

# Using Movies in Management Classes: An Instructor's Guide

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Feel free to use any of this material in your teaching. There is much more to these movies than can be conveyed by the materials. If you want to collaborate or talk about movies, I'd love to hear from you!

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<u>Page</u>	<u>Outline</u>
2	Surprise—the theater of class
3	Some movies I've used
4	Casablanca and Runaway Train—same same but different
	Casablanca
5	Teaching notes
7	Writing assignment
	Runaway Train
9	Writing assignment
10	A review written for a website
11	Notes to wrap up after using student papers for class discussion
	Ernest Shackleton
12	Overview for entrep, strategy, and management principles classes
13	Writing assignment
14	Shackleton/Enron final exam essay question for principles class
15	Slides for class discussion
16	Course outline—Management in the Movies

## Surprise—the theater of class

I think it is useful to think of class in terms of theater. The first and last days are the opening and closing acts, and they matter. The first, and final, moments of a play, opera, or movie are important—why shouldn't we think of class the same way? A great course opening focuses attention, much as a great final day conveys a lasting message. In beginnings, think of the movie *Lord of War*, with its “life of a bullet” opening sequence, or *Apocalypse Now*, with smoke, fire, and The Doors’ song “The End”.

For me, surprise is a useful and fun tool.

For more than a decade now, on the first day of class I go in early and hide in the back, dressed in jeans and a hoodie or baseball cap. If there’s anyone on the roster that has had me before, they know to keep the secret. When I was younger, I’d talk to people sitting next to me. Now, with a few gray hairs, I bury my face and appear to be asleep. A few minutes after class should have started, they become restless. When the perfect moment arrives, I stand up and start talking as I walk to the front of the room. With a few gasps, the class immediately falls silent. That little act of surprise effortlessly secures their full, undivided attention.

For management/strategy classes, I quote the opening lines of my favorite book about Ernest Shackleton—*Endurance*, by Alfred Lansing: “The order to abandon ship was given at 5 PM. For most of the men, however, no order was needed because by then everybody knew that the ship was done and that it was time to give up trying to save her.” I continue quoting excerpts from the introduction as I tell the story. Entrepreneurship classes may begin with the question “Who loves history?” and a lecture about Peter the Great, while international business may start with “Who loves music?” and a discussion about the global music industry. For creativity and other electives, I have other openers.

In various courses I show a movie during the semester, always with the element of surprise. When possible I arrange it for evening in whatever room/setting will give the best movie experience. The class does not know what the movie will be, and my introductory words do not reveal it. Cueing the movie up with a black screen, ready to roll, maintains the surprise and leads them to—forgive the pun—focus on what begins to unfold on the screen.

## Some movies I've used

Omitting brief news and documentary clips, here is an incomplete list of movies I have used in such classes as strategy, management principles, international business, entrepreneurship, creativity, and management in the movies:

Runaway Train  
Lord of War  
Casablanca  
Hotel Rwanda  
Paths of Glory  
North by Northwest  
12 Angry Men  
The Endurance/Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure (long and short versions of same story)  
The World's Fastest Indian  
B-29: Frozen in Time  
Capitalism: A Love Story  
Duel

For each movie, I give an assignment, sometimes handing it out before the movie, sometimes after. Depending on the movie and assignment, I also provide movie reviews, articles on the underlying management topic, or other materials to help students connect the movie to the course topic. In addition to suggesting that they look at customer reviews on Amazon, I give links to

Directory of downloadable movie scripts [www.script-o-rama.com/snazzy/dircut.html](http://www.script-o-rama.com/snazzy/dircut.html)

Internet Movie Database [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)

Rotten Tomatoes reviews [www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)

And, my favorite movie critic of all time: [www.rogerebert.com](http://www.rogerebert.com)

Casablanca and Runaway Train—same same but different  
(based on an IMDB review I wrote awhile back)

I have seen Runaway Train probably three dozen times, and some scenes much more, as I replayed them for my own enjoyment or for thought. It's my second favorite movie of all time. The first is Casablanca, and I think the two have a lot in common.

