

GANGWAY

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Welcome to Issue 6 of **Gangway**, where we look to set the record straight on the accusations that seafarers are just greedy mercenaries, and examine how we can make shipping relevant to a new generation of employees.

Shiptalk visited The Philippines last month to take part in the Lloyd's List Events 8th Asia -Pacific Manning and Training Conference, and to visit the incredible maritime developments, north of Manila, at Subic Bay.

We took the opportunity to meet real life seafarers, and to hear their thoughts on the "manning crisis", and to examine how their aspirations and expectations have evolved over the years.

During the conference, we were shocked to hear seafarers called "mercenary", and as our latest Shiptalk Survey looks at the issues of money and benefits we will explore the drive to recruit and retain sea staff, and of how these translate to a new generation of people about to enter the job market. Is it simply about cash, or is there more to it?

We hope you enjoy this issue, and if you have any thoughts on the topics raised please feel free to contact us.

WHAT ABOUT GENERATION - Y?

Having attended many conferences this year, all looking at the increasingly controversial issue of manning shortages, we were a little resigned to hearing rather more about the problems, rather than actual solutions as we rolled into a steamy, overcast Manila to take part in the Lloyd's List Events 8th Asia-Pacific Manning and Training conference.

Sadly it remains the view of many that a) solutions are not readily forthcoming, b) any solution would be too complex and painful to implement, and c) even if companies did have an answer they would shield it like a pre-pubescent schoolboy guards a test paper. Not a terribly auspicious starting point, but this event certainly lived up to its pre-publicity claims of tackling the "impact and consequences of increasing challenges within manning and training".

When one comes to such conferences, there are inevitably some wonderful presentations delivered by erudite and experienced



Anneley Pickles
Managing Director ShiptalkJOBS.com

old hands, just as there are some real snoozefests which see the numb bottoms start to become more and more bothersome as they rumble on and on (the speakers that is, not the bottoms). What you don't expect, however, is to be provoked and shocked, or to hear incredibly challenging and perception altering presentations, but this conference gave us both.



Holding the event in Manila obviously meant that not just “manning” was debated, but also the very nature of the people filling the bunks and safe manning certificates. Being in the very hot house of marine recruitment meant the Conference wasn’t so much about where to get people (Hey, just look outside) – it was about how to get them, and then what to do with them.

In working through this part of the equation, it seems that we are looking at how we manage and make the most of training and experience, how personnel perceive their employers and employment conditions, and how shipping needs to assess ways of matching people’s needs and desires.

Often a presentation can really get people talking in the coffee breaks, drinks receptions, and even in their sleep, and one of the most fervently discussed was from John Wood of Wallem Shipmanagement. He spoke of his concern about the declining standards of people working at sea, and questioned whether higher salaries led to raised standards, or whether this extra money simply makes poor quality seafarers into expensive ones.

In one of the more hard-hitting assessments, he claimed that if seafarers act like “mercenaries and prostitutes” that’s how they themselves will be treated. It is always tough to view a relationship from a “wronged” perspective, and it looks like this ship manager in particular feels pretty cheated by seafarers who, like Oliver Twist, always seem to want MORE.

He claimed crews are getting too “choosy”, and are demanding too much. Perhaps this view is right, maybe choosy is the best description – but then again when the evidence of this avarice was simply the desire of seafarers to have the best tools for the job, i.e. automated ships, increased numbers of watchkeepers, and contact with their homes and families, perhaps “discerning” would be a better word to use.

Let’s be honest, would you take a job that didn’t provide you with the very minimum of your desires? Would you take a position because you felt sorry for the employer? I think the answer of most would be a big fat “no”, but for those who do feel that way inclined please email us, and you can come and work for Shiptalk.

When Mr Wood went to sea the ship was a “place of work”, now he rather disparagingly sees that it is little more than “an internet café that serves 3 meals a day”. They don’t call it “progress” for nothing!

