



**The
Mobile
Life**

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to our parents for giving us the experiences and upbringing that made this book possible.

DIANE LEMIEUX • ANNE PARKER

The Mobile Life

**MASTER
THE CHALLENGE
OF MOVING
SOMEWHERE NEW**

**REVISED
EDITION**

© Diane Lemieux, Anne Parker

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



Foreword by Carry Turk	7
<i>Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition</i>	8
Chapter 1 The modern-day explorer	10
<i>Shackleton's aspirations in Antarctica</i>	18
Chapter 2 Choose to explore	20
<i>Shackleton's audacious mission</i>	34
Chapter 3 Envisage your future	36
<i>Shackleton selects his team</i>	52
Chapter 4 Lead the way	54
<i>Shackleton's preparations amid looming war</i>	72
Chapter 5 Prepare to set sail	74
<i>Shackleton faces unusual Antarctic conditions</i>	86
Chapter 6 New territory	88
<i>Optimism and unity on Shackleton's expedition</i>	110
Chapter 7 New neighbours	112
<i>Shackleton's crew make a life on the ice</i>	132
Chapter 8 Settle down	134
<i>The end of Shackleton's expedition</i>	146
Chapter 9 The mobile lifestyle	148
About the authors	157
Further Reading	158

FOREWORD



THE MODERN WORLD IS RELENTLESSLY global and many of its citizens, in response, are necessarily and increasingly mobile. I am one such citizen; in the terminology that this book presents, I have been an expat, a repat, an impat, raising ‘Third Culture Kids’ and requiring a spouse to ‘trail’ after my work. Moving back and forth across four continents, we’ve encountered challenges in many domains – cultural, climatic, logistic, culinary, financial, professional and personal. Most of those obstacles we were able to resolve over time, though not necessarily with great efficiency. For us it has been more of a ‘crossing the river by feeling the stones’ than a systematic, pre-emptive approach.

Lemieux’s and Parker’s pragmatic book provides a handbook for the increasing numbers of people who interact with this modern, global world by embarking on a life of mobility – people like me and people like the authors. I’ve been an admiring observer of one of the authors for many years. I have watched her resettle, enjoy, and finally leave complicated locations and wondered how she has managed these moves with such enviable levels of positivity and efficiency. Now I know the answers.

This is a handbook that I wish I had read many years ago. Few of the readers will be preparing voyages as epic as those of the book’s guiding light and hero, the renowned explorer of the Antarctic, Sir Ernest Shackleton. But the book captures for the reader some of that spirit of adventure that propelled one of the great explorers of the last century and frames the daunting prospect of international resettlement in the realm of the positive, the adventurous, the rewarding, the ‘can-do’.

Bon Voyage to my fellow readers.

CARRY TURK
Country Manager World Bank Ethiopia

ADVENTURE AND EXPLORATION

Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition

ANTARCTICA'S LANDSCAPE is shaped by gales of sub-zero winds and the colossal strength of ice as it expands and contracts with the shifting of frigid ocean currents. At the turn of the 20th century, this vast, uninhabited black and white continent was the last, unexplored frontier. As Europe struggled in turmoil at the cusp of war and massive change, a handful of explorers became national heroes with their tales of adventure, ingenuity and determination in their struggle to conquer this unimaginably raw and inhospitable place. In Europe, this period of exploration is known as the Heroic Age. The men who left the comforts and routines of their homes sailed to these forbidding shores not so much out of a desire to discover, as in the expeditions to Africa and Asia of the 19th century and the discovery of 'new worlds' before that: these men set out largely to test the limits of their own endurance against the sheer unforgiving power of nature.

Sir Ernest Shackleton is recognised as one of the great explorers of this period. As a young officer in the British Empire's merchant navy he had travelled to Africa and the East. In 1901, at the age of 27, he accompanied Captain Robert Falcon Scott on his National Antarctic Expedition: in three months they covered over 1600 miles (2600 km) on skis, got to within 745 miles (1200 km) of the pole, and, suffering from scurvy and exhaustion, barely made it back to their ship alive.

In 1907, Shackleton led his own expedition during which he managed to get to within 97 miles (156 km) of the South Pole. In 1911/12, two teams again set out to conquer the South Pole: the Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, and Captain Scott. With a fundamentally better understanding of snow and ice, Amundsen beat Scott to the South Pole by one month.

Scott recognised his defeat – he saw Amundsen's tracks in the snow. Worse still, he and his three companions died on their return journey, a story remembered today through the diaries kept by the men and later found and returned to the families.