Cynical and trapped by fate

Manny in Runaway Train, and Rick in Casablanca, are protagonists who are cynical, self-interested, and ruthless. Each has been rendered callous partly by their choices in life, but also by the twists and turns that life has presented them. Each has been terribly scarred by a world which is uncaring, unfeeling, and unthinkingly oblivious to the sufferings of mere individuals. Each is imprisoned by circumstance and by their own pain. Both movies have huge streak of fatalism, existentialism, and determinism within them.

Bitter yet loved

Manny and Rick are far more widely admired by those around them than they first understand. Neither grasps that they are perceived as heroes by people with less stubbornness and independence. The people around them are kinder, gentler and, yes, weaker. Still, Manny and Rick have a surprising quality—they care much more about others than they will admit. Watch Rick in Casablanca and you'll see how vulnerable he truly is. You'll see how much peace, happiness, and love mean to him, and get some hints (the earlier Spanish Civil War, inability to return to America, and lost love) as to why those things are so poignantly painful for him to think about. Watch Manny in Runaway Train and you'll see how much he cares about his friend Jonah, and how hard he tries to do some good for Buck.

Courage brings redemption

Manny and Rick both face inner conflicts and painful moments of self-awareness followed by opportunities for courageous redemption. Their choices have different consequences, but once each has made his choice, he is transformed into someone who is confident, at peace with himself, accepting of the price he has paid to do the right thing, happy he has done the work of a good man, and ready to face the future. In each movie, that transformational scene occurs at the end and is the highlight of the movie. We remember the climactic finale of each movie because those moments are the essence and message of each movie. The world hurtles onward regardless of us, but we do possess free will, the opportunity to make a difference, and the capacity to achieve inner freedom.

Carefully composed movies

In terms of production and editing, Runaway Train and Casablanca are sparsely shot. Each shot counts, and each has a purpose, much like each word of dialog. If you think there's something wasted in Runaway Train, watch it again and ask yourself why the director did it that way. These also are movies in which the dialogue and characters are everything. Every sentence and facial expression matters. The dialogue is sparing yet meaningful, and the characters' subtle mannerisms and expressions communicate far more than the words alone. I can watch either movie and still find something new to notice or to think about.

So, there you have it. My two cents on why my two favorite movies of all time really are about the same things: the indifference of the universe and the suffering it inflicts, balanced by yearning, courage, and love.

## Casablanca Teaching Notes

### Strategy, Entrepreneurship

“Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.”

Failure, loss of purpose, shock, adaptation, renewed purpose. An very human movie, and my top movie of all time.

When watching movie, must focus on dialogue and subtle facial expressions. Less is more—read between the lines. That is not only a good movie lesson, but a business and life lesson—there are always subtexts and underlying forces/relationships/factors.

#### Strategy

Ambiguity of decision-making: What should Rick do? Choices/pressures

Rick’s Cafe: What is its mission?

Emergent strategy: the sudden arrival of Ilsa changes everything.

Swift adaptation: Rick devises and acts on his plan very quickly—free Laszlo, sell off business, cash out, join the war. Decisive once he makes up his mind. At end he and Renault are planning to leave for Brazzaville, in the Congo (Free French garrison, non-German-occupied)

History matters—his history, Ilsa’s history, and the movie make no sense without understanding context

Role of business in wartime

Self-interest: like agency theory. Works on his own behalf, sticks neck out for no one, wants what he wants (Ilsa). Yet, he is quietly supporting people, helping others, making sacrifices no one knows.

Stakeholders—recovery of idealism—sacrifice is sacrifice. His decisions will affect others, but choices that benefit them will hurt/cost him. How to reconcile these things?

#### Entrepreneurship

Rick—what drives him? What entrepreneurial characteristics/behaviors/events do we see?

Leaves America, leaves Paris, starts anew from scratch, builds thriving business.

Provides customers what they want, even though it doesn't seem to do much for him—this business is his life, but also an escape from life.

All actions initially seem to be guided by a focus on the business. He's into lots of activities.

Networking—he knows everyone, and everyone knows him. Has set up his business as his hub for meeting people, and so others can meet. By networking/being out in the world, Rick knows what's coming for America "What time is it in New York? conversation with Sam

He seems to be apolitical, but is drawn to hiring refugees and outcasts, and he allows everyone regardless of ideology or past to be in his place.

