

PATHFINDING

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Leadership lessons from the hills



Everest Glory For TSAF Climbers

*Three-member TSAF team
summits Mt. Everest on May 21*

An Everest climb is an achievement every mountaineer dreams of, but the lack of resources is often a deterrent. Mountaineering is not a pocket-friendly hobby or sport to indulge in. But even if you are the richest man on Earth, there is no guarantee that you could still summit Mt. Everest. You could very well die, or worse, get maimed in the attempt.

But, when the challenges are life-threatening even for seasoned climbers, then the joy of a successful summit is even more precious and rewarding.

That is exactly what the three climbers, sponsored by Tata Steel and The Tata Steel Adventure Foundation, will remember for the rest of their lives. When the glory of an Everest climb seemed so close, they were instead staring straight into the face of death.

Sandeep Toliya, himself an experienced climber and a senior TSAF instructor for 10 years, was left stranded for an hour at 28,700 feet without an oxygen cylinder. Poonam Rana, who is also engaged with TSAF, had to wait for two hours at Everest Balcony (27,500 ft) for oxygen. Her Sherpa was far behind. Swarnalata Dalai from Odisha, who was handpicked by TSAF as part of the rural outreach programme, also had her share of harrowing experiences. She had to spend the night in Camp III without a sleeping bag and water – during the descent – because the Sherpa accompanying her went ahead to camp II without bothering to check on her pace.

This time, too, the climbers followed the same route (from Jiri) taken by the Indian Expedition of 1984, which saw Bachendri Pal become the first Indian woman to summit Mt. Everest. Though it is a longer route and takes one week to reach Lukla, it helps build up endurance and mental strength.

The three credit the intense training Ms. Bachendri Pal put them through as the major factor behind their success.

As part of the training, they first went to South America for an expedition to Mt. Aconcagua where they honed their climbing skills to the exacting standards required.

Unfortunately, extremely bad weather conditions prevented them from claiming the summit.

As part of the final preparation, they again trained in the Garhwal Himalayas for a month under heavy snow and extreme weather conditions, carrying loads in excess of the norm up and down the steep snow slopes to tone their bodies and prepare their minds for the Everest expedition.



Photos: Sandeep Toliya



The Speed Climbers From Steel City



Photo: Hemant Gupta

The winners:

Anisha Verma and Amrita Dey won gold in the junior girls and sub junior girls category, respectively. Talim Ansari won bronze in the junior boys category.

The Tata Steel Adventure Foundation recently hosted the IMF All-India Speed Climbing Competition at the JRD Tata Sports Complex in Jamshedpur. It was the first time that a national level climbing competition was held in the Steel City. A total of 103 climbers from across India took part in the sub junior and junior boys and girls, and men and women categories.

TWU Office Bearers Overcome Himalayan Hardships With Flying Colours

A first in Tata Steel history - outdoor leadership programme for workers' union



"When you successfully summit a mountain, you overcome your demons (fears)!" You might be physically fit, but if your mind gives up midway in your endeavour, your efforts will fail.

For the 11-member group of Tata Workers' Union (TWU) and two HRM executives, who attended TSAF's five-day outdoor leadership programme at Dyara Bugyal (meadows) in Uttarakhand, it was

an experience of learning, overcoming fears and fighting against the odds.

Incidentally, this was the first time in the history of Tata Steel that TWU office bearers attended an outdoor leadership programme in the Himalayas.

Says Zubin Palia, Chief, Group Industrial Relations: "A new committee of office bearers was elected in May this year, and the management decided to send them for a team building and leadership programme in the Himalayas. Previously, they would attend only classroom sessions in and around the city; so, this was a complete new experience for them."

On the first night, a few of the participants complained of uneasiness and claustrophobia. They were not accustomed to sleeping in tents and sleeping bags. They even decided to quit the programme and return to Jamshedpur.

Sanjay Kumar, HRM executive, who went along with the team, added that after the first day's climb, almost everyone, except for a few, was exhausted and bemoaning themselves for agreeing to join the programme. He says, "Few had cold, cough and fever, and many were facing breathing problems at those high altitudes."

But with some motivational talk from the TSAF instructors, they decided to carry on with the course. R S Pal, himself an Everest, regaled them with tales of mountaineering hardships and exploits, and motivated the team to overcome their fears and challenges.

The motivation sure worked wonders. Normally, a team makes the ascent on the fourth day, having climbed up the hill on the third day. The participants, however, decided to make the ascent on the third day itself and spend the extra day saved at the TSAF base camp at Kuflon.

