at the Edge**[®] program, participants will:

- Better understand the unique leadership challenges they face
- Develop a better sense of what is essential to thrive and excel under conditions of adversity and change, especially in their role as leaders
- Learn about Ten Success Strategies for leadership and teamwork while facing change and adversity and be able to immediately apply what they learned back on the job

Program Structure

Regardless of length, every **Leadership at the Edge**[®] program includes the following:

- An introduction and overview of the **Leadership at the Edge**[®] concept as a way to promote teamwork and organizational effectiveness.
- A detailed presentation of Ernest Shackleton's trans-Antarctic expedition using photographs and drawings from the original expedition.
- A detailed review of the *Ten Success Strategies* for leadership and teamwork, drawn from our research on groups that are performing "at the edge."
- Group discussions focused on promoting leadership and teamwork, especially under conditions of organizational change, resistance and adversity.

Learn More

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This Adventure Training program is delivered by ASCENT in partnership with The Syncretics Group.