Rigs the game so the Bulgarians can escape with dignity. Side note: Subtlety of movies/why dialogue matters—you have to infer that the Bulgarian girl is willing to trade the use of her body for freedom.

Rick draws good people to him, despite his seeming indifference/bitterness. They see beneath the surface, and his actions are subtle enough to remain mostly unnoticed by the bad guys, although they can't quit peg him/figure him out, which makes them a little uneasy.

Sam—independent thinker—Rick's best friend—and black. Wouldn't happen in much of US at the time. Rick treats him with respect and (almost) as an equal. Treats him and his other workers well—they all seem idealistic in a quiet way and very, very committed to Rick. They clearly like him.

Renault (Claude Rains) becomes that way too—admiring and behaving with integrity despite his learned cynicism/corruption.

Ferrari (Sydney Greenstreet)—he too is a wheeler dealer, but of the more deeply cynical kind (but not entirely). Rick appears to be more successful, which may be a moral from the story.

Ilsa's husband Victor Laszlo —is he stiff, or merely cautious, reserved, and dignified? We sense he has a lot of a passion, and that he gets what's going on between Rick and Ilsa. He too admires Rick, and in a low-key mentoring way encourages/challenges him to act with conscience.

The clear implication is that Rick and Ilsa have sex when she comes to his room. Of course they did—they're old lovers, and afterward he's a changed man, knowing that she still loves him. Rick's denial "she tried everything" rings hollow, and to me seems said because it's the right thing to say for Ilsa's sake. You can see a lot in his and Victor's facial expressions in that scene, and throughout the movie. Details matter. Victor understands the past, and that Rick and Ilsa love each other. He has the maturity to know that this is simply how life is, and not feel threatened or petty.

Need to explain for historical context:

The dueling songs scene: Germans with Wacht am Rhein vs. French expats with Marseillaise  
Many of the cast members were European refugees, so their emotions, as in the song scene, are real.  
The movie itself is about outcasts and refugees, sacrifice, lost love, idealism, hope, etc. which these actors were truly feeling.

Vichy Water in trash can—contempt for the Vichy puppet regime in France.

## Casablanca Movie Assignment

### Strategic Management students

1. Discuss one link between the movie and Musashi , and one link with Sun Tzu. (1 page total)  
In class we will talk about this, as well as more traditional strategy themes in the movie, like emergent strategy, ambiguity, and stockholder and stakeholder perspectives.
2. What is your reaction to the movie? (Up to 1 page)

### Intro to Entrepreneurship students

1. What drives Rick? And, what entrepreneurial characteristics, behaviors, and events do you see? (1 page total)
2. What is your reaction to the movie? (Up to 1 page)

I have seen this movie many times since I was about 12 years old, so I know it pretty well. I've read many reviews and commentaries on it. You may find some of them helpful as well.

Roger Ebert is a good place to start:

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19960915/REVIEWS08/401010308/1023>

Rotten Tomatoes has various other critics' reviews:

[http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1003707-casablanca/?name\\_order=desc#contentReviews](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1003707-casablanca/?name_order=desc#contentReviews)

Amazon has extensive customer reviews:

<http://www.amazon.com/Casablanca-Snap-Case-Humphrey-Bogart/dp/6305736650>

Here's a useful link for character analysis. It's incomplete and superficial, but it covers the high points.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/film/casablanca/canalysis.html>

See the back of this sheet for the cast

## The Cast

Rick	Humphrey Bogart
Ilse	Ingrid Bergman
Victor Laszlo	Paul Henried
Captain Renault	Claude Rains
Sam	Dooley Wilson
Major Strasser	Conrad Veidt
Signor Ferrari (the white-suited wheeler-dealer owner of the Blue Parrot bar)	Sidney Greenstreet
Ugarte (the thief who wants to sell the letters of transit)	Peter Lorre
Carl (Rick's maitre d')	S.Z. Sakall
Emil (Rick's roulette croupier who rigs the game to help Annina's husband)	Marcel Dalio
Yvonne (the blonde French girl who works at the Blue Parrot and dates Rick, Renault, and walks in with the German officer)	Madeleine Lebeau
Annina Brandel (the brunette Hungarian girl who is faced with trading herself for exit visas)	Joy Page
Sascha (Rick's Russian bartender)	Leonid Kinskey
Berger (the Norwegian who is in the resistance movement)	John Qualen
The Pickpocket	Curt Bois



## Runaway Train Assignment

Choose your words carefully to fit into the page limit. The standard format requirements apply—double-spaced, 1" text margins, Times Roman 12-point.

