



Hiring Criteria: Optimism and Idealism

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I read an interesting article in a recent issue of *The New Yorker* titled "[The White Darkness](#)" about Henry Worsley's extraordinary attempt to hike all the way across Antarctica. He was doing it alone and hauling a heavy sled with all of his provisions. Worsley was attempting to do what his hero, legendary explorer Ernest Shackleton, had failed to accomplish.

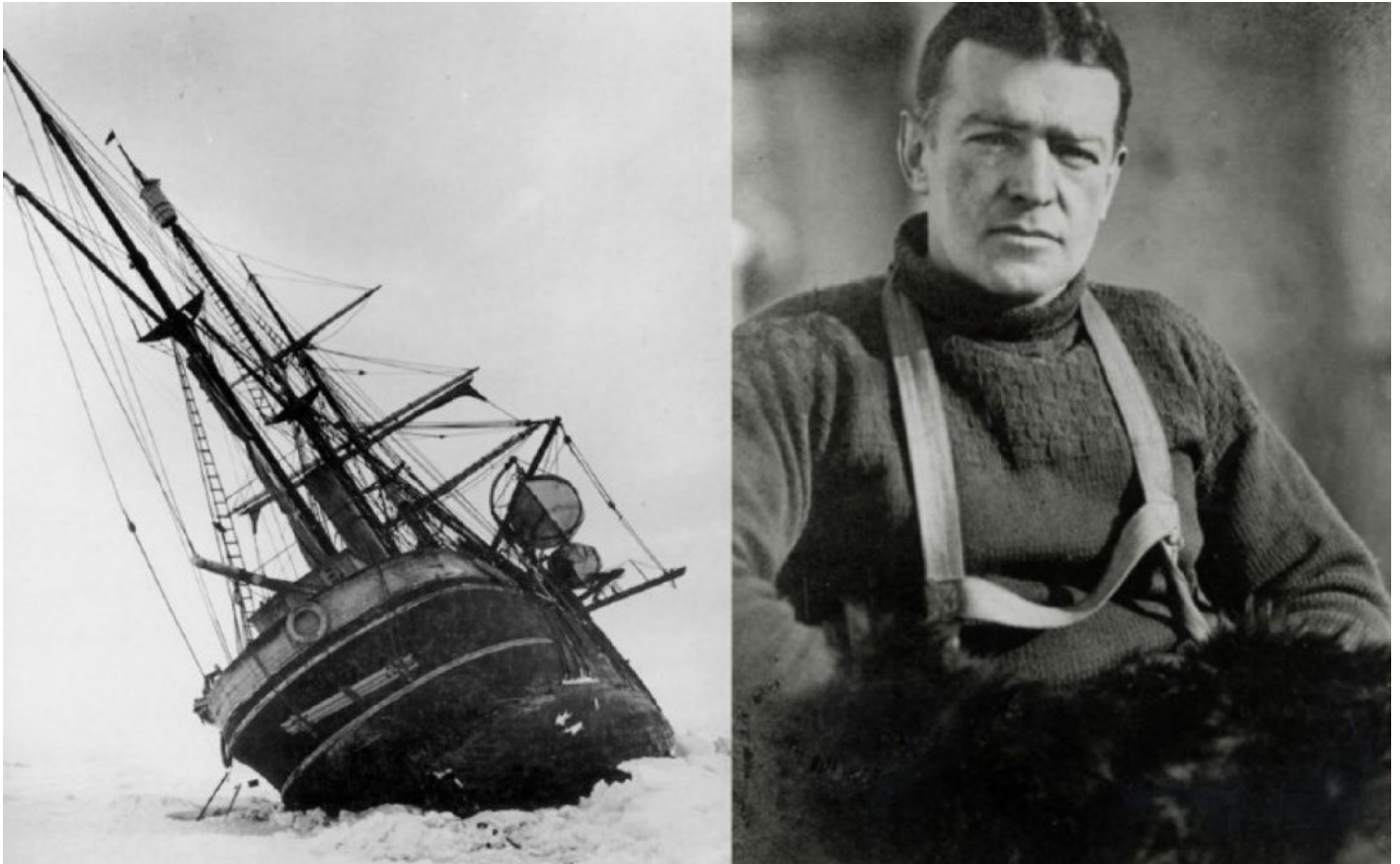


Henry Worsley, Antarctic Explorer

Shackleton and his crew sailed *The Endurance* toward Antarctica for his cross-continent adventure in January 1915. The ship became trapped in ice before reaching base camp and the men were stranded throughout the winter. The ship was crushed by the ice and they had to survive the most brutal elements imaginable until finally they could make their way over hundreds of miles to a whaling station in April 1916. While he failed to accomplish his mission, Shackleton "was revered for the way he had recruited and managed his men, coolly guiding them to safety." As one explorer said, "when you are in a hopeless situation, when there seems no way out, get on your knees and pray for Shackleton." In fact, there is a cottage industry of leadership books based on Shackleton's methods on the expedition, including *Camaraderie at 20 Below Zero: Creating an*



Optimal Work Environment.