"It was an exceptional team work and everyone helped and supported each other. It was a lifetime experience that one cannot forget," adds Kumar.

Says R. Ravi Prasad, President, TWU: "This was quite an experience for us — very different from the usual challenges we face in our routine work. We tend to remain confined within our respective domains. But out on the mountains, you have to work as a team to overcome your difficulties and take leadership of the situation. This programme has helped us learn that — to bond as a team and work together towards a common goal."

Adds Pal: "They were physically very fit, but seemed a bit demoralised on the second morning. But after the pep talk, they were ready to experience the thrill of adventure. The weather was not friendly. It was either raining or snowing all the time, but they completed the programme and came out with flying colours."

The TSAF team was led by R S Pal, Mohan Rawat and Dharmendra Singh.



Photos: Mohan Rawat

SAIL 'ASCENTS' New Heights With TSAF

When you climb a hill, you discover not only a splendid view, but also a lot about yourself, and your potential. In short, you overcome hitherto unknown fears and challenges.



The 39 participants from the Steel Authority of India (SAIL), who attended the second edition of the five-day 'ASCENT' Programme in the Dyara Bugyal (meadows) in Uttarkashi this year, have also similar tales to tell. The participants were all in the rank of DGMs in the 45-50 age group.

Says Sanjay Dhar, DGM, Academics and Senior Faculty, MTI Ranchi – SAIL: "I had attended the inaugural programme in 2017 and liked it. So, this time, we sent them in two batches, one of 20 and the other of 19. The aim was to get them to understand their strengths and weaknesses, combine as a team, enhance their capabilities, and force them to get out of their comfort

zone. The team building would ensure more cohesion even outside the line of hierarchy."

The best outcome of this exercise, according to Dhar, has been the journey of self-discovery.

He adds: "It is too early to say what the impact (of the programme) has been. But from the expectations we had before sending them and from what they have achieved after coming back, on a scale of 1-10, the outcome would be somewhere on the 6.5-7 mark. That's pretty good to start with."

At present, SAIL conducts this programme for its mid- and senior-level executives, and now wants to explore the option of a separate outbound leadership training programme for those in the junior and top level, as well.

The TSAF team was led by Hemant Gupta, R S Pal, Mohan Singh Rawat and Annapurna.



Grooming School For The Makers Of Tomorrow's India

School of Outdoor Leadership – TSAF's latest initiative for corporate training

Over the years, Tata Steel Adventure Foundation has earned quite a reputation with India Inc. and the B-Schools for its specialised outdoor leadership programmes, aimed at the business leaders of today and tomorrow.

Now, in a bid to streamline the entire process, TSAF has decided to set up a specialised institute, School of Outdoor Leadership (SOL) to impart leadership training through outbound adventure programmes. This time around, the beneficiaries will include schoolchildren, too. After all, was not "the battle of Waterloo won on the playing fields of Eton?" Inculcating the values of a healthy lifestyle from a very young age



will surely be a right step in making the children better and responsible citizens when they come of age.

Says Hemant Gupta, Sr. Manager, TSAF: "SOL has been planned as a premier institute for leadership training through outbound adventure programmes. For children, the emphasis will be on learning and fun. Environmental education will be a core aspect of this programme."

TSAF will continue as the parent body for SOL, but will henceforth involve itself only with adventure sports programmes and expeditions, with SOL taking over the mantle for corporate leadership training.

Upcoming Events

Mission Gange – TSAF is organising a month-long rafting expedition with the twin objectives of cleaning the Ganga and spreading awareness about waste management. Ms. Bachendri Pal will lead the 1,500-km expedition, which will be flagged off from Haridwar and culminate at Patna.

Mt. Kanamo Expedition – TSAF will organise two batches of the Mt. Kanamo expedition for Tata Steel employees and the

rural community. A group of 20 employees and five rural youth were selected following trials at Dalma Hills near Jamshedpur.

Outdoor Leadership Courses – TSAF will organise a series of its flagship outdoor leadership course in several batches for the post graduate students of XLRI, Tata Group management trainees, experienced professionals, and rural youth.

Mt Rudugaira Expedition (19,100 ft) for Odisha rural youth

Reflections: Bachendri Pal

1993 Indo-Nepal Women's Everest Expedition: A small step towards women empowerment in Indian mountaineering



After the powerful experience of the 1984 Mt. Everest summit, it was clear to me that I could never be the same person again. All my instincts told me that I must move on...learn from my experience...and keep setting new goals of empowering more and more women by leading numerous expeditions.

