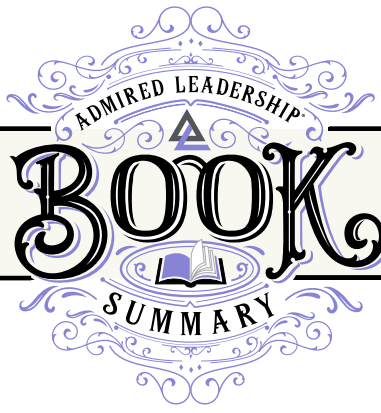




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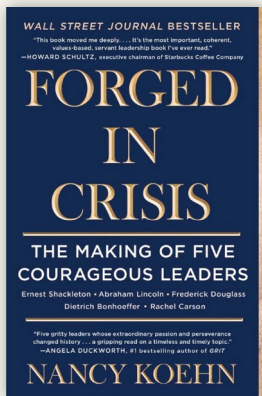
May 2022

Forged in Crisis

The Making of Five Courageous Leaders

Published 2017

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In her book *Forged in Crisis: The Making of Five Courageous Leaders*, Nancy Koehn details the harrowing journeys of five courageous leaders who faced turbulent times, persevered, and championed their cause. In particular, Koehn, a historian and professor at Harvard Business School, seeks to understand what character traits and leadership styles prove most effective in times of crisis. The book details the survival mission of polar explorer Ernest Shackleton, Abraham Lincoln's leadership through the Civil War, Frederick Douglass's escape from enslavement and rise to prominent abolition movement leader, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's imprisonment as a double-agent and part of a plot to assassinate Hitler, and Rachel Carson's investigations regarding the harmful effects of synthetic pesticides on human health, wildlife, and the environment. Koehn asserts Shackleton, Lincoln, Douglass, Bonhoeffer, and Carson are defined by their ascendance to revered leaders in tempestuous times and are proof that leaders are made, not born.

Key Quote

"For all the diversity among these five individuals, the threads that connect them are significantly more important. The most obvious is that these leaders were made, not born" (p. 437). — *Nancy Koehn*


Key Concepts

The Call of History. Ernest Shackleton, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rachel Carson are five leaders from various times and places who are, nevertheless, connected by "strength, pluck, and a deep sense of obligation to do right" (p. 5). Each in their own way moved through crisis calmly and confidently, were committed to being life-long learners, assembled well-rounded teams, created community, and built a network of individuals aligned to their cause.


Bring the Team Home Alive: Earnest Shackleton. Shackleton was the fabled leader of the 1915 Antarctica expedition on the ship *Endurance*, a ship which drifted miles off course, trapped in ice floes. His singular focus was to bring his crew home alive, and he managed to shore his team up physically and emotionally by exuding confidence and cheer regardless of his internal doubts. He kept his crew focused on the task at hand and created times of fellowship, refreshment, and entertainment with meager supplies. During the trip, he also nimbly adjusted his behavior and strategy as new information and challenges were presented. His preparations for the voyage, including the interesting criteria he had for his team, were prescient and shrewd. While his journals portray his personal struggles through it all, his courage, self-discipline, and emotional intelligence were remarkable and, against all odds, he brought his team home.

Save and Transform the Nation: Abraham Lincoln.

In 1862, faced with massive sacrifices of blood and treasure, battle losses for the Union, the recent death of his own son, and criticism on every side, Lincoln felt worn down under heavy burdens, and he struggled with anxiety and insomnia. However, his upbringing and life experiences had created personal resilience and a focused, “surgical strike” approach to self-education. This background trained him to “experience negative emotions without falling through the floorboards” (p. 83). In the midst of this deep crisis, he expanded his mission from preserving the Union and isolating slavery to a broader understanding of matters at stake and a new conviction of what he was called to do: abolish slavery in the U.S. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation, advocated for the 13th Amendment, and went on to win the war.



