

# Preface

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The idea for this book started with the goal of organizing a symposium for the Academy of Management (AOM) focusing on ‘Extreme Leaders, Extreme Teams, and Extreme Situations’. Our interest in extreme leadership began several years ago. Like many others, we had been captivated by the story of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s *Endurance* expedition. Shackleton’s efforts to rescue his crew after their ship was crushed by pack ice in the Antarctic continues to be an inspiring example of successful leadership behavior under unfathomable circumstances. Closer to home, the heroic efforts of the first responders to the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings on 11 September 2001 provided another inspiring example of successful leadership in a situation that was far outside the scope of daily experience. From these two cases we became interested in studying additional examples of successful leadership behavior in extreme situations.

While much is known about leadership effectiveness in corporate and business settings (Bass and Bass, 2008), much less is known about the variables that explain how leaders behave when facing extreme situations. The purpose of this book is to analyze unique examples of leaders and teams that have been successful in extreme situations. The leaders, teams and situations described in this book include both contemporary and historic cases of extreme situations that occurred in both corporate and non-corporate settings.

We define an extreme situation as one that falls outside the norm; that is, the situation falls outside the scope of daily experience. While some of the cases described in this book describe corporate and non-corporate examples of work that is inherently dangerous and risky, it should be noted that the situations described are extreme for them. That is, they faced situations that were outside the norm of their daily experiences. For example, mining is an inherently dangerous job; being trapped under ground for several weeks is an extreme situation.

A call for participants was sent to several divisions of the AOM, yielding several dozen proposals describing extreme cases. The leaders, teams and situations that academy members were researching were drawn from a wide range of corporate and non-corporate settings. This book includes a composite of cases that will offer management scholars and researchers alternative lenses through which to view effective leadership in extreme situations. The goal of the book is to better understand the factors that explain successful leadership behavior in a variety of extreme situations including corporate and non-corporate settings. Each chapter includes a description of the extreme situation, an analysis of the leadership theories that might explain the behaviors exhibited in the case, and a list of leadership lessons that can be extrapolated from the case.

There are numerous historic and contemporary examples of leaders and followers that have survived extreme situations. Management professors have long used cases drawn from business and corporate settings to illustrate leadership lessons and management principles. However, vivid and dramatic cases can also be found in a variety of non-corporate settings, including polar and mountain climbing expeditions, first responders and rescue workers, and those whose work takes them deep inside the earth and far above the clouds. We believe that we can contribute to management practice if we expand our models and theories to understand leaders who survive, and thrive, in extreme situations. In the last few years, companies have faced global and economic environments that fall well beyond the scope of their daily experience. We hope that the cases presented in this book will offer managers inspirational lessons for surviving at the extreme.

Finally, while writing this book the bomb explosions at the 2013 Boston Marathon and the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 14 December 2012 occurred. In examining these recent events we came to realize that virtually any one of us may experience an extreme situation at work or at play. We hope that the lessons learned in writing this book may influence our own leadership behaviors.