At a time when no one was even thinking about an all-women expedition to Mt. Everest, I, along with my Everest '84 colleague, Rita Gombu Marwah, booked the peak for 1993 on behalf of Tata Steel Adventure Foundation. Later, Capt. M S Kohli, the then President of Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) requested me to conduct the expedition under the banner of IMF, and jointly with Nepal, for making it an international event. Since the objective was the same – to give maximum opportunity to women, I happily agreed.

It was for the first time in the history of Indian mountaineering that a woman was given the challenge to lead an international team of women climbers to Mt. Everest. It included, among others, rigorous training for selection...to planning, organising and leading to the summit...taking care of the minutest of details to the most hazardous of tasks, and so on.

It was a Herculean task to select the best team, and accordingly, two pre-Everest selection trials were conducted. The first was held in 1991 to Mt. Kamet (25,445 feet) and its satellite, Mt. Abi Gamin (24,130 feet).

A total of 34 women climbers were selected from the applications received, for the first Pre-Everest selection trial. Bad weather made 17 of them miss the summit by 100 feet. But showing great resilience, all of them scaled Mt. Abi Gamin.

The second one was to Mt. Mamostong Kangri (23,659 feet) in 1992, in the Karakoram, known as the 'mountain of thousand devils' because of the difficulties involved in scaling it. Again, the members showed exemplary courage and skill. Against all odds, 15 of them reached the summit on 15 August. This was the first ascent of the peak by any women team.

Finally, the best team was formed for the Mt. Everest expedition on the basis of the performance in these two trials.

When the financial clearance came, the team was left with only three months in hand for getting itself ready. Left to itself, the team did not look for any help, and worked on a war footing from early morning till midnight to ensure that the expedition was ready to take off as scheduled. In spite of the acute time constraints, meticulous planning went into packing of items camp wise, with detailed checklists in hand to avoid confusion; and all necessary logistics were put in place in three months, unlike the usual time frame of almost a year.

High in spirits, the team reached the Mt. Everest Base Camp by the end of March 1993.

Right from the beginning, clear cut instructions were given to the members to treat the Sherpas as one of us and give them the respect they deserved. The Sherpas, too, shared the same kitchen and food as all the other members. In this way, we became a strong well-knit team, capable of handling all problems in those extreme situations with care and concern.

During the acclimatisation phase, when the climbers had to establish higher camps, the capability of each member was carefully observed, on the basis of which the summit team was finally formed.

The selection procedure was absolutely transparent and performance-based, and therefore, the outcome was also





an absolute success. In all, 18 people, including seven women climbers reached the summit safely.

After so many months of toil, hardships, and mental and physical exhaustion, it was such a momentous and joyous occasion for the entire team.

Both me and Rita Gombu Marwah, one of the deputy leaders of the expedition, had tears of joy and hugged each other. Now, it was our moment of joy after all those struggles, challenges and pessimism we had faced in the beginning.

The stupendous success was in stark contrast to the negative attitude of some mountaineers who had questioned the rationale behind organising an all-women expedition to Mt. Everest.

Capt. Kohli, who had singularly supported the expedition from the very start, sent congratulatory message over the wire and informed us of the seven records set by the team.

It was apparent that the Indo-Nepalese Women's Everest Expedition team was way ahead of its time, and unfathomable to quite a few people.

The expedition also owes its success to a few people who kept our morale very high and supported us throughout. Akhil Bakshi, the then OSD to the Prime Minister, and Dr. S Y Qureshi, the then Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, stood by us through thick and thin. They understood our struggles and provided all the necessary help to ensure the success of the expedition.

But above all, my greatest strength was my company, Tata Steel, who always stood behind me in all my endeavours.

To think of it now, the records were indeed special, and the Government of India decided to honour all the 21 members of the expedition with the coveted National Adventure Award. This was instituted in 1994, and we became the first recipients of this prestigious award

The expedition was indeed a historic one and set many records—

- This was the first all-women international expedition of India to Mt. Everest led by a woman
- A total of 18 people reached the summit in a single expedition, a record which stands till today
- India became the first country to boast of eight women Mt. Everest summiters
- Santosh Yadav became the first woman in the world to summit Mt. Everest twice
- Dicky Dolma became the youngest woman to scale Mt. Everest. She was 19 at the time
- Deepu Sharma, after returning from South Summit (28,704 ft) close to Everest summit, again made the attempt and reached the summit within a week, becoming the first woman to have performed this feat.
- A Sherpa and his wife became the first Nepalese couple to reach the South Summit of Mt. Everest. The wife – of the Sherpa, who accompanied us as a part of the support team –was also a member of the expedition

But most importantly, this expedition created a landmark in the history of mountaineering training in India, as immediately after this success, all the national mountaineering institutes started having women instructors on their payroll.