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End Slavery Forever: Frederick Douglass. In the wake of the great American and international success of his book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, Douglass had to decide whether to stay safely in England and continue his abolitionist work there or “glory in the conflict” and return to America, where he would face the threat of re-enslavement posed by bounty hunters. He chose to return and work to abolish the institution of slavery in the same country as the brothers and sisters who likewise suffered, believing (like Bonhoeffer) that the fundamental mission was worth the risk to his own person. During his tumultuous life, he had learned that education and courage were the keys out of slavery, that technological innovation was the result of the lack of the cheap manpower provided by slavery, and that a supportive spouse and a small circle of loyal friends around him would be necessary to his calling. Douglass also came to understand that he could use words to rally people to a heroic cause that was bold, big, and spoke to the historical moment of a nation.

Resist Nazi Evil: Dietrich Bonhoeffer. “What, if anything, did men and women who believed in the goodness of Christ’s teachings owe to those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis, and how did these obligations translate into individual commitment and action?” (p. 282). This is the question German intellectual and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer found himself compelled to answer during the rise of the Nazi state. Despite the danger to himself as a resistor of Hitler – and having initially left Germany for safety – he made the fateful choice to return during the war to continue his work. In Germany, he established a Christian community for theologically equipping pastors, with the hope of creating spiritual leaders well-trained to confront the ideas of the state church (p. 313).

After becoming a co-conspirator in a plot to overthrow Hitler and, subsequently, being arrested in his family home, his final years were spent in prison continuing his writing. Bonhoeffer also worked to develop a “scrupulous,” disciplined response to protracted interrogations by the Germans. He was hanged by the Nazis April 9, 1945, but his writings live on as a call to focused, principled resistance to evil, a light which nevertheless prevailed in the midst of darkness.

Protect the Earth and Its Creatures: Rachel Carson. A long fight against cancer along with a long list of debilitating illnesses left scientist and writer Rachel Carson at times physically weak, hopeless, and deeply worried for the care of her nine-year-old adopted nephew should she die. Still, she never gave in completely to despair, and she wrangled out her manuscript entitled **Silent Spring**, laboring through the nights to explain the devastating effects of commonly used pesticides. Carson purposed to write in a way that was simple enough for lay people to understand without sacrificing accuracy. She used the focus, determination, and commitment she had honed throughout her life to publish her work. And, despite her natural reserve and intensely private nature, she became a quietly powerful leader as a spokesperson in Senate hearings and on television for more regulation in the production and use of pesticides.


PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

These five leaders understood that to be champions of their causes, they had to be well educated on the issues most relevant to the situation before them. Lincoln, Douglass, and Carson first taught themselves before turning to experts to investigate topics further.


Abraham Lincoln supplemented his lack of formal schooling by educating himself. After his formal education ended, Lincoln remained focused, “obtaining the resources he needed to learn about a particular subject, absorbing what he discovered, and then honing his newfound understanding, first for himself and then in practice. Whether he was learning grammar to improve his speaking and writing, land surveying to make a living, or legal precedents to train for the Illinois bar, Lincoln was both teacher and student” (p. 90).

Lincoln recognized that slavery was the defining issue of his time and sought further understanding of the politics involved in dismantling it. It is well-documented that his views on slavery shifted over time. His commitment to being a lifelong student open to new perspectives, including those of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, resulted in his stance on slavery becoming one of abolition. “As conditions shifted and evolved, he amended his judgment – at times discarding previously important aspects and incorporating new ones. All the while, he was observing, reflecting, and, ultimately, trying to get right with himself about the meaning of slavery and what he should do in regard to this momentous issue” (p. 132).

After escaping slavery and settling in New England, Frederick Douglass prioritized educating himself. While working at a brass factory, “he often nailed a newspaper to the post near the bellows he operated, so he could read while he pumped the heavy beams.” This thirst for knowledge led Douglass to attend anti-slavery meetings in New England, regularly engage with abolitionist newspaper **The Liberator**, and eventually become a leader of the abolition movement (pp. 234-235).



