

BACK TO THE FUTURE



GANGWAY

EDITION 8 - MAY 2008

Welcome to Issue 8 of **Gangway**, where we look to explore the relationship between the past, present and future of shipping employment.

Shiptalk MD, Anneley Pickles visited Mumbai to take part in the Lloyd's List Events 3rd "Manning and Training in India Conference", to meet the local maritime community and to take a spot of tiffin with our Indian clients.

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

During the conference it emerged that whatever the progress made, we simply cannot accommodate all we need to train. With much made of the doom and gloom prognosis for the future we're going to look at the realities, explore the negatives to see whether we really are damned, or whether there is a vibrant life and career still available at sea and within shipping today.

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



Anneley Pickles
Managing Director Shiptalk Recruitment Ltd

Back To The Future Mumbai 2008



If it's March, it must be Mumbai and so the maritime manning fraternity arrived into the state capital of Maharashtra for the Lloyd's List Events 3rd "Manning and Training in India Conference", intent on grappling the same old demon, that of the marine manpower shortage.

After a rousing governmental welcome, it was clear that the Indian perspective on the people problem could indeed have a major bearing on the success or failure of global efforts. Key on the agenda were issues such as the dearth of Indian training berths, the position of India within the international community and the long term challenges of training – delivered from a line up of papers which gave rise to some slow dawning revelations, some backward glances and to even the odd fantasy being aired.

Despite the local emphasis, the manning crisis is being played out on a global stage, with ramifications that touch us all. As the delegates

settled into the air-conditioned splendour of the InterContinental Grand Hotel Mumbai, the reasons for gathering were stressed once again, that we have too few officers and don't know where (or how) to find new ones.

Sometimes though the facts don't always speak for themselves, and in summing up the "not enough people" problem too simplistically it became clear from the likes of Captain Bhardwaj of AMET University and Captain Deboo of Anglo Eastern, that we can occasionally get a little carried away with spectacular ideas on treating the symptoms rather than the actual disease.

While we at Shiptalk often get dewy-eyed preaching about the image of shipping, and of making employment appeal to a new generation, perhaps we are blinded to some rather basic and simple home truths. The fact seems to be staring us in the face...shipping is simply not able to meet training demand.

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From left to right - Anneley Pickles MD Shiptalk Recruitment, Martin Burley Conference Chairman VShips and Lisa Lokoma Froholdt University of Southern Denmark

As we said at the outset, the local flavour of the event was focused very much on the lack of Indian training places, and it was stated that applications in India currently outstrip the provision of training places by 3 to 1.

It would seem therefore that until such a fundamentally basic problem is solved the high-minded ideals we perhaps all envisage for shipping can never be realistically achieved. In fact perhaps it is a little churlish to voraciously seek more people when we are seemingly incapable of servicing those who actually want to work at sea today, and who are being turned away from colleges and ships because we do not have the capacity to handle them.

These gloomy Indian figures are deeply troubling, as we are seemingly turning our backs on a supply of 2 potential future officers for every 1 actually trained. According to anecdotal evidence this pattern repeats itself across the likes of Malaysia and many other strong sources of manpower. Even the UK, the supposed dead patient of maritime recruitment, has seen college demand outstrip places this year. We are therefore bemoaning the fact we can't attract

employees, but are all the while throwing people onto the scrapheap.

We hear so much talk of "the vital importance of human resources", of the need to improve the image of shipping, of the need to reach out to young, bright people. It would seem that perhaps all we need to do is embrace those (every single one of them) who still desperately want to work at sea today.

With every door that closes on a hopeful potential trainee we are wasting the talent and resources at our disposal. In the modern age we think of the impact of our own wastefulness on the environment, but what of companies and marine administrations who in effect "bin" two thirds of trainees at the first hurdle? Surely we need to act to stem this sheer wanton wastage and we must compel companies, colleges and authorities to think of their "cadet footprint" and of the legacy we all leave our industry with.

By lacking the capacity or the systems to train those who want to be a part of shipping, we are dooming ourselves as we allow the lifeblood to ebb from our industry. This is a fact, and one

that should not be ignored, however uncomfortable it may be to hear.