Avoid lengthy re-statements of the movie or books. I know this movie very well and have read everything out there on it, so you can assume I'm a well-informed reader.

Edit your paper for errors and style, write something tight and insightful, and have fun with it.

FYI, the main cast:

- Manny—the older convict (Jon Voight)
- Buck—the younger one (Eric Roberts)
- Sara—the engineer's assistant (Rebecca de Mornay)
- Barstow—the young railroad office supervisor (Kyle Heffner)
- Ranken—the prison warden (John Ryan)
- the train

### Strategic Management students

1. (½ page) What is your reaction to this movie, and why?
2. (1.5 pages) This movie is full of metaphors and examples related to strategic management. Some obvious links include decision-making errors, environment, resources, competition, emergent strategy, adaptation, path-dependency, decision-making processes, and leadership.

Identify one theme, issue, or idea from the movie that you find particularly interesting. You are not bound by the above list—focus on something *you* want to analyze. Discuss your subject using at least two of the four texts: Hill & Jones, Machiavelli, Musashi, and Sun Tzu.

### Intro to Entrepreneurship students

1. (½ page) What is your reaction to this movie, and why?
2. (1 page) This movie is, in part, a story about entrepreneurial ventures. Think about the movie's cast of characters—their demeanor, actions, motives, and such. What various characteristics do these people possess which are useful/relevant to entrepreneurship?
3. (½ page) Come up with a business idea inspired by the movie.

A review of Runaway Train I wrote for a website

★★★★★ **"Wake up, whacko!"** August 1, 2007

Runaway Train is one of my top 2-3 favorite movies of all time.

I've had the rare pleasure of watching it numerous times in a very small, very high quality theater. Each time I see it I discover additional nuances in mannerisms, glances, and speech. These subtleties reinforce the characters, their relationships, and the splendidly layered significance of the movie.

Miyamoto Musashi, the Japanese samurai-turned-author, wrote "Do nothing which is of no purpose." If you're annoyed by the plot, characters, or dialogue, as some reviewers are, I suggest thinking about why it was done that way. For example, some people are irritated by Eric Roberts' character Buck, but they miss the point. He's supposed to be annoying, and his annoying nature has meaning in terms of who he is underneath and his decisions/abilities/limitations. His reason for existence in the train's rolling philosophy discourse is to serve a purpose for the group, and to make us think about how the other characters relate to him.

Put it on the biggest television or screen you can find, turn the lights down, turn the volume waaaaay up, and watch it without distraction. The key to this movie is to immerse yourself in it. Do that, and you'll learn from it.

Runaway Train: Miscellaneous notes to wrap up after using student papers to guide main discussion

Question: Did you have low expectations before movie started? It's not uncommon, but why?  
One lesson: approach new things with an open mind.

A number of you picked up on the train and environment as major characters.

Teamwork on train—genuine, stressful

I think we all reflect our childhoods. We are the same people we were then, just evolved. Think about what Manny was like as a child.

Manny is terribly human: Hope, fear, friendship, remorse, courage, cowardice. He has been made cruel by society. He is in excruciating emotional and physical pain—shaking hand, facial expressions—but keeps going. Scenes show that he loves Jonah, hurts, wants to cry, but has been trained not to. Sad, tragic, heroic.

Manny's so brutalized by life and Ranken (father figure) that he can't admit he needs people and needs to be needed.

Freedom/independence is the mantra/dream that keeps him sane—his security blanket.

Ending—releasing the train is mature/sad/wise. Recaptures dignity. Climbing on top is redemption—he's done something good in life—and childlike—release from life. Ranken below can't escape his own anger/fear—a dangerous animal caged.

Ranken: "Pieces of human waste, no use to anyone"

But, they saved Sara's life, and Manny tries to save Buck's future. He also cares about Jonah.

