

Company of Master Mariners of Canada

Maritime Human Resource Solutions

Seafarers' Welfare - The Impact on Seafaring

I wish to thank Capt. Parsons, and the Company of Master Mariners of Canada for inviting me to this conference. Following on the heels of Doug Stevens from the Center for Seafarers Rights, I am tremendously honored, and I pray that I won't disappoint you.

Though I am a Catholic priest of the Diocese of Beaumont, I come to you today with a multifaceted background in the maritime industry. I not only grew up in a great maritime town, and have worked in maritime ministry for twenty years, I have also had my merchant mariners document for 30 years, and continue to sail through the Seafarers International Union hall in Houston. I also sit on the US Coast Guard's Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee. This committee has given me a front row seat for the regulatory changes caused by STCW-95, the new medical requirements, and the ISPS Code. Though my experience is heavily based on my US-flag sailing, I hope that some of my observations will be helpful in analyzing your own Canadian merchant navy and mariners.

In this talk, I will reflect on the image of mariners, quality of life issues, economic tensions that work against recruitment and retention, and the challenges seafarer welfare agencies face in meeting the needs of modern maritime professionals.

Sociopath or Professional Mariner:

For centuries, the public image of seafarers was that of people who really could not make it ashore. No experience was required for ratings. Just be healthy, and sober enough to make it up the gang way. One would learn all that he or she needed by on the job training.

In addition, apocryphal stories about the *Exxon Valdez*, branded into the public's mind that mariners were not only drunks and whore mongers ashore, but they were inebriated while operating vessels.

This poor image of mariners does not exist only in the public's mind. It also exists among mariners themselves. The shortage that the maritime industry is experiencing is not limited to just blue water. It is also severe in the brown water, or offshore vessel industry. Down on the coasts of Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi, the largest part of the US merchant marine operates. More than 20,000 US merchant mariners sail on hundreds of OSV's, tugs, and crewboats in support of the oil and gas exploration and production industry.

Though a 1,600 ton license (3000 ITC) captain with a towing endorsement can fetch more than \$700 a day working on an anchor handling tug, these fathers, and sometimes mothers, still encourage their children to go to college so that they "can make something of themselves, and won't have to be workboat trash."

What is going on in an industry where a captain, if he sails 200 days a year, and makes more than \$140,000, still encourages his or her children to go to college, get a business degree, and make between \$40 & \$70,000 a year?

Finally, shipping companies often considered mariners as disposable commodities. Until the introduction of ISM and STCW-95, any mariner could be replaced by anyone, and real qualifications were not required. Story after story exists of companies flagging out their ships, dumping officers trained at renowned maritime colleges, and ratings with decades of experience and specialized training, for crews usually drawn from developing countries with no common language. The companies had no real knowledge of the skill matrix of these mariners, other than what the manning agent in Manila wrote in a fax.

Fundamentally, the issue of recruitment and retention will not be solved until the public's, industry's and labor's image of seafarers changes, and mariners are no longer seen as: mercenaries out there only for the money; drunkards who can't last ashore; or desperately poor, third world workers who will endure anything to get a little money for the family.

This image has to change to one that sees the seafarer as a professional mariner. This man or woman has been trained, sometimes for years, to perform their profession. They have committed a significant part of their lives to performing this profession, and their reputation and dignity is tied to the quality of work they perform.

We will know that mariner's image has changed for the better when we can say "airline crew" and "ship crew," and the same level of professionalism, and dedication to duty comes to our minds.

Mariner Quality of Life Issues:

Interior Quality of Life Issues:¹

In 1974, Noel Mostert described his voyage on the *SS Ardshiel* in the book *Supership*. The

¹A great article appeared in the Nautical Institute's July 2008 journal *Seaways*. On pages 11-13, Ms. Carla S. Limcaoco, vice-chairman and executive managing director for Philippine Transmarine Carriers, Inc. argues for the need for corporate social responsibility in retaining and recruiting global marine professionals. One very sobering bit of data she shares with her readers is: "In the Philippines alone, where seafaring has been a tradition and a lucrative career, enrolment in maritime colleges in 2005 decreased by 26 per cent compared with 2002. This is partly attributable to the fact that, in our globalized world, there are now other occupations that are equally lucrative and which do not carry the same pressures as a life at sea."