Photos: Bachendri Pal

Prior to this expedition, no woman was considered capable to be an instructor in mountaineering training institutes. But the success of this expedition changed that thinking forever.

The one thing that people kept asking me at that time was why I did not climb Mt. Everest to create a record of having scaled it twice. I told them that “I climbed Mt. Everest as a leader not once or twice, but 18 times”. I believe that the job of a leader is to make more leaders and to spread confidence and self-belief in them for the betterment and progress of the nation and society.

In a nutshell, this was an expedition by women, for women and of women, and to the surprise of many, it had created a new history in mountaineering.

For me, leading the 93 expedition was an ultimate challenge and gave a far greater sense of achievement than climbing Mt. Everest in 1984.



Mountain Dream For Rural Youth

Two years on, Biju Patnaik Himalayan Expedition sends rural Odisha girl to Everest with TSAF support

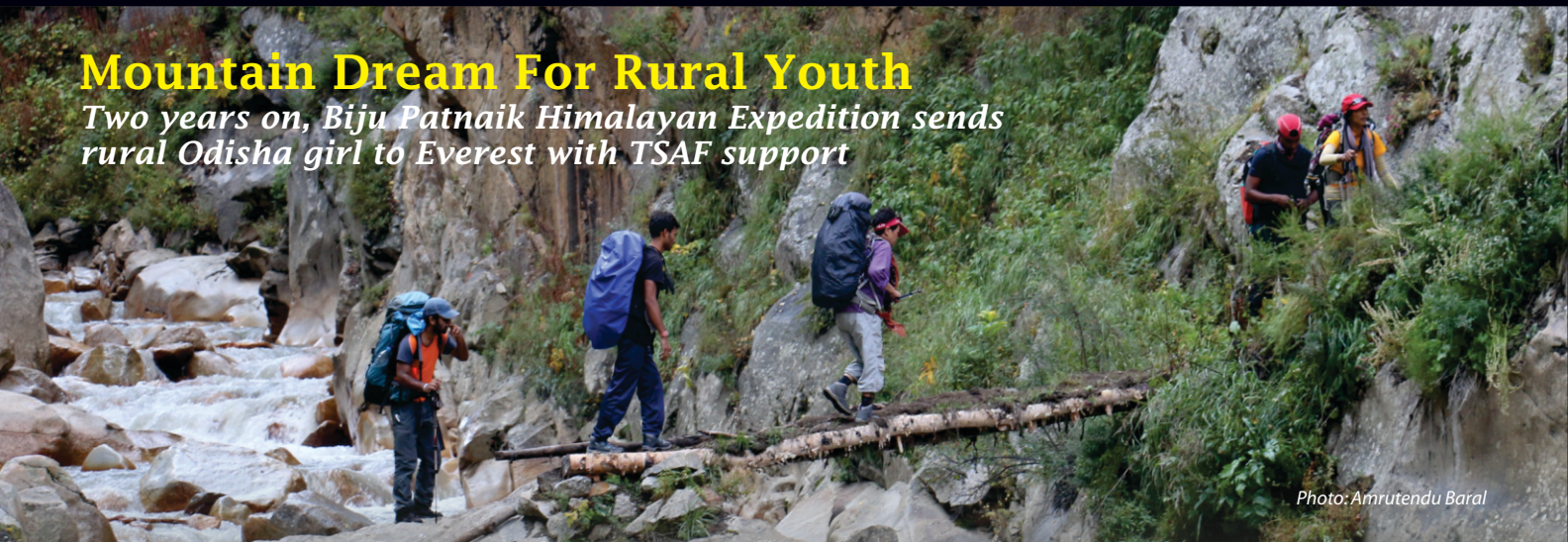


Photo: Amrutendu Baral

Two years ago, the Odisha government began a massive drive to empower the underprivileged youth of the state through adventure sports.

As part of the mission, 100 boys and girls are selected each year during a preliminary round, from which a 15-member batch is sent for a Himalayan peak climbing expedition.

