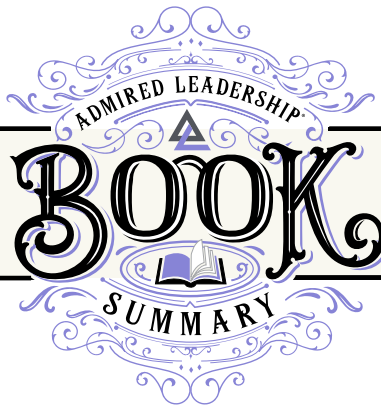




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



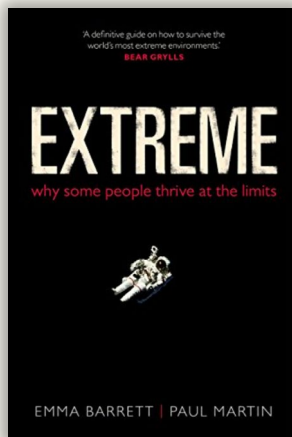
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# Extreme

Why Some People Thrive at the Limits

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Some people are driven to push the limits of the human body in extreme environments. The risk is high and surviving unforgiving conditions can be perilous without careful and meticulous preparation and planning. In **Extreme**, Emma Barrett and Paul Martin concentrate on characteristic traits found among the ambitious teams and individuals who spend years, or even decades, training, and teambuilding to conquer remote locations. Barrett and Martin spend much of the time covering the human capacity to cope with stress and how different extreme environments lead to varied forms of physiological and psychological stressors.

## Key Quote

“As the coward sees danger where there is, practically speaking, none, the reckless man does not see it where it actually exists... The really brave man does not overlook the danger. He does not let his mind dwell upon it; but if it exists, he knows just what it is.” — Charles Carroll Everett

## KEY POINTS AND CONCEPTS

### Leadership

Leaders encourage strong team members. Unlike many organizations, extreme followers are already highly motivated, and leaders must be alert to psychological changes and needs. Traditional leadership tools like expulsion or withholding privileges are denied (p. 119).

Hierarchy matters less than trust and credibility. Military psychologist Thomas Kolditz points out that leadership in extreme environments is “less about power over subordinates and more about an obligation toward their wellbeing and survival” (p. 120).

Teams in extreme environments need leaders that focus on both the mission and psychological needs of team members.

“An ‘in extremis’ leader does not ask their followers to do something they would not do themselves, [he] demonstrates concern for the welfare of their followers, and is prepared to put their followers’ needs above their own” (p. 121).

Toxic or destructive leaders rely on coercion, dominance, and manipulation. These tactics are applied to damaging leadership behaviors that are systematic and repeated.

A study surveying a large sample of the U.S. Army in 2009 found that most military members had encountered toxic leaders. Characteristics of toxic leadership were similar throughout the study which included:

- Pettiness
- Micromanagement
- Rigidity
- Indifference to the well-being of troops

While subordinates often refer to these leaders as ‘assholes’ or ‘jerks,’ toxic leaders often managed to look good to superiors.

### Conquering Fear

Those who enter extreme environments must cope with physical pressures like fluctuating temperatures or pressure, lack of oxygen, or noise. Other pressures may include difficulties like squallor, pain, thirst, and bad sleep (p. 9).

Cognitive appraisal is the process of assessing stressors. Influenced by feelings beneath cognizance, individuals assess the practical implications of worsening physical or psychological conditions (p. 10).

“Fear is an adaptive response that starts rapidly when the threat appears and ends when the threat goes away.” According to Barrett and Martin, fear comes in three different dimensions (p. 15):


- 1. Physiological arousal** is the fight-or-flight response to an acute stressor, which can cause a racing pulse, clammy hands, or rapid breathing.
- 2. Cognitive response** includes the appraisal of situations and consideration of possible outcomes.
- 3. Behavioral responses** such as avoiding or escaping are possible when faced with a fear-inducing stressor.

Anxiety differs from fear in that it is “triggered by less specific or less tangible threats, including a general apprehension about possible future events or personal concerns” (p. 15).


While facing fear stressors Barrett and Martin emphasize bravery. “Stanley Rachman, a central figure in the psychological study of bravery, described it as ‘persistence in the face of subjective and physical sensation of fear’” (p. 20).

One can train to become better prepared to cope with threatening situations, and the better trained you are, the better your decisions are likely to be.