214,085 gross ton supertanker sailed under the British ensign with British officers, and ratings drawn from across the British empire. On page 89, he describes the conditions on board:

“There was very little on this deck to suggest shipboard life as experienced by any previous generation of mariners. The swimming pool and cinema are no longer regarded as luxuries but as indispensable items of supertanker life....The principle social center of the ship was the officers’ wardroom, a smart club-like room with teak-paneled bulkheads...(I)t gave the room, and other parts of the ship where it was used a pleasant hint of forethought, warmth, and solidity which Formica and plastic the usual dress of tanker accommodation...could not render.”

Well, the cinema has been replaced by 29" entertainment centers in the officers and crew lounges, but the swimming pool, the teak-paneled bulkhead somehow got lost in later ship designs. Where Mr. Mostert describes the interior decor as club-like. Too often, the interior design of modern merchant ships can only be described as institutional on good ships, and prison-like on the rest.

I truly believe that the decades of flagging out has brought about the decline in living space design on ships. When one had to attract their own countrymen to work on the vessels, and unions would demand more and more consideration in their contracts, swimming pools, teak wood lounges and leather covered chairs were found onboard ship. Once mariners ceased being part of the company, and were only contract workers and part-timers on the vessels, there was no countervailing force to push the issue of spending a little more money so that the living quarters would be a little nicer.

Instead, crewmembers were now gathered from the poorest corners of the world. For many of them, running water and water closets were great advances. However, times have changed, and the extra \$500,000 or \$1,000,000 that it would cost to improve living conditions on a 65 or 100 million dollar vessel may begin to look like a small investment in improving retention, and increasing recruitment.

However, just adding more, or providing a healthier environment may not always bring the results that ship operators are seeking. Let me give two examples:

Smoking: On most vessels, smoking has been restricted to outside or in the mariners stateroom. On tankers, this is even further restricted to only the stateroom. The effect of this has certainly improved air quality. However, as a collateral effect, crew interaction has been significantly reduced, and the effects of loneliness have been exacerbated.

In the past, mariners would gather in the mess at coffee and at lunch. During that time, the smokers would smoke, lies would be told, and interaction would occur between different departments and different watches. With the restrictions on smoking, the smokers go to their rooms and smoke, and the cohesiveness that had existed is lost. My experience has been, that I

am the only person in the crew's mess during coffee, while everyone else has shut themselves into their rooms.

Satellite TV in Staterooms: With satellite tv, coastwise vessels can always be in tv range. As ships are going into the shipyards, or new tonnage is being constructed, efforts are being made to place satellite tv connections in each mariners stateroom.

On the surface, this seems like a good idea, but because crews are smaller, and the ships are continually getting bigger, the ease of staying in one's stateroom all of one's free time becomes a real temptation.

In addition, since most ship satellite services seem to come with the Playboy channel or other sexual content channels, a situation develops where if the mariner is not working, eating or sleeping, he or she is watching pornography. Leaving aside the moral issue of viewing pornography, spending four hours satisfying any appetite will have consequences in the persons life, and shipboard life.

A Decent Chair

One humble and inexpensive suggestion that I would like to make is to put some comfortable chairs on vessels. Oceangoing tugs are the most notorious for not having a comfortable place to sit. The *OSG Galena Bay*, which I sailed as the 8-12 dayman in 2006, had recliners in the crew lounge. At coffee and after lunch the crew gathered, watched tv, and God forbid, talked to one another.

In addition, people pay thousands of dollars to cruise lines in order to sit and watch the ocean go by. I have heard the old timers talk about gathering on the fantail at the end of the day. However, I have yet to find a vessel that has a comfortable outside place to sit when one is off watch, and at the same time, is configured so that one is not blown off the deck.

Exterior Quality of Life Issues:

We are all familiar with the primary exterior quality of life issues that challenge young men and women from choosing careers at sea.

Certainly, the first on my list is the shore leave issue. I sit on the Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee, and chaired a work group on the issue of shore leave. What we discovered surprised us:

1. The Coast Guard determined early in the rule drafting process that it did not have the authority to tell facilities who they could or could not allow on the facility's property. The work group found this position quite incredible because the federal government tells facilities just about everything else they can and cannot do. However, with this one issue

that deals with the human factor, the Coast Guard claims complete impotency to mandate shore leave for seafarers.