Says Hemant Gupta, Sr. Manager, TSAF: "The Odisha Govt initiated this project and approached us for guidance. We select a core group of 30 youth who join an 8-9 day TSAF programme in Uttarkahand. From this, a select batch of 15 youth is sent for the peak climb."

This time, the nine-day trek took the team to Darwa Pass and Darwa Top at 13,500 ft, and from there to Yamunotri and back to the TSAF base camp at Kufлон.

Adds Gupta: "We have finalised the peak for this year. Last year, it was Rudugaira, and this year, too, we have decided for the same. The expedition will take place sometime in September."

The programme sure has had its fair share of success.

Swarnalata Dalai (20), who climbed Mt. Everest this May through a Tata Steel and TSAF sponsored expedition, was part of the inaugural edition of this rural outreach programme. Now, she has become the youngest girl from Odisha to summit Mt. Everest.

Says Dalai: "I joined the programme in 2016, and since then have gone on many high-altitude treks and expeditions with TSAF. I have been to the Everest Base Camp and Mt. Rudugaira. Mt. Everest was a dream, and thanks to the Odisha govt, TSAF and ma'am (Bachendri Pal), who has always believed in women empowerment, that dream has been fulfilled now."

The concept behind the programme is promoting mountaineering as a sport, while also providing learning and character building through adventure sports in general. It has certainly made the right progress in the right direction.

'Eco-Bricks': A Unique Venture Of Waste Management In Hills



The Tata Steel Adventure Foundation has now added another dimension to waste management at its camp site in Uttarkashi.

Disposal of plastic waste is a never-ending problem,

more so in the hills, which have limited facilities to recycle the waste generated. The usual practice is to bring the waste down to the cities, or, burn it. The latter is a quick solution, but adds to air pollution.

As a solution, the TSAF team decided to come up with the concept of eco-bricks made of plastic bottles and wrappers. The bottles are cleaned, dried, and filled with the biscuit and instant noodles wrappers that participants leave behind during the course of their outdoor leadership training programme.

Says Hemant Gupta, Sr. Manager, TSAF: "A friend of mine suggested this idea, and a TSAF team began work.

During the course of two hours, we managed to make eco-bricks out of 4.5 kg of plastic wrappers and 19 plastic bottles left behind by 150 students during the 5-10 day duration course."

As of now, they have made one stool and plan to add a few more 'furniture' pieces, and later, maybe, a shed. So far, the TSAF staff have been the mentors for the project.

Gupta adds: "Mohan Rawat was the architect for the stool and Randeb Singh micromanaged the entire task of collecting and segregating the waste. Now on, though, the participants will have to take up the initiative of waste management during the outdoor leadership course."



Photos: Hemant Gupta

TREKKER SPEAK

Journey To The Base Of The Highest Peak

A trek to the Everest base camp! Just the thought of trekking up to 5,334 metres at the base of the world's highest peak was enough to give me goosebumps. This was my first major trek and my second one with Tata Steel Adventure Foundation.

It was a day before the start of the trek, and I had just finished packing my 16-kg backpack, when I realised that my journey to the base of Mt. Everest had started when I had left home a few days earlier. Now, here we were – 13 trekkers, two guides and three porters – different people from different walks of life, but all sharing one goal – to trek up to Everest Base Camp.

So, what was the best part of the trek? The entire journey in itself. It was not just about walking with a backpack at that altitude. It was about experiencing every little aspect of life in the mountains; right from trekking to a snowy Dingboche (4,252m), drinking lemon-ginger tea at such lofty heights, or listening to the effervescent jingle of the yaks' bells as they ambled along the trekking trail.

The memories will last forever, whether it was hauling up the body and mind to overcome the strenuous stretch to Kalapathar and Pheriche (4,000m), or, soaking in the view of the Ama Dablam (one mountain growing on another, reminiscent of the way a mother carries a child).

To think of it, the thought of stopping by at picturesque teahouses every night, or, walking past the suspended bridges decked with prayer flags while the Dudhsagar flowed below in a torrent, or, chatting up with people from across the world, now seems so surreal.



Photos: Santosh Biswal

I even picked up a few words of Nepali during my trek: 'Nepali Flat'- A roller coaster like terrain that goes up and down. 'Daal Bhaat (Rice and Lentil) Power. 24 hour. No toilet no shower.'