It is true that there are some who are pushing and negotiating hard with employers, but maybe we shouldn’t be criticising those who work at sea for saying what they really, really want – maybe we should work harder to see how we could best provide it.

Mr Woods’ paper went on to talk of amazement that people could possibly care more for their faith, their families and their cultural identity, over and above the job they have. Can that really be so surprising? One only need look at the wars the world has ever seen, and it would seem that few people ever take up arms for their employer, but many a battle has been waged in the name of the few “self evident” truths.

The very idea that people should downsize their ambitions, shun their background and change to reflect the industry, rather than the industry shifting to reflect and then attract people, is an interesting and challenging one.

In the “developed” world we have seemingly moved as a society away from a “tail wagging the dog” idea of employment. Today the very best people want more, and feel they can demand it. Perhaps we are now seeing, as supply and demand dictate, that qualified and experienced officers from the developing world are starting to “make hay while the sun shines”.

Employees, it was quoted, are teaching shipping new sets of lessons. Such as “loyalty is dead”, “job hopping is ok”, and that it is fine to move to the highest bidder.

Shipping is of course highly cyclical, and so this view that mercenary seafarers are finding new ways to upset employers seems a little harsh – one only has to speak to seafarers of all nationalities who have been in the industry through lower ebbs, and their tales of being laid off as shipowners switched Flags, and as employers scoured the Earth for ever cheaper and eclectic mixtures of crews suggest that these lessons are far from new, and are far from employee driven.

Many shipowners have in the past treated their supply of manning with, while perhaps not quite disdain, certainly an air of indifference and a relaxed



certainty that they would always be there. Now in these times of seafarer scarcity the “workboot” is on the other foot, and it is beginning to pinch.

As one delegate whispered... “If you kick a dog for long enough, don’t be surprised one day if it bites your bottom”...and it seems some owners are now seeing the teeth marks on their derrieres.

According to Captain Bhardwaj of AMET University, India, the manning crisis is akin to a typhoon. He saw it as a disaster that has led the shipping industry to ports around Asia to seek shelter and to find the ways and means of continuing the voyage. All very poetic, and looking around at the masses gathered in opulent surroundings of the Sofitel Manila, perhaps there is truth in it as well.

Captain Bhardwaj, took a rather different view of the conundrum, and saw instead that we are trying to attract and then retain a new generation of not just seafarers, but a new generation of people. The problem being that we are labouring under the models used to capture the imagination of previous generations, and of course we not going to attract new people with the worn out ideas of the past. As any angler knows you don’t bait your hooks for all fish, “you must tailor your rod, your hooks, your bait and where and when you cast”.

What we are seeing, he said, is a search for ...BUZZ WORD ALERT... “Generation Y”. Gen-Y, as it is also known, covers people born roughly from about 1980 to 1990 (sociology isn’t seemingly an exact science), or more basically the very new life and fresh blood feeding into industry today – all industries, not just shipping.

According to those who know such things, Gen-Y are a very different bunch to those that have gone before, and it seems that industry “veterans” must stop thinking they can change the people;

instead it seems that employers themselves must evolve to attract the best people. We seem to have arrived at an impasse, where the new order of young professionals is faced with a “joy division”, a yawning chasm between their aspirations and the reality being offered by maritime employment, and something has to give.

As USA Today puts it, “They [Gen-Y] want to work, but they don’t want work to be their life”. Fair enough really, and while it may seem lamentable to some, it is worth remembering that it is these wanton “me, me, me” desires that have led the boom in world trade in the first place, and which have led to such unprecedented demand for shipping... so you can’t have your cake and eat it. Indeed it seems that the four fold effects of globalisation, “individualism, consumerism, modernisation, and technology” are now beginning to squeeze shipping’s labour supply as it has never been squeezed before.

Worse news still for the industry is that increasing social and financial mobility across many traditional labour supply nations have seen parents “nurturing” these demanding Generation Y offspring, children who’s future has been seemingly mapped out by parents wanting so much more for their offspring than they themselves had. In fact these children even have a name, in China they are known as “little Emperors”, while in other countries, they are simply “spoilt”.