In India there are some signs of progress and we were told of the Maritime University Bill, being presented to the Indian parliament. The bill seeks to establish and incorporate a maritime university at Chennai with its campuses at Mumbai, Kolkata, and Vishakapatnam. While such progress can help on the academic side there is still the issue of physically accommodating cadets on ships.

Interestingly, Ashok Mahapatra of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) was on hand to deliver what could be an incredibly important paper, covering the IMO thinking on training. It seems the IMO does indeed recognise the issue of capacity, and as such they are set to seriously debate making trainee berths tax deductible through flag States.... though best not to hold your breath on that one.

It is perhaps depressing to think that companies need tax incentives before they will look to safeguard their future. It is depressing also that many myopic marine administrations do not

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The gateway to India.

seemingly readily embrace their role in safeguarding the future supply of qualified and skilled people.

Whatever the ensuing debate, it seems sadly true according to many in Mumbai that despite the good intentions, the IMO pressure on training berths and college places will founder, and the consensus appears that companies themselves need to find a way of accommodating and supporting their future Masters and Chiefs.

Putting the emphasis on the industry to act is all well and good, but firstly is it true are we failing potential recruits or failing to recruit? A subtly different set of problems, and ones that will take very different medicine to cure.

The solution voiced here, whispered with conspiratorial glances over hot sweet tea, was of an "international training pool" to be established. So whether students

in Subic, school leavers in San Diego, college kids in Chengdu, youngsters in Yokohama, or whoever in wherever, they can apply and be allocated training on a global scale, thereby mitigating the risk of wastage.

Mind you, just who should shoulder the responsibility was anyone's guess...from the IMO, International Chamber of Shipping, The Nautical Institute through to dear old Shiptalk, everyone seemed to have an idea of who might be best equipped to provide the service...but it seems whoever draws the short straw we need to act to ensure people who want to go to sea can get there - if we can't even get that bit right it seems rather foolish to waste anymore time and effort on getting the other bits fixed.

The people puzzle doesn't stop with bunks and cabins, and the event saw a range of excellent presentations all under the calm and measured Chairmanship of

V Ships' Captain Martin Burley...a man who really knows how to wield a mean cricketing analogy.

While Savraj Mehta of The North of England P&I Association stressed the importance of training, and with Chris Haughton of Videotel on hand to stress the importance of providing training, there was a lot of constructive progress made. However there was one nagging problem throughout much of the two day conference, it seemed at times the event was haunted by the "ghost of shipping past".

Even ignoring for a moment that year on year too many of the points raised at such events simply rumble round in ever decreasing circles - much of the feedback from the floor in Mumbai was sadly, to say the least, caught up in times gone by.

We can of course occasionally look backwards to learn and then move forward, but it seems perhaps the constant harping about how things used to be doesn't do any of us any good.

Yes, not all change is positive, but do we really need to be constantly reminded of how wonderful it was in the days of yore? Nice though it occasionally is to listen to memories of the days when ships only went to nice places, when more "sociable" locals climbed the gangways than inspectors, and where the bar was always well stocked and full of friends having a great old time of it, it doesn't appear to be terribly constructive.

The truth is we have moved on...sad in some cases, long overdue in others - but we have moved forward all the same. Chaucer was right, "Time and tide waiteth for no man"...things change and we are moving onwards. We have new struggles to overcome, and sadly while we are succumbing to the rime of ancients mariners, we are neither truly recognising what is actually happening, nor are we able to do something about it!

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At the end of the day there are many problems to overcome, and slowly we need to chip away at them. Talking is good – but we need action, and in Mumbai we got a tantalising hint that things are progressing and that finally we may have a proper answer to the manning dilemma, but will the progress discussed be fast or thorough enough?

There were some excellent ideas floated at the event, with George Hoyt of Newslink being slightly more fanciful than most. Amongst other things he wanted a soap opera along the lines of Baywatch to promote shipping. Bearing in mind Pamela Anderson's role it would seem an apt choice given that shipping has a history of making giant boobs when it comes to human resource management...not having the capacity to train our future officers could be one of the biggest yet.

