

When Failure Is Not an Option

By Roxanne Emmerich | Monday, January 11, 2010

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 28 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 1000-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 28 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 100 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 28 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.

Whether it is your work life, financial goals, finishing school, health aspirations, or whatever--why not just take FAILURE off that list of options?