It would appear then, that the rather old fashioned; Marie Antoinette style “let them eat cake” approach to management is seemingly floundering. Shipping can no longer dictate what should make personnel happy, satisfied, and make them want to stay put. We now have to look deeper to see what actually will make a difference. We should not try to change them, but instead need to look to their ambitions and expectations, and act accordingly. It seems that we need to service both the professional and personal life of our employees.

This new generation, if harnessed and seduced can make a real positive difference. Gen-Y has been embraced in other parts of shipping, and the effects have been spectacular. We are in the midst of an astonishing upturn in the fortunes of the financial and business sides of the industry and perhaps it is no coincidence that so many bright young graduates, of so many nationalities have come into the business side of shipping. Now we need to mirror this afloat to attract fresh talent into our ranks.

Aside from the more gloomy forecasts, there were a host of upbeat presentations laying down clearly the challenges ahead, particularly from InterManager's Ole Stene and GlobalMET's Rod Short and it is increasingly clear that we need to react now. Every day spent simply ploughing on in the same furrow is wasted.

The strong message is that action is vital, every time we, as an industry shun the chance to think differently, with a wider view, and with people as a primary concern is an opportunity lost. Every day we procrastinate and simply maintain the Status Quo is a day closer to ships not sailing, with a huge impact on our very business lives. Shipping, as we know it, is in a life and death struggle, and it is going to take guile, commitment and intelligence to progress – not simply lashing out and name-calling.

However, to end on a more positive note (and not wanting to ruin anyone's holiday period), Captain Bhardwaj saw that people often triumph in the face of adversity, and now we as an entire industry have the chance to step forward to face the problems and to ultimately triumph over them.



Asian Tiger Tales

The Philippines has always had, what many Filipinos themselves categorise as a two-tier education system. Traditionally shipowners have only ever really concerned themselves at the lower level, as they have sought high volume, groups of young people to become seafarers, more particularly deck and engine crew.

As the need for more Officers from nations such as the Philippines has expanded, this traditional lower level people grazing has led to a real problem. It seems true that affluent Filipinos do not see shipping as a career for their children. "I worked hard...so my son wouldn't have to go to sea" is a sentiment heard all too often, while the wealthy and educated would rarely have entertained the notion of heading off to sea in the first place.

Even where the most talented, well educated have been attracted into shipping, albeit in a purely business sense, they will look at you rather quizzically when you ask whether they went to sea, and if not why? The answer being that going to sea was seen by the majority as something of a lowly profession, mainly for the hordes of young men travelling in from the provinces, certainly not for the spick and span young Manilans in their pristine Catholic high schools, and Business Colleges.

Sure those that went down to the sea in ships came back with money, chocolate and the latest Nike sneakers, but that was never enough to make the higher echelons look over the horizon. Can we change this view? Maybe managing the HR elements more effectively, maybe by making the journey as rewarding as the end product?

Adding to the "Crewing Crunch" is the painful reality that The Philippines is awaking to its own stranglehold on the market. When President Arroyo playfully suggested that if her citizens were ever to withdraw their labour, or were even all to take a vacation together then the global supply of medicine and the world movement of ships would grind to a halt...this was perhaps the first inkling of a change in emphasis for the Philippines, and for their vision of who works where and why.

There certainly seems to be an air of optimism shaping the maritime industry in The Philippines – there is a boom in some of the biggest and best training facilities, and even the hitherto rarefied world of Dynamic Positioning training has come to town in a big way. Add to these the fact that Subic Bay is shaking off the slumbers of decades of political infighting, and it looks as though the country is starting to not just see itself as merely a provider of people, but as a provider of ships and of real expertise too. There is even serious sounding whispers of a Filipino Open Registry, an idea that if they could harness it alongside their strangle hold on people power could really make a splash.

This was Shiptalk's first visit to The Philippines, and it was a wonderful experience – there is so much talent, so many resourceful and energetic people all looking to be part of the solution – but we have to, as an industry face the mistakes of the past and the harvesting of only the cheapest people, and now look to make use of the real passion, knowledge and skills this incredible maritime nation has to offer.