Ernest Shackleton and The Endurance Trapped in Ice

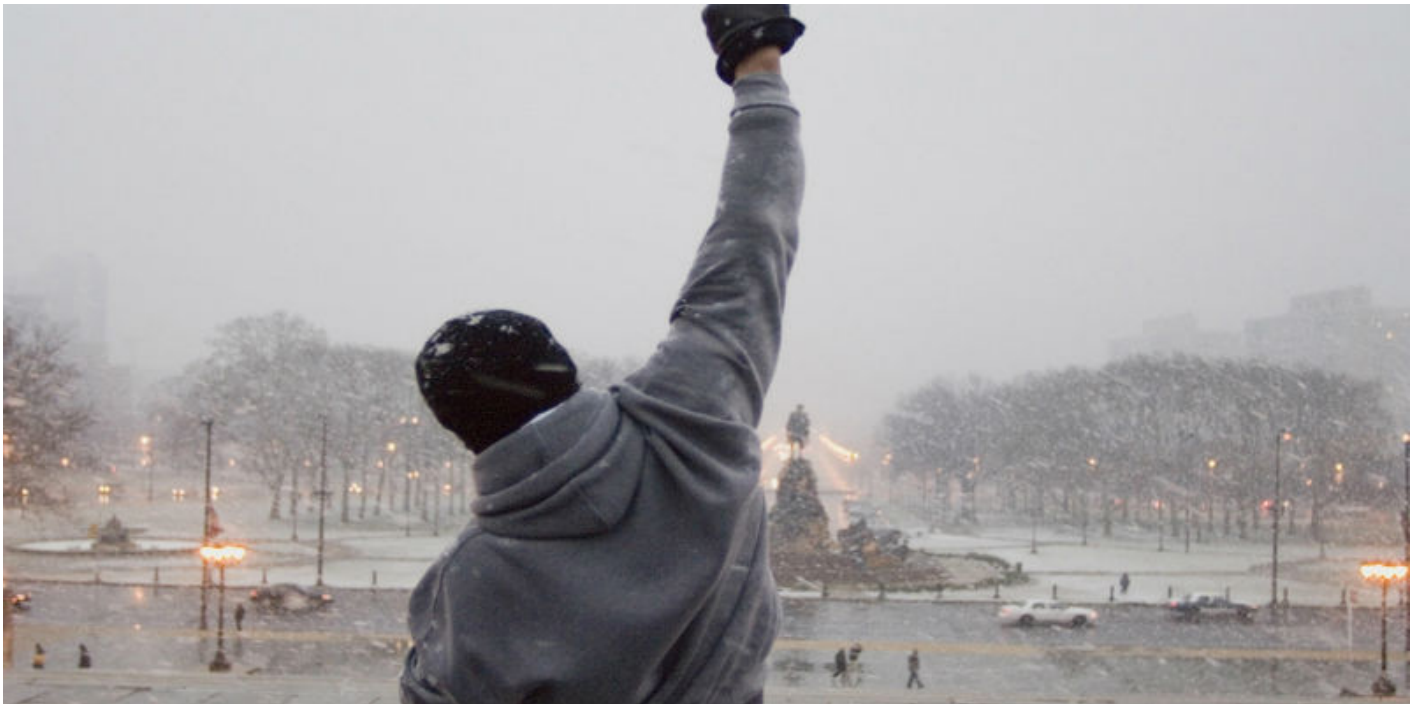
I share this background as context for talking about the qualities that Ernest Shackleton looked for in recruiting members for his expedition team. Our work at the School obviously is different. At the same time, however, I think those qualities might be worth considering in our own recruitment process—especially for faculty members.

Here are the qualities that Shackleton deemed essential: “First, optimism; second, patience; third, physical endurance; fourth, idealism; fifth and last, courage.”

While we do not face daunting physical challenges, at least on most days, it might serve us well to look for many of those qualities in our recruitment. Optimism and idealism are crucial if you are confronting the brutal physical conditions of Antarctica. I would argue that they are important in carrying out the School of Government’s mission. We are doing something that is distinctive in higher education—combining academic excellence with practical assistance for public officials. I want to hire people who are idealistic enough to be inspired by the idealism of our mission, and who are optimistic that we can have a major impact on the quality of life in North Carolina’s communities. Like Shackleton’s team, our team will succeed if faculty members are motivated by



the School's mission more than anything else, including money or other professional interests and goals.



Albert Coates was our Shackleton, and we would not be here if he had not possessed most of those qualities. He was an idealist and he was optimistic that he could create the Institute of Government. Notwithstanding long odds and many setbacks, Coates never stopped pursuing his dream. Physical endurance was important as he worked tirelessly to build and promote the Institute. He demonstrated courage along the way, including when he reduced his law school salary by 50% during the Depression to focus his time on creating the Institute. We need to have courage in continuing Albert's legacy during a time when public service and government is often criticized and poorly supported. We need to have the courage to try new things that might make us more responsive to the needs of public officials. I would never argue that Coates demonstrated patience in his work—everything I have heard about him suggests the exact opposite.

In future searches for faculty members I want to become even more intentional about identifying those candidates who are optimistic and idealistic, and who possess the courage to sign on for our practical North Carolina mission. Finding those people has allowed us to be successful in the past, and it may be more important and even more challenging to find them in the future. We need to have the courage and patience to keep looking until we identify them, and never settle for candidates who lack those qualities. In Shackleton's case the life of his team depended on it. In our case the success of our mission depends on it.



THE GOOD GOVERNMENT MAN

*Albert Coates and the
Early Years of the Institute
of Government*

HOWARD E. COVINGTON JR.





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