On the day of making the final ascent to the Everest Base Camp, my oxygen level dropped to 62 (the minimum should be 70) because of fever and a nosebleed. The temperature was -15 degrees, but there was no going back after coming so far. It was more a test of my willpower rather than my physical strength, and the team completed what it had set out for when it had landed at Kathmandu.

I had successfully completed my trek to Everest Base Camp.

Do take up this challenge and get into the world of snow angels, fresh air, and zero vehicular sounds. You will cherish the experience throughout your life.

A special thanks to the TSAF staff, and especially to Pranav Mamgain, who led us in the best manner possible, notwithstanding the innumerable challenges in the high mountains.

– Bharati Das, 25, Manager, Tata Steel.





EDITOR'S NOTE

The year was 1914 and Europe was at war. Far away near Antarctica, a small band of British explorers were fighting a 'white war' in their quest for a final glory in South Polar expedition – the criss-crossing of the Antarctic continent from sea to sea.

The men were the members of Sir Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition.

They planned to land as far south as possible on the Weddell Sea coast; march south to the Pole (South Pole), and then across the continent to the Ross Sea coast. That never happened though; their ship, the *Endurance* was crushed by the floating sea ice, and they were stranded.

Over a course of 20 months, they camped on an ice floe, cannibalised their row boats to strengthen one long boat, a six-man party (including Shackleton) rowed 800 nautical miles across rough seas to reach a whaling station on the nearest habitable island, and two members (including Shackleton) of that party trekked 36 miles in heavy snow without proper equipment to reach word out about their stranded shipmates.

Finally, with the help of the Chilean government, Shackleton, (or Boss as his crew called him) was able to save all his 27 crewmembers.

Sir Shackleton was on each of the four rescue voyages. A heroic effort indeed, more so since Shackleton suffered from a congenital heart defect (he had a hole in his heart from birth)!

But, there is lots to learn from his leadership skills for today's business leaders and managers as well, and that is precisely why we are discussing him here.

- 1) **Priorities:** Shackleton always had his priorities right. First, it was about criss-crossing the Antarctic. When that became impossible, he changed his focus to saving the crew.
- 2) **Improvisation:** Whether it was about setting up camp on an ice floe, cannibalising boats, sealing them with seal blood and tar, driving nails through boots to act as temporary crampons, or, using a carpenter's adze for an ice axe, the Boss knew what to improvise and where.
- 3) **Decision Making:** Falkland Island was 1,000 kilometres away, but unreachable due to wind conditions. Another option was Deception Island, but there was no surety of rescue. So, he decided to sail 1,500 kms to South Georgia Whaling Station. It was a longer voyage in rough seas, and never before attempted in a boat, but if successful, would ensure the safe rescue of his stranded men. So, he boldly took the decision for the welfare of the crew.
- 4) **Team Discussion:** Shackleton always kept the crew informed of his decision. It was after long consultation with the deputy leader of the expedition and the ship's captain that he took the decision to sail to South Georgia. As a leader, he made the decisions, but took opinions from all.
- 5) **Task Allocation:** He allocated specific tasks to the crew and kept the troublemakers under his direct

command. This ensured they never remained idle and formed coteries. That was his way to maintain discipline and prevent mutiny.

- 6) **Leadership:** The men were stranded with no hope of rescue from their home country (England was at war then). There was no source of communication or news. Things were just ripe for a mutiny, infighting and a bout of depression. But there was discipline in the ranks. Even when six men sailed off in a long boat, the stranded crewmembers never for once doubted that their Boss would abandon them. That's respect earned through leadership.
- 7) **Patience, Persistence and Resilience:** He was patient, persistent and resilient. He never surrendered to the harsh environs of the Antarctic; rather strategised ways to adapt to the changing circumstances, be it camping on an ice floe, rigging a long boat, or, walking miles through an ice field with no mountaineering equipment. His willpower overcame the harshest of the Antarctic challenges.
- 8) **Co-workers:** He had utmost trust in his co-workers, be it in rigging a long boat to survive an 800-mile sea voyage, in his sailors to accomplish that task, in the captain to chart a right course through the sea, and in himself to complete the journey.
- 9) **Adaptability:** He had once rebuked the carpenter for insubordination, but did not let that cloud his judgement. He let the carpenter strengthen the boat for the journey, as he was the most qualified for the task. In short, he kept himself open to changes as and when required.

These were the management lessons from Shackleton's *Endurance* voyage. Will see you with a new lesson in the next issue.

Happy Hiking!

Sutirtha Sanyal

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