

Relationship-Building – Lessons from Mutiny on the Bounty

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Introduction

Mutiny on the Bounty is one of the rare films that have been produced thrice – 1935, 1962, and 1984. The films bring out three key leadership lessons.

One, the pursuit of **dual goals** is distractive. You may recall the South Pole expeditions led by Captain Robert Scott and the Norwegian Roald Amundsen. The main reason why Amundsen beat Scott to the race by one month was because his goal was simple and direct: *Reach the South Pole first*. Scott, on the other hand, also wanted to conduct scientific experiments en route. In the process he lost strategic focus and encumbered his logistics. Captain William Bligh, the captain of the *Bounty*, was mandated to collect breadfruit plants from Tahiti and deliver them to the native plantations in Jamaica. When the ship reached Tahiti, the sensuality of this Pacific Island was so attractive, that some of the sailors got married to the natives and enjoyed the lay pleasures of the island and its people for over five months. In the process Bligh lost complete focus on his goal.

Two, Bligh was a believer of **mission first, people second**. To him people were expendable and secondary to the success of his mission. Bligh is quoted as saying, *“It is a matter of supernatural indifference to me whether you contaminate the natives or the natives contaminate you. I have but one concern – our mission.”*

Bligh’s relationship with his seamen was contemptuous to put it mildly. The conversation goes something like this:

Bligh: *“What’s your name?”*

Seaman Thomas Ellison: *Thomas Ellison, sir. Pressed into service. Got a wife, a baby.”*

Bligh: *I asked you your name, not the history of your misfortunes.”*

After the death of one sailor as a result of an order by Bligh, Fletcher requests for a proper burial. Bligh explodes at him, *“Never mind Norman! We lost one full league before I countermanded your order.”* He may have been able to achieve his mandate had he motivated his crew on why it was important to take the breadfruit saplings to the West Indies. It is not enough to have a goal and even keep on sharing it ad nauseam. Leaders down the chain must explain why the goal has been selected in the first place? And how the goal will benefit those affected?

Three, one direct fallout of the belief that people should be subordinated to the mission was the low importance Bligh gave to **relationships**. Bligh is on record to say, *“Why should an alleged gentleman give his first loyalty to ordinary seamen?”* This is an