Bravery can be a surprisingly common human capacity and has been found to be contagious. During World War II, the government wanted to know how Londoners might respond to sustained bombings. Psychiatrists predicted panic and trauma. Instead, people adapted quickly and displayed little fear. Both bravery and fear are contagious. Acting the part of role model can reduce fear in one’s self (p. 21).



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Recklessness comes from those who often purposefully put themselves in the face of danger when they aren't prepared or ready to manage stressors. Reckless behaviors have several common contributing factors (pp. 24-25):

- Adolescents and young adults are more common to engage in reckless behaviors and activities versus older people and children.
- Various personality traits contribute to recklessness. Personalities susceptible to sensation seeking, aggression, impulsiveness, susceptibility to boredom, and egocentrism have been found to engage in reckless behaviors.
- Social influences like family, culture, and peers play major roles in influencing individuals to behave recklessly. One study found that “the best predictors of recklessness were sensation-seeking personality, peer influence, and ‘present-time perspective’ (the tendency to focus on the here-and-now rather than the future).”
- To best manage fear, manipulate one of the three elements: physiological, cognitive, and behavioral. Practice relaxation techniques to reduce physical stressors, appraise situations so they seem less daunting, or equip yourself with tools and responses to various situations.

## Sleep

Sleep deprivation is problematic in perilous situations where cognitive demands run high, and consequences can be damaging. Leaders in extreme conditions must make decisions based on incomplete information, while still needing to communicate directions, track problems, and monitor team members who share sleep deprivation.

Studies show that after sixteen hours of consciousness, a person will start to exhibit cognitive slowness, delayed reaction time, memory problems, and difficulty maintaining attention (p. 48).

Sleep deprivation causes many effects like alcohol and some people tend to behave as if they were drunk.

Caffeine and napping are the two most common remedies for sleep deprivation.

Tactical napping is the ability to sleep in short, yet efficient, bursts. “Extensive evidence confirms that napping significantly improves the alertness, reaction times, performances, and mood of sleep-deprived people.” The slow-wave sleep cycle that occurs during a short nap helps with the processing and formation of new memories, additionally mitigating the effects of sleep deprivation on the immune system (pp. 53-54).

“Winston Churchill was renowned for working extremely long hours, yet he really was an enthusiastic napper” (p. 53).

Caffeine will moderately counter the effects of sleep deprivation. It will not combat the negative effects of sleep deprivation on the immune system and will adversely affect the consumer's ability to fall asleep. However, a small amount of caffeine has been shown to increase cognitive functions, and raise levels of alertness, energy, and mood (p. 54).



*Studies show that after sixteen hours of consciousness, a person will start to exhibit cognitive slowness, delayed reaction time, memory problems, and difficulty maintaining attention.*




## Cross Culture Capabilities

When embarking on an extended journey there will often be groups of people who have been chosen based on technical expertise, experience, education, or other qualities. These groups are not always culturally homogenous, and friction can quickly hit a boiling point.


Three crews of scientists, researchers, and astronauts were gathered in July 1999 for a ten-month experiment to test how a culturally diverse group of people may react to being locked in small confines for future deep space missions. Crew 1 was entirely Russian, Crew 2 had three Russians and one German, and Crew 3 was a mix of Russian, Austrian, Japanese, and Canadian (the only female participating). Tensions boiled over during a New Year's party when the Russian crew broke out into a bloody brawl and one attempted to kiss the Canadian. Afterward, many of the participants began to become suspicious of the controllers of the experiment, seeing them as "faceless foreigners" and Crew 3 went as far as to barricade one module door to prevent mixing with Crew 1. Researchers assessed what had happened during this experiment and settled on several conclusions (pp. 90-91):

- Cultural differences made it hard to coalesce cultural habits, trends, and norms. Crew 3 thought Crew 1 had overreacted to the New Year's incident stating that what happened would have been seen as the norm in their culture.
- The crew had no training in cross-cultural management or sensitivity.
- The shared lack of a common language caused difficulty in communication, isolation, and led to many preventable squabbles.
- The participants had been chosen solely on their skills, expertise, and enthusiasm rather than social capabilities.
- Social pressures can be hard in extreme environments, especially when confined to small spaces, and social conflicts are powerful stressors. Ultimately, surviving extreme environments and demanding situations, as in everyday life, boils down to being tolerant and tolerable.

Barrett, M. & Martin, P. (2014). **Extreme: Why some people thrive at the limits.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.



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