Shackleton, fully aware of the challenges and risks men faced in Antarctica, had plans to regain his nation's honour. In August of 1914, he and 27 men set out from London aboard the *Endurance* with the intention of becoming the first to cross the frozen continent from one shore to the other. The herculean ambition of this goal is difficult to translate into modern terms: the terrain is, in fact, so extreme that it is only in the South Polar summer of 1957-1958 (43 years later) that a second attempt was made at this same crossing. Dr. Vivian E. Fuchs and his team laboured for nearly four strenuous and tortuous months, during which he was strongly urged to give up. He ignored the advice and did, finally, succeed.

Shackleton and his crew did not have the benefit of Fuchs' heated, tracked vehicles, radios, reconnaissance planes and trained dog teams, nor modern outdoor clothing, protective gear and supplies. This tale of unimaginable hardships and suffering, of determination and survival, is the source of Shackleton's reputation as one of the greatest leaders ever recorded.

CHAPTER 1

THE MODERN-DAY EXPLORER



TODAY, FEW CORNERS OF OUR PLANET remain unexplored. And yet, the urge to discover new places, to experience the unknown and test our personal limits survives. On reality-TV, a couple roll up their sleeves to start renovating their dream home in a foreign country, or a group of young people test their survival skills deep in the Amazon jungle. In these shows, individuals test their physical or psychological limits and experience the unfamiliar in order to achieve a dream.

Packing up and moving to live in a new country is another form of exploration and in some ways similar to this televised version of adventure. We leave the comforts and ease of our familiar world and head off into the great unknown. It is an exciting, adrenalin-filled journey, an opportunity to fulfil ambitions and discover places we don't know.

On the other hand, moving to live somewhere new is nothing like the televised version of travel. Those of us who leave in order to establish a new home in a different environment do not have a crew preparing

the adventure before we arrive, standing ready to whisk us out of danger when the going gets too rough. We don't have off-camera 'down time' or a safety net.

Our new life is nothing like the old: at home, we occasionally drive to work

and wonder how we got there because the journey is so routine that we can allow our minds to wander. Out there, in that new environment,

To relocate = to move from one place to another

To resettle = to re-establish a good life in a new place

nothing is routine; everything – including how to get to work and where to buy a loaf of bread – is an undertaking that requires concentration. Once we arrive at our destination, only our flexibility, self-motivation and problem-solving skills will help us tackle the daily challenges we face in trying to re-establish a life in this new place.

Not a tourist

The adventure of establishing a life in a new location is also nothing like being a tourist. The world's massive tourist industry allows individuals to explore any part of the planet at whatever level of comfort they may desire, from unscheduled backpacking to five-star organised trips. Such voyages have the added luxury of being finite – the tourist knows that they will soon return to the comforts of home. When you move to live in a new country, you are there long-term. Even a three-year posting is long when you live your adventure 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for weeks on end. There is no tour guide to explain local procedures, no travel agency to solve problems. Moving to live somewhere new is an all-encompassing, life-altering event.

Therefore, this book begins from the premise that anyone who leaves the comfort of his or her known environment to set up a home in a new location – a resettler – is a modern-day explorer: moving to another city within the same country; changing between urban and rural settings; leaving your parent's home for the first time; moving to a university or college away from home; moving to an entirely new country or retiring in a new environment... For every move between locations, you go through a process of adjustment in order to establish a new life for yourself. In this book, we take many examples from international moves because of the extreme complexity of having to adjust to a new cultural and/or linguistic environment. However, the skills discussed here are applicable to anyone who moves from one established 'home' to another location that will become a new 'home'.

What's so hard about moving?

Some people seem to be naturals at the mobile life – they move happily from one place to another and seem well adjusted everywhere. Other people wouldn't dream of moving away from their hometown. It is worth remembering that there are hundreds of thousands of people who live in a place that is not the location of their birth or their passport nation. The fact that so many people do it, and live normal, well-adjusted lives, means that it is both possible and can be a desirable lifestyle choice.

INTERNATIONAL LABELS

- An **expatriate** is most often used to describe someone (and his or her family) who is transferred by his or her company, organisation or government for a short period of time.
 - **Impats**, from the point of view of the locals, are the foreigners who come into the country for work.
 - **Re-pats** are those who return to their country of origin after a stint abroad
 - The partners of international employees are sometimes called **trailing, accompanying or expatriate spouses**.
 - The children of expatriates are known as **third culture kids (TCK's)**, defined as a child who lives a significant portion of their childhood in a country other than the country of their parents' origin. A more recent term for all of the above is the **global nomad**, a term that implies frequent or recurrent moves.
- **International students** in higher education are often excluded from the 'expat' label though they are also generally short-term sojourners to a new country.
- **Immigrants** are generally understood to be people who move to a new country with the intention of staying there permanently.

