

The Table Rock Lake Tragedy – Leadership has Consequences, Good or Bad

On a sunny Summer day near Branson, Arkansas, a group of folks embarked on a duck boat tour; 31 people in all. Little did they know the tragedy facing them as the amphibious vehicle entered Table Rock Lake.

Before the tour, Captain Scott looked at the weather forecast and noticed a severe thunderstorm warning. The warning didn't deter him. He was an experienced captain and was confident that the tour could proceed as usual.

After the passengers embarked on *Stretch Duck 7*, Captain Scott shared brief safety instructions. He mentioned there were life jackets on board, but the passengers wouldn't need them.

Then it hit. An intense thunderstorm seemed to come out of nowhere. The storm's 75mph straight-line winds created four-foot waves. Captain Scott struggled to keep control of *Stretch Duck 7*. As part of standard operating procedures, he didn't speed up the boat and try to make it to shore.

Water began swamping the boat. Trying to appear calm and confident, he told the passengers not to worry, that they wouldn't need their life jackets, and stay seated.

Trusting Captain Scott's words, none of the passengers put on the easily accessible life jackets. Then, the boat's plastic curtains were lowered, blocking the exits for some reason. The passengers were trapped and couldn't abandon the ship even if the order was given.

Stretch Duck 7 began to sink and quickly submerged, taking its passengers with it. Tragically, seventeen people drowned; nine

members from one family perished in the accident. Fourteen people survived, including Captain Scott.

View accident video here: <https://youtu.be/d5TCXz3taJk>

For some reason, the Table Rock Lake tragedy captured my attention last Summer. I was curious about Captain Scott's alleged negligence and inattention to duties. I began to wonder how I would act in a crisis? What leadership lessons can be learned by examining what not to do? Why did Captain Scott dismiss the warning signs? Why did he not direct the passengers to put on life jackets? Why didn't Scott speed up the boat and head to shore? Why did he put the boat's plastic curtains down, trapping the passengers even if an abandon ship order was given? Why did the passengers merely comply with the captain's orders and not act?

I don't know the answers to all of the above questions. The accident is still under investigation, and Captain Scott is awaiting trial on negligence and inattention to duties charges.

What I do know is that leadership has consequences, good or bad. The decision of Captain Scott resulted in lost lives and a sunken ship. So, what should you do when faced with a crisis and avoid Captain Scott's mistakes. I discovered the following principles:

- **Hope for the best; prepare for the worst.** Optimism and confidence come from preparation. But if one fails to prepare, they prepare to fail. Ask what's the worst thing that can happen before a crisis strikes, and do everything within your control to be ready for it. Captain Scott didn't appear prepared for the emergency in front of him, or he had a false sense of confidence that he could navigate through the storm.
- **Assess the situation.** A leader's job is to define reality. Ask what happened, what are the root causes,

alternative solutions, and implications? Where do you want to be? Determine the facts and let them guide your decision-making. Captain Scott's circumstances arose very quickly, and he exercised poor judgment.

- **Act quickly but not carelessly.** Once you define reality, act but don't act in haste. Captain Scott acted negligently as he tried to maintain control of the ship. Had he chosen to accelerate toward the shore and ordered the passengers to put on their life jackets, the outcome may have been entirely different.
- **Convey confidence.** Leaders must respond in a crisis; people look to you for assurance and direction. You must remain calm and appear confident, so your followers will be confident as well. But like Captain Scott, appearing confident won't help the situation if you don't prepare for the worst, assess the situation and act wisely.

What does the tragedy at Table Rock Lake teach us? That leadership has consequences, good or bad. Our decisions and actions matter. I recommend that you take the time to think through how you'd handle a crisis – professionally or personally. Your mental preparation may make all the difference.

Want to discover how to become a leader others will gladly follow? Please visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston