

The Race to the South Pole

Are you **Scott** or **Amundsen**?

(Jim Collins, 2011, “Great by Choice: Uncertainty, Chaos and Luck – Why Some Thrive Despite Them All”)

“Our **[bad] luck** in weather is preposterous” ... “it is more than our share of ill-fortune ... how great may be the element of **[bad] luck!**”

(Robert Scott)

“Victory awaits him who has everything in order; **[good] luck** people call it. Defeat is certain for him who has neglected to take the necessary precautions in time; this is called **bad luck**” (Roald Amundsen)

“**Unlike Scott, Amundsen systematically built enormous buffers for unforeseen events.** A single detail aptly highlights the difference in their approaches: **Scott brought one thermometer for a key altitude-measurement device and he exploded in “an outburst of wrath and consequence” when it broke;** Amundsen brought four such thermometers to cover for accidents. Amundsen designed the entire journey to systematically reduce the role of big forces and chance events by embracing the possibility of those very same big forces and chance events. He presumed bad events might strike his team somewhere along the journey and he prepared for them.

Scott’s Philosophy: “Robert Scott presents quite a contrast to Amundsen. He could have trained like a maniac on cross country skis and taken a thousand mile bike ride. He did not. He could have gone to live with the Eskimos. He did not. He could have practiced more with dogs, making himself comfortable with choosing dogs over ponies. He did not. Scott chose ponies. Scott also bet on motor sledges that hadn’t been fully tested in extreme conditions. Scott left himself unprepared and complained in his journal about his **bad luck.**”

Amundsen’s Philosophy: You don’t wait until you are in an unexpected storm to discover that you need more strength and endurance. You don’t wait until you’re shipwrecked to determine if you can eat raw dolphin. You don’t wait until you’re on the Antarctic journey to become a superb skier and dog handler. You prepare with intensity, all the time, so that when conditions turn against you, you can draw from a deep reservoir of strength. And equally, you prepare so that when conditions turn in your favor, you can strike hard.”

The other led his team to defeat and death.

One leader led his team to victory and safety.