2. We found that when the Coast Guard developed the rules for maritime security, they changed the wording of the ISPS code. Instead of facilities developing procedures to facilitate shore leave, they only had to coordinate shore leave. To add insult to injury, the Coast Guard then accepted the position of some facilities that since they would not allow shore leave, there was nothing to coordinate, and, therefore, they were in complete compliance with the federal regulations.
3. The Coast Guard has failed to draw the distinction between a facility denying access or shore leave to a particular person who they may consider to be a threat, and denying access or shore leave to a class of people, mariners, who have already been vetted 96-hours earlier as being safe to come along side the facility.
4. In drafting the rules, the Coast Guard conspicuously overlooked the ISPS Code bullet that every facility security plan, at a minimum would have procedures to facilitate shore leave and access. In the final rules, this bullet is missing. One can ask, since this was part of the minimum standards that every facility security plan must contain, are US facility security plans in compliance with the ISPS code?
5. Other countries are beginning to take retaliatory steps against US mariners when they visit their countries. For example, Canada's present policy bars the entry of US mariners who have only minor criminal records.
6. More countries are adopting their own visa policies. Mariners may not be able to keep up with all the visa requirements for every country they visit. This may also open the door to some countries to use shore leave visas as an income source.

William Langewiesche in his book *The Outlaw Sea* (page 70) makes a cogent observation regarding the new maritime security environment:

“The only sure effect of the new regulations is that legitimate operators, who do not pose a threat, will comply. But it is likely that terrorists will comply as well, and that, like many shipowners today, they will evade detection not by ducking procedures and regulations, but by using them to hide....Paradoxically, when a ship approaching U.S. shores does not comply, it will be because it is a bumbler, and therefore, almost by definition innocent.”

My second concern would be with the criminalization of seafarers. Your president, Capt. Turner, put it well in your August newsletter:

“This treatment of our seafarers is unacceptable, detrimental to the industry at

large and without doubt unfair to those who are incarcerated under those circumstances.”

I could not agree with him more. We have seen too many situations in the United States where the public views seafarers as incompetent, and that as a group they need to be punished either for what they have done, or what they will do.

The abuse of justice that was accorded Capt. Schroder of the *M/V Zim Mexico II*, and the pilot on board the *M/V Cosco Buson* are two good examples of the mob screaming for a head, and the federal and state officials too willing to oblige.

In the States we need some strong legislative changes that protect mariners when they are operating within the scope of their work. The simple negligence that was required to convict Capt. Schroder to prison under the *Seafarer Manslaughter Act*, and the abuse of the migratory bird law to ratchet up the charges against the pilot of the *Cosco Buson* are just two recent examples.

However, we are also seeing a disturbing trend by the Department of Justice to milk the newly found cash cow of falsifying oil record books. There seems to be no interest in finding out why so many vessels are getting caught up with this charge, only that with very little work, one can get a shipping company to pay a \$10 million penalty.

A third concern would be piracy. William Langewiesche makes a comment in his book, *The Outlaw Sea*, that disturbed me a great deal when I read it:

“...the growth and persistence of a modern form of extra-national piracy that plagues large swaths of the ocean and has escaped every sea-based effort at control. On a global scale, this sort of piracy is more a nuisance than a threat, and typically it has been overblown in the press, but it is a significant phenomenon nonetheless....”

Sadly, until recently, the international community, and the world navies looked upon piracy as just a nuisance. If some Taiwanese fishermen, or a Filipino tugboat crew was hijacked, that was a nuisance for the maritime industry. However, I don't think the hijacked mariners and their family would exactly describe the affair as a nuisance.

Maybe with the hijacking last week of the Belize-flagged, ro-ro *Faina*, with 30 Soviet-era T-72 tanks on board, the issue of piracy will cease to be a nuisance, and the world's navies will get back to doing one of their primary missions: protecting trade routes.

Finally, a fourth concern which impedes recruitment and retention is substandard shipping, or more specifically, the continued toleration of it.

If I were a shipowner operating in international trade, and felt that keeping ratings on a ship for 9-11 months, and officers for 6-9 months was destructive to the morale of my crew, their families and their commitment to the industry, I would still feel constrained from shortening their contracts because I would be adding to my operating costs. Any effort to unilaterally improve the conditions of seafarers, would be undermined, by amoral operators who would do everything to cut their labor costs.

As Mr. Arthur Browning, managing director of the Hong Kong Shipowners Association, noted at the *2005 Nautical Institute of Hong Kong Seminar*:

“There is, and will continue to be, pressure to keep the number of people on board as low as possible. Crew costs are perceived by some to be one variable in the running costs of a ship that can be reduced to make the ship more competitive; by changing the nationality of crew, or by reducing manning levels, for example. Other running costs are not so easy to change – bunker and lube oil costs are determined by the oil markets, insurance costs by the insurance markets, spares by the manufacturers of those spares, etc. So it is no wonder that some owners concentrate their energies in reducing crew costs as much as possible in order to become more competitive.”