Sara: not from their world but can descend into violence, admires that they broke out of Stonehaven, understands value of kindness, pity, empathy.

The violence is brutal, but it's part of reality

Buck really wanted to be Manny's friend.

Jonah, Manny's prison friend—they're so glad to see each other. Played by Eddie Baxter, a convicted bank robber who also co-scripted the movie.

The similarities to themes in our books raises the question—did Kurosawa or Konchalovsky read Musashi or Sun Tzu?

## Ernest Shackleton

### Overview: The Endurance/Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure

The Endurance is the longer (100 minute) version, narrated by Liam Neeson, slower, darker.

Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure is the 40 minute IMAX version, narrated by Kevin Spacey, suitable for families.

Both tell the story of Ernest Shackleton's third trip to the Antarctic. The first was with Robert Scott's expedition, where he learned about the importance of planning, leadership and small-group management. The second was his own Nimrod expedition, where he garnered the utter loyalty of people like Frank Wild and Tom Crean. The third expedition went wrong—the ship was stuck in the ice and sank after the better part of a year. They camped on the ice for months until it broke up, then rowed for supplies and safety on Paulet Island. Wind and currents sent them backward, so they aimed for Elephant Island instead. With no hope of rescue there, Shackleton and 5 others sailed 800+ miles across the South Atlantic (worst seas on Earth) to South Georgia Island to get help. After hiking 36 hours non-stop across mountains and glaciers, they met the first human beings they had seen in a year and a half. Several months and multiple attempts later, Shackleton rescued the remaining crew from Elephant Island.

The story is full of material and can be linked to numerous topics in a variety of management classes.

## Writing assignment: The Endurance

Although simple, your assignment is not easy. To do it, you first must identify a subject--one theme, issue, or idea from the movie that you find particularly interesting. It can be something broad, or something quite specific. What matters is that the subject interests *you*.

Avoid lengthy re-statements of the movie or books. I can't throw a baseball worth a darn, but I know this movie and its subject very, very well. You can assume I know pretty much every book, comment, review, and analysis that's been done.

FYI, some of the main characters  
Ernest Shackleton, expedition leader  
Frank Worsley, the ship's captain  
Ernak Hurley, the photographer  
Tom Crean, the Irishman with the dogs, and long-time Shackleton companion  
Frank Wild, the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command, stays with main group on Elephant Island  
Chippy McNeish, the carpenter

Take the time to write something tight, interesting, and insightful. Feel free to discuss the assignment with anyone you wish. And, edit your paper carefully for errors and style.

### Strategy Class Assignment

This movie is full of metaphors and examples that link to class and our readings. A few of the most obvious ones include decision-making errors, environment, resources, emergent strategy, adaptation, path-dependency, culture, strategic re-orientation, goal-setting, decision-making processes, leadership, and group dynamics. There are others as well.

1 ½ pages Analyze your subject using one book: Hill & Jones, Musashi, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, or O'Neal.

½ page Give a brief personal reaction to the movie.

### Entrepreneurship Class Assignment

This movie is full of metaphors and examples that link to class and our readings. A few of the most obvious ones include entrepreneurial characteristics and process, defining and shaping opportunity, marketing and financing, and building a team. There are others as well.

1 ½ pages Analyze your subject using our textbook.

½ page Give a brief personal reaction to the movie.

Shackleton/Enron final exam essay questions for management principles class

Version 1: Two important examples from this semester are Ernest Shackleton and his expedition to Antarctica, and Ken Lay and his company Enron. Compare the two examples, explaining how the two examples are similar or different, in terms of the three different types of control systems available to the two leaders, and the impact of those combined control systems on their organizations.

Bureaucratic controls

Market controls

Clan control

Impact of combined controls on Enron and Shackleton's expedition

Version 2: Two important examples from this semester are:

1. Ernest Shackleton and his expedition to Antarctica
2. Ken Lay and his company Enron

Connecting to course concepts, discuss similarities and differences between the two—show how Shackleton and Lay are the same or different, and show how the expedition and Enron are the same or different.

To help you decide how you want to answer the question, here is an outline of the chapters we focused on this semester. DON'T use all these topics! The list is here only to help you organize your thinking.