Shipboard Access Control. What you need to know!

The first in the series of Shiptalk Security Guides by Steven Jones

With the five-year span of the first International Ship Security Certificates (ISSC) now reaching an end, and with the prospect of revalidation looming, the pressure to apply the basics of maritime security has never been more pressing.

Sadly it seems many ships are still failing to properly implement the most fundamental requirement of maritime security, that of effectively policing access to the vessel. In fact according to

The United States Coastguard (USCG), 33% of security deficiencies have been related directly to vessel access, and they have stressed that, "Access control is the cornerstone of a security regime and the most sensitive part of any security arrangement is the facility-to-ship interface".

The message remains clear then, that all access to vessels must be controlled, monitored and supervised, and it is vitally important that personnel know how to control access, when to act, who to allow onboard and who to deny, all while keeping adequate and proper records.

In order to assist these efforts and to give clear and simple advice to seafarers with security duties, Shiptalk has begun a series of Security Guides with the first entitled, "Shipboard Access Control".

According to Shiptalk Chairman, Captain Thomas Brown, "the fact that ships are still being detained for not applying the very basics of maritime security is hugely concerning, especially given that deficiencies could see many ISSC's not being revalidated. As such it appears that the basics of security need to be stressed to all personnel, and that is exactly what this new guide delivers."

The aim of the guide is to really help crews to achieve more, and to allow them to feel confident to act, to understand their role and the huge importance it carries, all written in basic terms that can easily be understood even if English is their second language.

The guidance within "Shipboard Access Control" is based on the requirements of the ISPS Code, and also best industry practice – it provides background guidance to work in tandem with the Ship Security Plan (SSP) for each vessel, while encouraging personnel to ask questions and to engage in discussions on how gangway and access control is managed.

As we know the gangway watch is the most visible part of any security regime it is also where mistakes are made.

Controlling access is not simply about being the first line of defence it is also the first aspect of security to be assessed by port and Flag State, and by law enforcement agencies – so it is important we get it right, and "Shipboard Access Control" can help seafarers do just that.

"Shipboard Access Control" by Steven Jones

(ISBN 978-0-9556513-3-5) is available from Shiptalk priced £10 for single copies (with bulk and fleet discounts available),

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Incentives crucial to cure drain on European manning supply



Pay incentives and better onboard facilities are key requirements for solving shipping's worsening manpower crisis, according to the chairman of Europe's leading manning forum.

Coupled with the developing world's increase in better paid jobs ashore, the recruitment crunch is being felt even in major crew supply nations like Poland, where maritime academies are struggling to fill just 1,000 places a year.

This year Sopot in Poland will play host to the 11th European Manning & Training conference, organised by Lloyd's List Events, the conference takes place on May 20-21 on the back of a prolonged shipping boom that now sees demand for seafarers far outstrip supply.

Conference chairman Capt. Kurt Buchholz, managing director of V.Ships (Isle of Man), acknowledges there is a problem but asks: "Is there really a shortage? Not if you are among those companies offering above-average pay and conditions.

"We need to be competitive but owners have been enjoying high freight rates and seafarers obviously want their share as the salary development proves. If owners want cheap crew – and that's a hard task - they have to accept that they are cheap for a reason and couldn't find better-paid employment."

He points out that shipping remains an attractive career choice in countries like the Philippines because a captain's salary can be 30 times greater than the national average income.

There would be no shortage of seafarers if the same calculation applied in places like Poland, he suggests. Claiming that the ITF stance of 'same pay for the same work' completely neglects national differences in the cost of living, he argues: "How realistic is it to pay the same rate worldwide? Young people in Europe have more attractive job opportunities ashore so they need an incentive to go to sea."

Capt. Buchholz, a master for ten of his 25 years at sea, insists that money is not the only factor. Home comforts were also crucial when asking people to live on board for four, six or even nine months.