Certainly, there are evermore sophisticated efforts to squeeze that last bit of efficiency out of the system.² However, the maritime system also allows operators to descend beyond efficiency, and explore ever more substandard levels.

As long as the maritime industry continues to tolerate substandard ship operators, shipowners will be hard pressed to be more magnanimous.

Your Capt. Turner put it well in the your August newsletter:

“These incidents indicate the lack of interest in the welfare and competence of crews, the inadequacy of Flag State and Classification surveys, and the unwillingness of certain Flag States to curtail operations of shipping companies not complying with the standards of seaworthiness required.”

To this list, I would add insurers, who will insure anything that is floating at the time of the policy, and charterers who spend more time asking what the charter price is, than what the condition of the ship is.

²See Nautical Institute’s July 2008 *Seaways*. On page 27-29, Capt Michael Lloyd addresses the issue of manning fatigue, and the lack of any margin in minimum manning regimes. The full version of this paper can be downloaded at: www.witherbyseamanship.com, then choose technical reports/crewing & manning after clicking on “product type” in left column.

Only when the industry shifts its first principle from the maximization of profit, to the maximization of quality, will the tolerance of substandard shipping end. To put it another way, when the industry rebuilds itself so that it is more profitable to do good than to do bad, then substandard shipping will finally be driven to extinction.

Then Why Would Anyone Want to Go to Sea:

With all the negatives that are working against recruitment and retention of seafarers, why would anyone want to go to sea. As an active mariner, I can only list some of my own reasons:

1. Being at sea is just a wonderful place to be. This simple point is hammered home by the cruise line and the mega-yacht industry. People will pay thousands if not millions of dollars for the opportunity to spend a part of their lives at sea. As a mariner, I get paid to be at sea.
2. I learn a whole new set of skills, and get to do things that they would never allow me to do ashore. I am the president of the Apostleship of the Sea of the United States of America which oversees what is called the Cruise Ship Priest Program. On all Holland-America and Celebrity ships, and selected Norwegian and Princess cruises, AOS-USA provides Catholic priests to give pastoral care to the passengers. Since I see the list first, I could go on any cruise I wanted, but after doing two cruises, I still say, “give me a merchant ship”. You may ask yourself why? “Well, I get to drive the ship, run the deck cranes, turn valves, and run the winches. You can dance all night on a cruise ship, but they won’t let you drive it.”
3. I perform a job that directly impacts the quality of life of millions of people. In 2006, I was an AB on the *OSG Galena Bay*. We sailed from Valero Refinery Dock - Corpus Christi, Texas to Tampa, Florida. Every ten days, we would complete the circle. It looks like a pretty monotonous job: load, sail for 60 hours, discharge, sail for 60 hours, load.....But having the time to think during cargo watch, it struck me that if the *Galena Bays* and the *ATB Reliances* did not make this journey every ten days, millions of people in Florida would not be able to get to work, ambulances would not be able to transport people to the hospital, police and firefighters would not be able to protect their communities, and the ability to run to the mall would become a very long bicycle ride.³

³This example is not hypothetical. With Hurricane Ike’s landfall, approximately 20% of the United States refining capacity was shut down. With no product, ships were no longer able to load cargo for discharge in Florida and along the Southeast Atlantic coast. Serious gasoline shortages are presently taking place in Orlando, Miami, Atlanta, Nashville, and other major southern cities. These will continue until the refineries are back up, and the ships are able to begin delivering product again.

Some Comments on Seafarer Centers and Seafarer Welfare Services:

Seafarer centers and seafarer welfare services can play a significant role in improving the life of merchant sailors. Too often, though, they exist on the margins of the maritime industry, and are not seen as providing essential services to a ship's quality crew program. Since their services are often performed for free or for donations, the value of the services are overlooked. This leads to cash-strapped, understaffed centers, that have poorly-paid personnel who offer only limited services in relation to the needs of the mariners.