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Rachel Carson had been paying attention to the controversy surrounding synthetic pesticides when she read an account of songbirds dying no less than a day after the synthetic pesticide DDT had been sprayed. This prompted Carson to learn all she could about the growing use of aerial pesticide spraying programs. She spoke with scientists, government officials, concerned citizens, and officials with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Food and Drug Administration. Her thorough investigation and reporting on the harmful effects of synthetic pesticides led to a nationwide ban on DDT and other pesticides (p. 409).

WELL-ROUNDED TEAMS

Seeing the importance of the work ahead of them, Shackleton, Lincoln, and Carson took care to select team members who had the right temperament for the situation, skills that complemented each other, and experience to accomplish their goals.

Rather than hire based on skill alone, Ernest Shackleton interviewed each team member looking for traits that would keep morale high in an uncertain, high-stakes environment. In his interviews, he was “searching for cheerfulness, a sense of humor, and other qualities he associated with optimism, a personal trait that he deemed essential for men on a daring, dangerous mission.” One crew member recalled being asked if he could carry a tune, which proved useful as the crewmembers sang and played music to boost their morale while trapped between the ice floes (pp. 31-32).


When Abraham Lincoln was president-elect, he staffed his cabinet with more experienced men who offered perspectives that differed from his own. Lincoln “recognized that he would need specific skills and political capital he himself lacked, and thus, he chose men who would bring these assets to the work of governing” (p. 145).

While Rachel Carson was researching and writing **Silent Spring**, she hired Bette Haney, an eager college student, to be her research assistant. The two worked closely to gather and analyze data in the early stages of Carson’s investigation, which helped her analyze articles at a faster pace. As the project continued to grow, Carson hired Jeanne Davis to be her second assistant. Bringing on Davis, who was well-versed in scientific literature, gave Carson space to complete chapters that were focused on how synthetic pesticides impact birds, wildlife, soil, and groundwater (p. 415).


CULTIVATING COMMUNITY AND EXHIBITING EMPATHY

Shackleton and Bonhoeffer employed leadership styles rooted in empathy, and both put an emphasis on fostering community through shared activities, such as playing music.

To foster, promote, and maintain camaraderie on the ship, Ernest Shackleton insisted he and his crewmates gathered for dinner each night together. During these evening gatherings they looked at photographic slides from the ship’s photographer, played games, or sang together. This tradition continued long after they abandoned the ship for shelter on the ice, which kept morale high amidst the uncertainty and frigid arctic wind. Shackleton was also “watching for ways to make the men’s food more satisfying even as stores ran down, [and] visiting each tent after dinner to recite poetry or play cards” (p. 50).



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Shackleton recognized the value of keeping his crew well-fed, celebrating each holiday with bigger portions of food. In honor of the leap year in 1916, he insisted the crew eat three full meals with hot beverages. During the 800-mile journey by rescue boat back to the South Georgia Island, Shackleton noticed one crew member seemed to struggle more than others with the cold. He ordered a round of hot milk to be served to all. This boosted the entire crew's morale without causing the one man to be singled out for his health (pp. 50-60).

In the village of Finkenwalde, located just across the present-day Polish border, Dietrich Bonhoeffer established an underground seminary "that he hoped would stand as a bastion against the false teachings of the Nazi-controlled state church." One of the hallmarks of Bonhoeffer's leadership of the seminary was his commitment to small acts of service and generosity. For example, Bonhoeffer cooked an opulent English breakfast to lift the spirits of one of his students who had become very ill (pp. 312-315).

Bonhoeffer put equal emphasis on worship, learning, and recreation in structuring the routines of students and teachers in the vibrant Finkenwalde community. After attending lectures and worship services, they gathered to play music, perform skits and musical numbers, and listen to gramophone records Bonhoeffer had brought from New York (pp. 313-314).

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

These five leaders prioritized building a network of professionals and close confidants they could turn to for support, counsel, and resources.