"Years ago captains had a comfortable cabin and sometimes even their own steward," he recalls. "Now they get a box-sized bare cabin. Whether you are

talking salaries or shipboard lifestyle, cheap should not be an option."

In one of the main conference sessions, Capt. Buchholz will examine realistic solutions to crew shortages with representatives from ship and crew management, manning agency and the IMEC employers' association.

They include Simon Frank, crewing and marine personnel director at EMS Ship Management, who foresees management companies getting closer to seafarers.

"In the past they didn't even know we were employing them - they thought it was the owner – but we are entitled to have as close a relationship with them as anyone else," he asserts.

"Now we are lifting the interface to a higher level, particularly when it comes to setting the right pay and conditions. It's about being visible as an employer in the hope that it will help with retention, because recruitment is only half the problem. With closer connection, we expect them to stay with us longer."

Mr Frank stresses that retaining junior officers is a priority "because they are the future" and also predicts added focus on ratings within two years due to demand from oil majors for highly experienced crew.

Meanwhile, with in-demand vessels idle because they cannot find crew, he says the crewing sector is dependant on some ships leaving the market, particularly as the massive new building programme was adding to bad expectations. "It's accepted that cadet programmes and training must be upgraded but that will not be visible for at least five years, so now we are in the middle of a big problem," he warns.

A new long-term education initiative to maintain Poland as one of the main officer supply nations will feature in another major session devoted to industry promotion and training.

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The government-backed Maritime Partnership has been launched by academies, industry supporters and the Polish Maritime Chamber of Commerce, whose director Jerzy Uzieblo explains: "The world is open and the profession does not look so attractive as before. I am sure Poland can continue to offer good provision of manpower but it's not so easy to find huge numbers, so we need to make our young people aware of the opportunities."

Seatrans (Norway) general manager Piotr Masny, who is also president of the Association of Polish Maritime Agents & Marine Representatives, adds that the initiative was prompted when maritime academies reported a downturn in the quality and number of applicants.

"We have 350,000-500,000 high school graduates every year yet we cannot fill 1,000 places," he observes. "We have to wake up society and let youngsters know that the sea offers a better, more profitable career than washing dishes in London or Dublin."

Job prospects for Polish seafarers and the effect of EU membership will be assessed in keynote opening addresses by Pawel Bodak, personnel director of Bernard Schulte Ship Management (Poland) and OSM Group chairman Jan Morten Eskilt.

Full details of the conference and an online registration facility can be found at the conference website, www.manningandtraining.com



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CAREER DESIRE LINES

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." –Ralph Waldo Emerson

You've probably seen them, the paths people make when they cut across a grassy area instead of following the prescribed walkway. These spontaneous, unofficial, radical paths are called "desire lines"...and show that people often decide against following the path dictated to them, and instead look to go their own way.

While it may be all well and good to break free and forge our own route when wandering about our daily lives, does it follow that we can take this "desire line" theory and apply it to a career path? It seems that when we look at careers in shipping the answer is "YES".

In deciding on a career – we know our starting point, we usually know our goal – so in most cases we simply follow the pathway laid down before us. But what of free expression, and risk taking, of detours and rest breaks, before we arrive refreshed and smiling at our dream job destination?

As we discussed earlier in our main feature, "Back To The Future", today's seafarers are both lucky and unlucky in equal measure. It is true that the nature of seagoing has changed, that the work environment and social climate has evolved beyond all recognition, but there are positives too.

For many the past brought frustration and a lack of opportunities, with promotion based on "Dead Man's Shoes". Today things are different, and with the right mix of experience, qualifications and a little bit of brave fortune, the world can be your oyster.

Want to stay at sea and spend a lifetime as a proud and skilled Master or Chief? You can do just that, but what if your aspiration to leave the beaten path becomes too much to fight? Thankfully, there are answers indeed one of the most important and attractive elements of a career in shipping is the world of choice for talented, qualified and skilled people.

So we should all make sure that potential new recruits are aware of the options that shipping can give them.

To follow your "desire lines" why not check out all the latest shore based vacancies on www.marine-jobs.co.uk

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