Chapter

- 1 Managing
- 2 Environment and culture
- 3 Ethics and corporate social responsibility
- 4 Strategic planning
- 5 Entrepreneurship
- 6 Organizing
- 7 Human resource management
- 8 Diversity
- 9 Leadership
- 12 Communication
- 13 Control

## Some Entrepreneurship/Strategy/Management Themes

Environment: imperfect information  
continual change  
luck  
even harsh environments offer resources and prospect of success

Decisions: balance caution and decisiveness  
path dependency  
decisions = F (resources, environment, mission/goal)  
resources: prepare, adapt, improvise

Management: plan, stick with plan, be willing to adapt/abandon plan.  
people rise to challenges with right leadership  
willingness to adapt goals, strategy, resources, culture, knowledge  
crisis can build or destroy cohesion  
hierarchy for decision-making, not tasks or individual worth  
manage conflict to relieve stress  
earn faith/respect/loyalty to overcome fear and disagreement

## Shackleton's Management Style

Care for/don't single out weak members.  
Equal treatment, equal respect, equal workload.  
Humor/entertainment/normality—soccer, singing, dancing.  
Earn trust and respect.  
Group's comfort/welfare/safety before his.  
Ambitious goals and persistence.  
No disappointment when plans/purpose must change.  
Adaptable, creative, ingenious, patient, cautious.  
Take time to think, even when pressured  
Lead by example, share hard work.  
Take on dangerous tasks himself when he must.  
Listen.  
Focus on unity and activity.  
Unflaggingly optimistic.

Course outline—Management in the Movies

This is a one-hour credit course which meets for one evening every other week during the semester. It can readily be scaled up with increased content for a regular 3-hour course.

This outline identifies the movies, but the regular syllabus does not.

This semester we will experiment with a brief course devoted solely to the use of movies to illustrate management topics. Every other week we'll watch a movie then discuss it. At the end of the semester we'll tie them all together. You'll walk out of the class with amazing examples that will guide you in business and in life. The movies will illustrate management topics like leadership, international business, organizational behavior, entrepreneurship, and strategy, but in ways you didn't expect. What are the movies? You'll have to wait to find out. Most if not all will be new to you, and all of them are fantastic.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings and assignments (some readings will be handed out in class)</b>
Course Intro Movie 1  Lord of War	International business and entrepreneurship  Read before class: <a href="#">How to Watch a Movie</a>
Movie 2  12 Angry Men	Decision-making and group dynamics  Read before class: Decision-Making Problems and Pitfalls: <a href="http://www.leadershipexpertise.com/decision_making_problems_and_pitfalls.php">http://www.leadershipexpertise.com/decision_making_problems_and_pitfalls.php</a>
Movie 3  Hotel Rwanda	Negotiation and leadership  Read before class: <a href="#">How to Negotiate Effectively</a> , from Inc. Magazine
Movie 4 Double Feature  B-29: Frozen in Time and Kviahellan: The Pen Slab	Mission and motivation  Read before class:  DUE TODAY: Compare and contrast the lead characters in the first three movies we watched in terms of ethics and leadership style. (1 page)



<p>Movie 5</p> <p>Capitalism: A Love Story</p>	<p>Economics and society</p> <p>Read before class:</p>
<p>Movie 6</p> <p>Paths of Glory</p>	<p>Lessons about bureaucracy</p> <p>Read before class:</p> <p><a href="http://www.evolutionarysystems.net/docs/integrity.pdf">http://www.evolutionarysystems.net/docs/integrity.pdf</a></p>
<p>Movie 7</p> <p>North by Northwest</p>	<p>Adapting to environmental change</p> <p>Read before class:</p> <p>DUE TODAY: Compare and contrast Movies 5 and 6 in terms of their attitudes toward organizations, leaders, and decision-making. (1 page)</p>
<p>Movie 8</p> <p>Duel</p>	<p>Environment and strategic decision-making</p> <p>Read before class:</p> <p>Course wrap-up and review</p>
<p>Final Movie</p> <p>Casablanca</p>	<p>Final Exam—watch the last movie, discuss and compare all movies and their management lessons</p>