

SELLING AT 90 BELOW ZERO

**5 LESSONS FOR SALES TEAMS FROM
THE RACE TO THE SOUTH POLE**

Antarctic Mike



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SECTION I

WHY THE RACE TO THE SOUTH POLE MATTERS TO SALES

*One leader led his team to victory and
safety. The other led his team to defeat
and death.*

— JIM COLLINS AND MORTEN HANSEN,
COAUTHORS OF *GREAT BY CHOICE*

CHAPTER 1

The Great Antarctic Race

Antarctica is the only place in the world where the temperature can reach 90 below zero. Mere existence in these conditions, let alone working, is challenging and difficult.

The same is true in the world of selling. To be a world-class sales person or sales leader is challenging and difficult. Many valuable lessons for sales people can be learned from the famous race to the South Pole in 1911-1912, where temperatures reached 90 below zero and colder.

After a grueling journey of seventy-seven days through blizzards, the famed English explorer Robert Scott and his party of four followers reached the South Pole on January 17, 1912. Spirits were high that day, but their hopes were soon shattered.

When they arrived at the South Pole they found a small tent and the flag of Norway. In the tent was a letter addressed to Scott from the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen saying he had arrived on December 14, 1911. (All the Norwegian men arrived safely back at their camp following their conquest of the South Pole.)

Scott and his men were mentally and physically exhausted.

All five were doomed to die on the trip back. The end came for Scott in late March of 1912, just eleven miles from the last food depot that had been set for them on the journey down.

The final lines of Scott's last diary entry read: "We shall stick it out to the end but we are getting weaker of course and the end cannot be far. It seems a pity but I do not think I can write more. For God's sake look after our people."

He and the last two members of his team were found almost eight months later by a search party. The three died side by side in their tent, frozen into their sleeping bags.

"I do not regret this journey," Scott had written in his diary, "which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great fortitude as ever in the past."

History now shows that it was Scott's lack of preparation and bad judgment that led to his downfall and the deaths of his team.

Lessons To Be Learned

Two rivals, Scott and Amundsen, attempted to win the race to the South Pole. Both had the necessary resources, drive, and experience. Both encountered the same severe weather and dangerous terrain along the way. The Norwegians succeeded through determination and careful planning. The British failed because Scott took unnecessary risks and relied on bravado.

By contrast, not only did Amundsen win the race, he and his entire party lived to tell the tale, arriving safely back

at their camp on day ninety-nine, which is the day that was predicted when they started their journey. Amundsen trained for such conditions and took every possible precaution. Unlike his English rival, the Norwegian took better calculated risks and did not depend on luck. It was the difference between success and failure, winning and losing, and life and death.

Much has been written about the race for the South Pole and the contrasting leadership styles of the two men. In an October, 2011 article in *Fortune* magazine about their book *Great by Choice* (which I highly recommend), Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen asserted that in business we cannot predict the future, but we can create it. To illustrate their findings about leading under chaos, they wrote:

It's a near-perfect matched pair. Here we have two expedition leaders—Roald Amundsen, the winner, and Robert Falcon Scott, the loser—of similar ages (thirty-nine and forty-three) and with comparable experience. Amundsen and Scott started their respective journeys for the Pole within days of each other, both facing a roundtrip of more than 1,400 miles into an uncertain and unforgiving environment, where temperatures could easily reach 20° below zero even during the summer, made worse by gale-force winds. And keep in mind, this was 1911. They had no means of modern communication to call back to base camp—no radio, no cellphones, no satellite links—and a rescue would have been highly improbable at the South Pole if they screwed up. One leader led his team to victory and safety. The other led his team to defeat and death...Amundsen and Scott achieved dramatically

*different outcomes not because they faced dramatically different circumstances. In the first thirty-four days of their respective expeditions, according to Roland Huntford in his superb book *The Last Place on Earth*, Amundsen and Scott had exactly the same ratio, 56 percent, of good days to bad days of weather. If they faced the same environment in the same year with the same goal, the causes of their respective success and failure simply cannot be the environment. They had divergent outcomes principally because they displayed very different behaviors.*

My own studies of Antarctic exploration—and my personal adventures of actually racing through the icy land at the bottom of the world—have led me to similar conclusions. In my speeches to sales teams, I often share how the triumph of the winners and the tragic consequences of the losers provides five important lessons for leaders and sales teams around the world.

But first, let us compare the different approaches of these two great Antarctic explorers.



Roald Amundsen

Robert Scott