What makes a great leader? Ernest Shackleton is a renowned man, not necessarily for his attempt to be the first to cross the Antarctic continent, but for his heroism and leadership of twenty-seven men during one particular expedition. On the fourth of August in the year of 1914, twenty-eight men left their families and friends in England to withstand what will be one of the greatest stories of endurance that mankind has ever heard: surviving 2 years, stranded in one of the coldest places on Earth. In his advertisement in the newspaper, Shackleton wrote: "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success;" in simple terms, each crew member knew the dangers of such a perilous flight, yet they and five-thousand other applicants were willing to risk their lives given “Shackleton's sheer willpower and personal magnetism” (“Shackleton’s Voyage of Endurance”). Ernest Shackleton, to explain, was a man that was ambitious enough to try to cross Antarctica and know when to change his objective in order to save the lives of his men; all in all, Shackleton was a notable leader given his poised qualities and consistent behavior.

Throughout his forty-seven years of existence, Shackleton was consistently described as courageous, sympathetic, and loyal; undoubtedly the characteristics every leader should possess in order to be followed and respected. The crew, in basic terms, looked up to Shackleton; his ease and calmness were contagious and, thus, gave the men hope even during the worst of situations. Ernest fundamentally knew that once the first-in-command showed the slightest sign of worry or cynicism, everyone would then lose their morale and nothing will be accomplished in the end. This is apparent when Shackleton realized that the ship, Endurance, cannot be carved
out of the ice: One of the crewmen, Alexander Macklin, wrote in his diary, “Shackleton at this
time showed one of his sparks of real greatness. He did not rage at all, or show outwardly the
slightest sign of disappointment. He told us simply and calmly that we must winter in the pack,
explained its dangers and possibilities, never lost his optimism.” Ultimately, Shackleton never
allowed himself to lose self-control or his strength of mind; he remained strong in order to assure
his crew that they can and will make it. “The Boss,” as they referred to Shackleton, was also a
father-figure to the men given the fact that he always put their lives before his own; in simple
terms, their well-being meant more to Ernest than his own health, yet he was always subtle in
showing it. For instance, after leaving the Antarctic Circle and spending seven treacherous days
trying to reach Elephant Island, Shackleton then attempted to sail the *James Caird* lifeboat to
South Georgia to reach civilization and finally get help; during the journey, “He noticed that if
any man was particularly unable to cope, and he ordered hot milk not just for him but for
everyone, so this man would not, as he put it, have doubts about himself” (Alexandra
Shackleton, grand-daughter of Ernest Shackleton).

In addition to his character, Ernest Shackelton was also admired for his treatment and
habitual behavior among his crew members. In his eyes, qualifications did not matter and, hence,
each individual was of the equal rank: the scientists, biologists, doctors, carpenters, and sailors
all shared the same chores/duties around the ship. Shackleton was not a man that believed in
“special-treatment” and, therefore, acted as one of the crew men in addition: “It was a team and
not a "them and us" situation,” Peter Wordie, grandson of one of the crew men, shared during the
Shackleton’s *Voyage of Endurance* documentary. Nonetheless, when situations arose, Ernest
Shackleton acted as “the boss,” especially in regards to the lives of his men; for instance, when
the photographer jumped into the sinking ship to save the last of his belongings, Ernest was stern
and angry with Frank Hurley not necessarily for disobeying the leader’s order, but for risking his (Frank’s) own life in the process. Shackleton, in addition, allowed his men to participate in activities and several forms of entertainment; basically, he wanted them to forget that they were stranded, thousands of miles from home because Ernest knew that if they sat around and dwelled on such a thought all day, the men will not only lose their spirits but also their minds. For this reason, Shackleton and his men had theatrical evenings, concerts, memorable haircuts, dog races, and so forth; when all is said and done, “the boss” had a consistent behavior and a habitual routine because he wanted his crew to consist on being civil and sane in a world outside of civilization.

In the end, Ernest Shackleton became a prime example for leaders everywhere because he possessed all five of the exemplary leadership characteristics: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Shackleton, to understand, was fundamentally the glue that kept his men from unraveling; the glue that kept his men sane. His optimism inspired the crew and gave them hope that they can achieve the unachievable; that they have the power to act and ultimately beat Mother Nature at her own game. Ultimately, Ernest was “The Boss” who cared; and by the crew knowing that, made them more inclined to follow orders and work extra hard to achieve the ultimate goal of the Endurance expedition: to return to their families alive. To the men, Shackleton essentially became the embodiment of survival; if he were to die, then survival would die with him because the crew would indubitably lose themselves without their leader. As Ernest Shackleton once said, “If you're a leader, a fellow that other fellows look to, you've got to keep going.”