

The Apollo Attitude—When Failure is Not an Option

By Roxanne Emmerich

It's hard to beat the movie *Apollo 13* for drama. Over 200,000 miles from Earth, in the vacuum of space, an explosion disabled a space capsule on its way to the Moon. The explosion damaged power lines and an oxygen tank.

The mission was over. And it would have been reasonable to assume the astronauts' lives were over, too. Earth was three days away, by which time the astronauts would be dead from the build-up of carbon monoxide, the loss of heat, or any of a dozen other things.

Yet three days later, after applying ingenuity, courage, and an incredible amount of fortitude to solving the many "unsolvable" problems, the astronauts were standing on the deck of an aircraft carrier.

Then there was the three-masted sailing ship *Endurance*, which left England in August 1914 under the command of Ernest Shackleton with twenty-eight men determined to cross Antarctica by sled.

The *Endurance* ended up trapped and crushed to splinters by ice floes. The men lived on the Antarctic ice for another six months, eating penguin and a few of the dogs they'd brought along.

Eventually, Shackleton had the men pile into three open boats for a thousand-mile journey through the expanse of the South Atlantic, without instruments, in hopes of hitting one of the three unimaginably small specks of the South Shetland Islands.

Which they did.

After several more indescribable events and voyages and over two years on the ice, the men were finally rescued.

Total survivors out of the original twenty-eight men? Twenty-eight.

The British explorer Duncan Carse wrote of the expedition, "I do not know how they did it—except that they had to."

What if you approached every challenge in your life and in your work as if you simply HAD to overcome it? I'll tell you what—you would do it. You would find a way, and you would get it done.

Why is "Failure" ever ON the list of options in the first place?

Whenever I hear the expression, "Failure is not an option," I think of *Apollo 13*. I think of Ernest Shackleton and the men of *Endurance*. I picture them confronting these utterly impossible situations and saying, "Well, lads, let's see what our options are."

I then picture them reaching into a pocket and pulling out a scrap of paper. Under the title OPTIONS are two words: **SUCCESS** and **FAILURE**.

Like heck. Why would failure EVER be an option? So why not take it off the list entirely?

Oh I know, I know, I can just hear it. We've all heard it—the hundred or so reasons such and such a thing simply cannot be done, the many, many reasons failure is the only option. Tell it to the hand, 'cause the face ain't listening.

Better yet, tell it to Shackleton, who surely knew he "couldn't" keep twenty-eight men with cotton clothing and little food alive on the Antarctic ice for two years. Tell it to the astronauts of *Apollo 13* and the engineers at Mission Control in Houston. Tell them all about the insurmountable obstacles you face.

Better STILL—why not just take FAILURE off that list of options?

Show me the baby!

I have a friend who I dearly love but who always used to explain why something couldn't be done. Excuses came easy to her. Then one day her boss gave her a priceless saying to remember: *Don't tell me about the labor pains—show me the baby*.

Before a project begins, I don't want to hear all the reasons it can't be done. After the project is done, I don't care how many hours you worked. I don't care how many obstacles you hit. Save it for your memoirs. Just show me the baby. I want to see the result. I want to coo and tickle and celebrate that beautiful little baby.

My friend immediately got it—and her results that first year amounted to an extra \$2 million to the bottom line for her department. Coochie coo—that's some baby! At first she was as surprised as anyone, but in the end she was a believer.

Success will do that to a person.

Decide now that whatever project or challenge you currently have before you simply cannot be allowed to fail—that you must use the ingenuity of the *Apollo* crew and the fortitude of the *Endurance* crew to make it happen. It's a completely different way of thinking.

But be careful—it's addicting. Once you get a taste of achieving the impossible, it's hard to quit!

SIDEBAR

Erasing "failure" from the options list

- Consider the most unreasonable goal of your business.
- Identify the excuses that make the goal unreasonable.
- Now, power past them in your mind; picture the path around the obstacles until that goal becomes not only doable after all, but reasonable.
- Measure your progress, stay accountable, and get results regardless of all obstacles.
- Set your own unreasonable goals. Don't wait for someone else to request it of you. Those who have great success in life are driven by goals beyond what others expect of them.
- List EVERY possible obstacle to that goal. For each one, write out beside it at least one strategy about how you will break through and make that happen regardless of the obstacle. Don't leave that sheet of paper until you've done that for every obstacle in advance.
- Take immediate action on one or several of the steps to make your unreasonable steps. Tell at least two people what you're doing and what your commitment is, and tell them that if you start to have any excuses for why that can't happen, ask them to support you instead of buying into your story. Ask them in advance to not accept ANY excuses and obstacles.

Roxanne Emmerich is renowned for her ability to transform “ho-hum” workplaces into massive results-oriented “bring-it-on” environments. To discover how you can ignite the passion of your employees, catapult performance to new levels, and boost the morale of your company subscribe to the Thank God It's MondayTM e-zine at www.ThankGoditsMonday.com.