



## Our Iceberg Is Melting

John Kotter, 2006, St. Martin's Press

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Prof. John Kotter says "Management books are read only by a limited number of senior people in any organization, including B-schools, whereas Leadership has to go deep in the system to secure the best transformation change.

"Our iceberg is melting" has been acknowledged as a book to be read by everyone from CEOs to high school students. This is a gem, US defense department ordered five hundred for the staff distribution.

The book tells the story, as to how the beautiful emperor penguins, living in Antarctic Penguin colony for ages, take the road to change from the secure iceberg, firmly believed "Not To Melt" at any time, to safer place before the disaster strikes and how they come to accept a nomadic life. This fable has a totally positive approach.

Our age old panchtantra tales bring out series of morals, but mostly from negative instances. Kotter's fable deals with all problems faced in any organization in a sea of change and how step by step positive approach solves, ultimately leading to success.

Let us see how the eight-stage process of creating change is brought out in the penguin fable.

The truly beautiful Emperor Penguins, the largest of the seventeen types, were living for ages in the iceberg that will never melt, surrounded by a sea rich in fish and food... Secure in their safe haven, they lived together as a family, in management terminology, as an excellent team. Any change in their living style was just beyond their imagination.

While all penguins were busy collecting and stocking fish for the severe Antarctic winter, one unique penguin, Fred,

was behaving differently-curious and unusually observant. Every day, he observed the iceberg behavior and over a period, sometimes swimming into the crevices, noticing a canal filled with water, and observing freezing and expanding so as to break. He analysed the data he collected and came to the conclusion that the iceberg of ages is melting and might break and would threaten the existence of the penguin family. Fred, a penguin of the largest group of two hundred sixty eight, seems to be a born leader, at his level, intuitive and curious.

Here it would be appropriate to ask a question-"Is Leader born or made?" Let us ask Jack. Jack says it is both but the basics-IQ and energy is inborn; the other, confidence can be experienced and learnt. Shall we say it is 80% inborn and 20% acquired? In our case, Fred is really a born leader, as he has all the three.

Fred felt he has to take the initiative to establish a SENSE of URGENCY. He talked to one close to the Head of penguins, Alice, a member of the ten member leadership council and known for her aggressive, practical, "make things happen" and "cuts across status" to achieve the impossible. Alice was not easily convinced but agreed to go with Fred into the heart of the iceberg. Fred pointed out the fissures, the clear symptoms of deterioration, caused by melting; then through a canal that led into a spacious cave filled with water. In the cold Antarctic winter, the canal and cave water will freeze, dramatically expanding in volume, leading to iceberg breaking to pieces overnight without any warning. This unexpected phenomenon will drown the penguins in a flash, destroying the whole community. Alice grasped the gravity of the problem, more so with the dreadful Antarctic winter just

two months away and the enormity of the task of moving the whole community to a safe abode and that too to be found expeditiously.

Alice met Louis, the head and Leader and apprised him of Fred's findings and how she got convinced by personal visits and persuaded him to call the leadership council. At the request of Louis, Fred made a presentation through a model of the iceberg, removed the top structure, created a cave, filled with water and left it to the cold winds after closing the top. The next day Fred showed how the water had frozen, expanded and broken the walls of the cave. Still the council members were not convinced. Louis asked Fred to come up with something more convincing. Fred collected a glass bottle that had washed ashore, filled it with water, sealed it with fish bone and dug it inside the real ice crate. The next day, another enthusiastic Penguin, Buddy, was given the task of retrieving the bottle. The bottle had broken under the weight of the water frozen to hard ice and expanded. The council was now convinced and the Sense of Urgency sank deep.

What next? Louis thought about "Creating a Guiding Coalition", comprising himself with Leadership skills and credibility, Alice for her authoritative approach, Professor with his logical communication, Fred analytical and Buddy trustworthy and not ambitious. It now behooves Louis, the leader, to decide what to do - develop the change vision and strategy. Leadership council is now convinced, but to arrive at a solution with consensus, all the elder penguins are to be taken into confidence. Alice advised Louis to call the general assembly to communicate the change vision. Louis called the general assembly with no agenda. All adults showed up. Alice and Fred showed the model and Buddy presented the experiment of broken bottle. All were stunned. Many couldn't believe. Louis, Alice, Fred are not professional change experts but at the end succeeded in infusing the Sense of Urgency and the need to give up complacency.

Mere communication is not the end. Louis, the leader, has to "Make It Happen". He cannot act alone. He took the next step- Empowering a broad based action. He named the guiding coalition members as the team and ensured that this five pulled together to work on the needed change.

What is this needed change? Where to begin? Alice came up with the idea of talking to others, other than penguins in the colony. Here again reservations. Whom to? Can they identify the perfect iceberg, no melting, no exposed caves, no fissures, and no need to move out again? Only a dream. Rethinking. The ice berg melts, others also will in course of time. Look for the others who can give a way out. As usual, the ever observant Fred suggests talking to seagulls, flying

from one place to another, but not forever. Means, seagulls change their abode as and when needed. Louis responded, saying "We are thinking about the possibility of a new and very different way of life.