Your Opinion Counts! The search for answers goes on...

The second survey in the series looks at "Salaries and Employment Benefits".

Nobody ever thinks they're paid enough, but some wages are fairer than others. Part of the onboard payment package always used to include travel and the chance to experience new cultures, at home and abroad, unfortunately ISPS may have put pay to those particular benefits.

How times have changed! Today when fast turnarounds in port affect shore leave and increased workloads and smaller crew sizes lead to an increasingly lonely existence for those at sea, the second "Shiptalk - Life At Sea Survey" looks directly at wages and payment packages to ask today's seafarers a simple question, "Is a career at sea still worth it?"



There's more to any job than just the amount people are paid, but with changing conditions the work-to-reward ratio may be changing. Is money all there

is to it these days, or does life at sea still provide a more exciting lifestyle than any job on land? Some people wouldn't give it up whilst others wish they already had.

The second in the series of the "Shiptalk - Life at Sea Surveys", asks the serving seafarer exactly what's happening at work, providing a unique voice for mariners around the world.

To have your say you can access the survey online, the "Salary and Employment Benefits Survey" intends to find-out exactly what seafarers think they're worth today.

'Oil and Water an Expensive Mix - What you need to know about U.S. Criminal Liability'

The latest Shiptalk
LegalGuide by
George M Chalos

Since the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, pursuant to a directive of the Office of Homeland Security, the U.S. Coast Guard has undertaken a comprehensive program of boarding foreign flag-state vessels calling U.S. ports. As a result of the new heightened security measures, there has been a significant increase in the scrutiny to which vessels; her records and logs; and her crew are being inspected. Such scrutiny, rightly or wrongly, has led to a

rash of vessel/crewmember detentions, as well as criminal charges and convictions of vessel owners, operators, officers and crew.

This concise legal guide provides a good outline of applicable laws and statutes which U.S. Federal prosecutors have at their disposal when charging a vessel owner, operator, officers and/or individual crew members for environmental related crimes.

The guide goes on to provide advice on how to work with the authorities in the U.S. and exposes some of the myths about whistleblower rewards. It is a must read for every seagoing Master and Chief Engineer trading their vessels to the U.S. today.

The A6, 27 page, paper back format of this publication has been drafted with the needs of the mariner in mind. Your employer can drop a copy into your joining instructions and thereafter it will fit snugly into the top pocket of your boiler suit. This concise can be read from cover to cover during your next smoko if you're so minded and will definitely be a good investment of your time.

It is not designed to be a legal text book it is a guide that tells you or your officers and crew 'what you/they need to know!' nothing more nothing less.

For full details about this publication please go to www.shiptalkshop.com



A BIG THANK YOU...

Well it's been a year since the launch of Shiptalk Jobs, and of our vision of bringing seafarers closer to sea going and shore based employers.

Managing Director, Anneley Pickles joined back at the start of 2007, and it has been an incredibly busy and exciting year. "Setting out to bring these new products and services to shipping has been a great challenge, and an immensely enjoyable one" says Anneley.

Our recent trip to Manila was the culmination of a lot of hard work this year, and really showed to us that the Shiptalk message is getting through. Anneley was thrilled to meet so many subscribers and clients at the Conference, and the relationship building is really going from strength to strength.

Anneley sees that it is these positive relationships that are so important, not just from a business sense, but in moving the manning sector forward, "Shiptalk started back in 2002 as a seafarers community - and it is this initial guiding philosophy which has ensured that even as we have grown we always look for out for the individual, and strive to get the best for seafarers, something which then feeds back into helping the industry in these troubled times for manning".

So thank you all for your support of, and interest in Shiptalk, and we look forward to helping even more companies with their recruitment and marketing over the next year, and let's hope that the doom and gloom which has marked so much of this year be lifted in 2008.



SHIPTALKJOBS
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