There are things that ship officers can do to improve the services that are provided by the local seafarers' center:

1. Pay the tariff or have your company pay the tariff - Many ports have mandatory or voluntary seafarer welfare tariffs that directly support the operation of the seafarer centers. Since seafarers' centers don't have a history of taking shipping companies to court, these tariffs are often ignored. Companies have told me on many occasions, "We don't pay seafarer center bills." In other cases, ship agents either don't pass on the tariffs, or they pass them on, but pocket the funds. The seafarer center is only told that the companies "do not pay."
2. Communicate early - With all oceangoing ships having GMDSS, and most seafarer centers having email and at least a rudimentary web page, there is no reason that a call or an email can not be made to the seafarer center before the vessel arrives. This would allow the center to better coordinate its limited resources, and begin offering services before the traditional ship visit takes place.
3. Encourage seafarers to make personal donations for the services they receive. We are seeing certain nationalities asking for high levels of services, but because it is by donation, and they are from a developed country, they take the attitude that they do not have to support the work. I have seen seafarers bolting for the gangway, only to have the chief mate or the captain call them back, and make them ante up.

In the near future, seafarer centers will have to develop new strategic plans to respond to the constantly changing waterfront. This will be hard, because like the larger maritime industry, seafarer centers do not like change, and have significant capital investments in buildings, vans and equipment.

The change, though, will need to come. The International Transport Workers Federation's Seafarer Welfare Trust has been a great support of seafarer welfare programs over the last 20 years, but in a 2007 report by the Seafarers International Research Centre commissioned by the Trust, seafarer centers were shown to be missing their target client.

Two quotes from the survey are very sobering for those of us in seafarer welfare work:

1. “Seventy-two per cent of the seafarers said that they have not seen a seafarers’ welfare worker aboard their ship during their current contract. Only six per cent said that they saw a ship visitor during the previous week; 13 per cent saw one during the previous month and 9 per cent over a month ago.”
2. “Overall a low level of satisfaction has been reported in relation to seafarers’ welfare workers and their services. Most seafarers expressed appreciation about receiving magazines and other materials but their expectations and welfare needs exceeded this sort of service.”

Just as the maritime industry struggles to find skilled, well trained professional mariners to meet the needs of an ever changing industry, those of us in the seafarer welfare world need to find skilled, well trained and professional volunteers and employees to offer quality welfare services to seafarers.

Just as the industry had relied for years on developing countries to provide bodies for their ships, so have seafarer welfare agencies relied on the good will of primarily Christian churches to finance and staff seafarer welfare programs. Today, many of these churches have fewer resources, have refocused their efforts away from the waterfront, or have asked the question, “Why are we spending all this money, when none of our denomination are on ships?”

How Seafarer Welfare Agencies can help with...

Recruitment - A major challenge for the maritime industry is to move from its physical and psychological domain of the water’s edge, to the center of the community in its efforts at recruiting the next generation of mariners. In the past, local union halls, and small shipping companies were the door through many entered the industry. However, with the consolidation and internationalization of the industry, and the centralization of union hiring halls, living within a reasonable distance, and knowing people who will direct future mariners to the maritime employment entryways is becoming an ever greater challenge.

The seafarer welfare agencies like the Apostleship of the Sea (Catholic) and the Mission to Seafarers (Anglican) are located in most moderate and large Canadian ports. Because of their dependency on the local community for their funding, they have close ties to local parishes, and through these parishes to the families who attend.

Closely developing recruitment plans with seafarer welfare agencies can have a number of positive effects for the industry and seafarer welfare. Some of these benefits are:

1. Better understanding by industry of what seafarer welfare agencies actually do.
2. Providing an entre for the maritime industry to approach church youth

groups who would be the primary targets of any maritime recruitment campaign

3. Allowing seafarer welfare agencies to approach local church communities with a program that would be a benefit to the churches' members, rather than always approaching the churches as funding sources.
4. Assist in introducing seafarer welfare and maritime ministry to future generations of mariners.

Establishing the moral foundation for industry discussions on the human element - Much has been written lately about the negative effects of fatigue, minimum crewing, pirates, and excessively long contracts. In spite of the many studies, the industry has resisted changing because the primary moral principle that drives the industry is that of the free market. In this environment, the first values are the maximization of profits, and the diminishment of costs and liability. With this as the primary moral value, any appeal to improve the human element is unable to gain traction because it will inevitably add costs, and therefore, contrary to the first principle of the industry.

In working to establish a new moral principle, or as it is so popular to say in the economic world, a "new paradigm," the international maritime ministry organizations like the Apostleship of the Sea, Mission to Seafarers and the German Seamen's Mission can be of great help. For decades they have been arguing for a maritime industry that respects the mariner, and puts the him or her at the center. They have written extensively the moral values that must be respected. These values can be incorporated into the growing scientific and human resource materials that already exists. Then, one would not only have the scientific data to show why many present practices are harmful to mariners, but also moral principles that can replace those of the "free market."