Finally, all went in search of a seagull. Fred noted one. The seagull was scared. Louis allayed his fears. Then the seagull said "I am a scout; I fly ahead of the clan, looking for where we might live next; highlighting their nomadic existence. The concept of nomadic existence, as the way out, dawned upon the five.

Penguins are different. They cannot fly. They need delicious fish. They enjoy all the time. Their family ties are very strong. Professor realized 'if melting and degradation is taking place for a long time and manifests itself all of a sudden, what do we do. He came to the conclusion that penguins will have to change their age old habits and accept what is there. He shared his views with the other four and they came to the final conclusion that nomadic life is the way out. Thus the team succeeded in creating a VISION of A NEW Future, a nomad colony, with no fixed home. We can learn from the seagulls.

It is all ok with the five. How to get this vision accepted by all as the entire community has to willingly accept, cooperate and move out-really a daunting task. Communicating the change vision is the task of the leader. Louis realized and took up the challenge. He called the general assembly, talked about penguins' unity, brotherhood, strong responsibility, and love for the young. Then, he asked Buddy to explain the scouting, to explore to find good territory, free to move to anywhere to live a good life. Keep moving and the only aim is to live comfortably and educate the young how to live comfortably through change.

To propagate and to get this vision sink in the minds of everyone and secure total acceptance, conceived creating posters all over. This attracted the attention of everyone, the young, the old, women and children. Teaching in the school was directed to portrait the coming change with the cooperation of the teachers, so that the total change of life becomes something not taking anyone by surprise. Thus communicating the new vision of a nomadic life, of a very different future was remarkably successful. This vision became the talk of the town.

The next step was empowering broad based action. Enthusiasm was high but where to find enough fish, that too constantly moving like a nomad, calling for all time scouting. There was the attendant danger of killer whales, lurking around in new surrounding, which itself is not the end, from the present safe haven, thus germinating reluctance

to accept the change. Louis came up with the idea 'first scouting'. He invited fifty young penguins. The school children, now oriented to the change, gave a fitting sendoff to the team. The community that always practiced to providing for its own family was persuaded to provide the food for the scouts, a change in the life style. Children joined in persuading their reluctant parents to accept the change. Louis, then, conceived 'celebrating Heroes day' to welcome the scouts, with games, band, raffle and events of great fun. The broken bottle was given to Sally Ann, an enthusiastic youngster. The scouts were garlanded with Hero medals. Fred and his scouts thus succeeded in creating a short term vision on a long term project. Scouting went full swing.

The first wave of scouts brought back some information. More birds volunteered and the second wave went in search of a single iceberg. With the tempo going up and down among the penguins, the second wave came up with the finding of an iceberg, equipped with a tall strong snow wall to protect them from icy storms, a safe home with no evidence of melting or water filling the caves and close to fishing sites. Also located on a route with small icebergs or ice plateaus along the way to give the youngest and the oldest penguins some rest during the tiresome long journey.

On May 12, just before the start of dreadful Antarctic winter, the birds began their move to their new home, not a moment too soon. At one point, some penguins lost the trail but they made up. Louis's leadership was so effective; he was admired and respected by one and all. The new home had problems but the penguins got used to face problems. The next season, scouts found a better, larger iceberg, with richer fishing grounds. The penguins, thus, learnt to keep moving, not becoming complacent and not letting up.

Louis was persuaded by Alice to shake up the leadership council and pack it with young, energetic and enthusiastic. With a strong imaginative scout selection, the search for new and safer iceberg to carry on the nomadic life became

a regular feature. Louis asked for retirement. Alice was unanimously elected as the Head, with Fred in the council and the professor as consultant for constant vigil for weather changes.

Louis, the grand father figure, taught the new little ones the great adventures and prepared their young minds to accept and adapt to the constant change. He told them:

1. Found the sensible vision of a better future, in the midst of insurmountable obstacles.
2. How they created a sense of urgency in the colony to deal with difficult problems
3. How he put a carefully selected group in charge of guiding change.
4. Communicated that vision to everyone through novel methods so as to secure complete understanding and acceptance.
5. Removed all obstacles that came in the way and took the right practical action.
6. To keep alive the need for constant action and securing subscription of everyone, how he created some sort short term success quickly.
7. Never let up until the new way of life was firmly established.
8. Finally, ensured that changes shall not be overcome by stubborn hard- to-die traditions.

So ends the Fable on Leadership to bring change.

What is the key lesson we learn from this seemingly simple FABLE, apart from the practical application of the eight process of successful change. It is the fusion of Leadership and Management; Leadership, establishing direction, aligning people, motivating, and inspiring, producing change (like new products, customers' wants, new approach to labour relations to ensure competitiveness) and Management functioning as the executive arm of the leadership.