Throughout his political career, Abraham Lincoln understood the importance of connecting with his constituents. He traveled across villages and farms and "talked as much about crops, livestock, and a family's hopes as he did about politics. This made many feel, recalled a New Salem resident, that 'they had met a friend – one as near as a brother.'" He once encountered a group of men harvesting grain who said they could not support someone who could not work in a field, to which Lincoln grabbed a scythe and began harvesting grain alongside them. That year, Lincoln became one of four men elected to the Illinois state legislature (p. 99).

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass was integral to Lincoln's decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Douglass worked tirelessly to galvanize the Northern public, press, and government officials. "By the time Lincoln was ready to issue his proclamation, millions of people across the North believed that the war had to result in slavery's end." Douglass had garnered enough support that Lincoln knew he had the necessary political support to issue the executive order (p. 267).

Lincoln worked tirelessly to get the 13th Amendment passed, finally abolishing slavery in the United States. "He met with individual legislators, urging loyal politicians to lobby others to vote for it." Lincoln secured the passage of this amendment using the relationships he had developed throughout his political career (pp. 189-190).

Ernest Shackleton harnessed his personal connections to raise funds for his ambitious and dangerous expedition. The Royal Geographical Society, with which he had worked closely, contributed a small donation, and journalists with whom he had become friends promoted his anticipated voyage. This news coverage, coupled with Shackleton's determination, prompted donations from wealthy supporters, who supported his vision to do a land crossing of Antarctica (pp. 26-27).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer played a significant role in Operation 7, a mission that successfully smuggled 14 Jewish and other minorities from Nazi-controlled Germany into Switzerland. Bonhoeffer leveraged his ecumenical connections in Switzerland to secure visas for all. By autumn 1942, all 14 were safe (p. 335).

Rachel Carson relied on her “network of scientists, physicians, librarians, conservationists, farmers, and government officials” to investigate the effects of synthetic pesticides. “Some of these people knew the writer from her years in government. Others knew her by literary reputation, or by her scientific contributions. Still, others responded because a trusted colleague had referred her to them.” Because of their expertise and support, Carson’s well-rounded reporting on DDT prompted a call for public awareness and subsequent actions to protect the ecosystem from the destructive effects of synthetic pesticides (pp. 413-420).

CALM AND CONFIDENT IN CRISIS

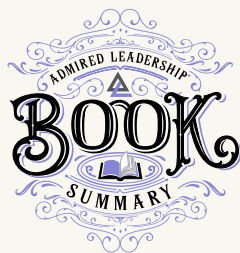
Remaining calm and appearing confident were strategic leadership decisions that lent credibility to Shackleton, Bonhoeffer, and Carson.

After being stuck between two ice floes for months, Ernest Shackleton and his crew needed to abandon their ship and begin living on the ice. In extremely grim conditions, Shackleton remained calm and optimistic in front of the crew, though he too feared for their fate (p. 42). Throughout their harrowing journey to safety, Shackleton maintained a confident façade. As his crew sailed in unforgiving icy seas, he noticed that his team was losing hope. To display his confidence in the crew’s ability to successfully sail to safety, Shackleton stood on the stern of the boat and kept watch over the men to reassure them (p. 56).

While being prosecuted before a Nazi lawyer and his associates in court, Bonhoeffer “harnessed his reserves of emotional discipline to present a calm, confident appearance during prosecutorial sessions.” During the four months of the trial, he readied himself emotionally to keep up a confident appearance (p. 350).

In an interview with CBS, Rachel Carson appeared before an estimated 10 to 15 million viewers and voiced her concerns about DDT “in a soft, confident voice.” Carson knew she needed to speak in a manner that would lend credibility to her findings, and her delivery prompted an inundation of citizen calls to agencies across the United States (pp. 430-431).

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After reading a good summary, we believe leaders are able to make better choices as to what to ignore, what to peruse and what to make the time to read closely.