However, moving to live somewhere new is not without its difficulties. We are used to thinking that the process of moving from A to B involves a series of events that are dealt with by ticking off a long list of ‘things to do’. We sell or rent the house, have a goodbye party and buy plane, train or bus tickets. We research housing, the university programme, and how to buy a car; we find schools for the kids and locate the local stores.

But to resettle is far more than *relocating* – physically moving from one place to another: it is a process in which we deal with the huge amount

- o **Economic migrants** move in the hope of finding better conditions in the new country.
- o **Knowledge migrants** are highly educated individuals who accept a job opportunity (often with a local company) in a foreign country.
- o **Refugees** have the added difficulty of having been forced to leave their country of origin.
- o **Love-pats** are individuals who move to a country to join their partner in his or her country of origin.

The problem with labels is they often lead to stereotypes and clichés: after how many years in a country does an expat become an immigrant? Why are expats often (incorrectly) assumed to be from western industrialised countries and immigrants from developing ones? Both expats and immigrants are criticised for not adapting to the local culture or language. And yet, in reality, many do.

In this book, we avoid these identity labels and instead talk about the **resettler** – the individual who moves to live somewhere new. Resettling is a process: no matter how far, for how long or why one moves, everyone experiences a period of adjustment to their new environment.

of change that occurs in our lives as a result of the move. Since the late 1960s, studies have linked major life events to increased stress levels that affect health or emotional well-being. Resettling is one of the most stressful 'life events' because it affects every aspect of our lives, including our social networks, our personal and professional identities, our economic circumstances and every one of our daily routines.

As we deal with the logistical challenges of relocating, we can overlook the emotional and psychological aspects involved in resettling. These include:

- Leaving everything that is familiar to us
- Facing the unknown
- Disrupting our social and family networks
- Losing the identity which came with these networks
- Rebuilding new social ties
- Re-establishing a new 'daily life'
- Rebuilding our identity in a new environment.

Instead of handling the process of moving to live somewhere new as a logistical puzzle, resettling is most usefully viewed as a project in managing change. There are, however, few resources that support people through the change they face when *everything* in their life changes. In this book we do just that – we apply the theory and techniques of change management to the process of resettling.

How to use this book

The chapters in this book are organised chronologically. They begin at the point at which a decision must be taken: to move or not to move. Once the decision is taken, chapters lead you through the process of preparing for the journey, then through the process of arriving, settling in, and establishing a life long-term. You may, of course, dip in at any point in the book. However, even if you have already arrived at your destination, we strongly suggest you read the pre-departure chapters from the begin-

ning: sometimes the difficulties we experience in settling in at a new location are rooted in things we did or didn't do before arriving.

An episode of Sir Ernest Shackleton's epic voyage precedes each chapter. These sections are easily identifiable by the coloured paper should you wish to read the story in one go. Though Shackleton and his crew did not intend to move to live in Antarctica, the polar expedition is an excellent case study in the design and execution of a project of going elsewhere and the process of adapting to change. Each episode reflects perfectly the theme of the chapter that follows.

SHACKLETON'S EXPEDITION

- **Who:** Sir Ernest Shackleton, captain and 27 men
- **What:** To become the first to cross Antarctica
- **Where:** On the Endeavour
- **When:** August 1914
- **Why:** For the honour of Britain

Your expedition: moving somewhere new

Whether you are moving for the first time or are an experienced resettler, chances are that you have never considered the personal experience of moving in terms of it being a project that requires you to plan, manage and motivate yourself through change. Even individuals who have experienced multiple moves in the past may not be aware of the range of abilities they have developed through their experiences. Our aim in this book is to help you become effective *change agents* in order to manage the challenges of uprooting your life and starting somewhere new.

Throughout this book, we describe the information you need, the skills that are most useful and the mind-set that helps you actively create a good life for yourself at your new location. In this way, we aim to make you aware of the knowledge, skills and attitudes you have developed so that you can apply them consciously to any change in your life.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

In **organisational theory**, change management helps individuals, teams, departments and entire organisations adjust to change. Change agents are designated individuals who have the skills, knowledge and attitudes to lead their co-workers through the process.

In the field of **personal development**, change management helps individuals initiate change for themselves or adjust to major life events such as divorce or retirement. In the context of resettling somewhere new, a change agent is someone who can lead themselves and their family members through the adjustment processes required to establish a home in a new environment.

In this chapter we established the fact that to resettle is to leave ‘home’ in order to establish a new ‘home’, and that this process will mean dealing with change. In the next chapter you will think about the nature of the change that will occur in your life. Making a conscious choice to accept the challenge of change is the first step in experiencing a successful mobile life.

YOUR EXPEDITION

No matter how far or near, different or similar your destination is to where you are now, your life will change. Keeping Shackleton’s story in mind, how would you describe your expedition?

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?

