Alone in the Dark

On October 13, 2010, thirty three Chilean miners who had been buried inside the San Jose mine for 69 days were finally rescued.

It was a triumph of engineering and a victory of faith.

The miners locked in below did not give up in the dark, nor did their families above ground surrender to despair.

On August 5, 2010, at around lunch break, miners digging for copper and gold started to feel vibrations in the earth.

Almost immediately after the vibrations began, they heard a sudden huge explosion, and the whole mine filled up with dust and rock.

A massive piece of the nearby mountain had broken off, burying almost all the layers of the mine.

For seventeen days after the initial collapse, there was no word on their fate.

As the days passed, Chileans grew increasingly uncertain that any of the miners had survived.

A small exploratory hole was drilled on August 22, and the camera captured a message that said, "We are still alive."

It was the first sign of hope.
Soon, a video camera was sent down 700 meters deep and captured the first images of the miners, all clearly in good health.

The discovery sparked joyful celebrations nationwide, and rescue efforts gave a light of hope that the miners could be saved.

The miners were lucky to have an air tunnel that allowed enough fresh air to reach them.

They also had broken trucks from which they could charge the batteries of their head lamps.

In addition, they were able to drink water from storage tanks nearby.

Until the tunnel to deliver food and medicine was operational, food was the most critical issue in the shelter.

They only had enough food for two days.

For eighteen days, each person had to live on two spoonfuls of tuna, a mouthful of milk, bits of crackers, and a bite of canned fruit every other day.

Another factor which bothered the miners severely was the high heat and humidity of the shelter.

Each miner had lost an average of 8 kilograms by the time they were rescued.

The miners united as a group soon after the collapse.

They organized themselves into a society where each person had one vote.

They all knew that if their social structure broke down, their problems would become more serious and did what they could do best.
Lesson 5. Collaborate

For example, Jose Henriquez, a religious man, tried to keep morale up, and Yonni Barrios, who had had some medical training, helped other miners with their health problems.

On October 9, a rescue hole was finally drilled through to the miners in their shelter.

It created a tunnel large enough to lift them one by one.

For this purpose, a specially designed capsule was built.

More than 1,400 news reporters from all over the world, together with the family members of the miners, gathered to watch the rescue process.

On October 12, the first rescue worker was sent downward to the miners, who greeted him with nervous relief.

Soon, the first trapped miner was raised to the surface.

One by one, the miners were brought up in the capsule to see the sunlight.

Upon leaving the capsule, each miner was enthusiastically greeted, but they could not see their families right away.

They had been trapped for so long that their first priority was to get medical attention.

Luis Urzua, who had taken a major role as a democratic leader while underground, was the last one to come up to the surface on October 13.

"The 69 days during which we tried so hard were not useless."
We wanted to live for our families, and that was the greatest thing,” Urzua said to the Chilean people after his rescue.

Then, the rescuers and the rescued began singing the Chilean national anthem with the thousands of joyous people who came to support the operation, celebrating the heroics and the humanity of all those involved.